

Time to generate

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"*A peste, fame et bello libera nos, Domine*". A few weeks ago, Romano Prodi, the former Prime Minister of Italy and President of the European Commission, used this ancient prayer to sum up the anxiety of the present time: "*Deliver us, Lord, from plague, hunger and war*". "Each of these has happened.", he said. "The Coronavirus pandemic, whose social and psychological damage is still difficult to calculate; the hunger that is almost completely ignored by wealthy nations and which grips the lives of 12 percent of the world's population; the war in Ukraine which, despite its ferocity and gravity, is just one of the 169 violent conflicts that Pope Francis has called the 'third world war in pieces'".

We live in a time full of tremendous challenges and, perhaps unrealistically, we hope to leave them behind as soon as possible. But we cannot escape, we cannot escape. We need to listen to the cry of those who suffer, to let ourselves be affected by the unsettling questions they pose to us and to open our minds, hearts and hands to share, to feel the pain of the other and to make it our own. We also have to turn to the faith that opens that hope up to us, one which is founded in the Crucified and Risen One, that at the end of the tunnel a light will await us and that something new can still be born.

Was it not precisely the time of persecution and the collapse of the Roman Empire that gave us that impressive flowering of martyrs and virgins and Fathers of the Church that laid the foundations for the spread of Christianity? Was not the hell of the Nazi concentration camps one of the places where a new relationship between the divided Churches began to spring forth: the most fruitful form of ecumenism, that which has come from blood? Just as in the 16th century, in times of great ecclesiastical decadence and the shattering of the unity of the Church in the West, new forms of holiness and mission have appeared and from which we still benefit.

On closer inspection, it is precisely the periods of crisis and situations of precariousness that are the occasion for the creation of something new. This applies not only in the religious sphere. Microsoft's success story began with two young men in a small garage in the state of New Mexico. The invention of microcredit by Muhammed Yunus began when, in the 70s, in Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries on earth, was hit by a severe famine that caused the death of hundreds of thousands of people.

The fact is that it is difficult to create something new when one is comfortable and satisfied. This is the dilemma of the Church in many wealthy nations. There is a need to leave former positions and attitudes behind and strip oneself of one's habits and securities. Our mission [as members of the Church] presents us with the opportunity to set out and walk lightly, without baggage: being "outgoing" in a way that makes us capable of bringing about the 'new'. It also involves risks but ones which will stop us from cozily following other gods. We need, therefore, the courage to allow ourselves to be stripped of our old securities and to become poor, like Christ on the Cross. It is precisely there – the Fathers remind us – that Jesus gave birth to the new Eve, the Church.

But there is still another condition for generating the new: *opening oneself to the other* in their diversity and otherness. It is only in the undertaking of an exodus from ourselves to meet the other and "make us the other" that something new can be born. In this too Jesus is our teacher: as the Son of God, becoming man, he made the greatest exodus of all time and thus initiated an absolute new reality: the wedding of the Trinity with humanity – not a humanity which is perfect or ideal – but one which can be redeemed from its troubles. This is a light which can inspire every type of dialogue!

Thinking of the Incarnation and redemption, a third condition becomes apparent: to generate something "salvific" and truly decisive, it is not enough to meet, to listen and welcome each other, however necessary and important this may be. But a higher "spark" of inspiration must come into play, the "incorruptible seed" of the living Word of God must find acceptance and sprout in us (Cfr. *1 Pt* 1:23). We must remember this at a time when we are seeking a synodal style of the Church, in which we are all called to discern the ways to follow and the steps to take.

It is against this background that the present issue of *Ekklesia* raises the challenges of the present time: so that crisis may turn into opportunities and precariousness into generating something new. Whether this happens, and whether we are not just losers, depends on each and every one of us. To equip ourselves for this task, we first asked experts in the human sciences what is meant by "generating ongoing renewal" and how to cultivate it. We then asked experts in ecclesial life what is needed so that the pastoral care and life of Christian communities can become 'generative' again in the presence of young people, in vocations, especially in Western countries, in contrast to the current decline in the number of faithful. To ensure that the reflections are reflected in reality, we collected real-life experiences that were effectively generative, from parish pastoral care to consecrated life, from education to social commitment and for peace.

Commenting on Psalm 127, St Augustine wrote: "*Moriente Christo, Ecclesia facta est*" – "From the death of Christ the Church was born". The amazing fact is that it was precisely in this way that Christ began to live a hundredfold: it is in his Body that we are the Church. May this be the time to make a further experience: in the sunset of a certain model of the Church, will we begin to see the birth of a new humanity and to experience the Church being realized in greater fullness?