

The Church in a Time of Epochal Change

Hubertus Blaumeiser - Carlos García Andrade cmf

Today's Church has been shaken not only by abuse crises, painful and indefensible in themselves, but also by another factor: that of needing increasingly to navigate in uncharted waters. It's something being felt outside the Catholic Church as well. In fact, the 2013 World Council of Church's Faith and Order Commission document, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* speaks clearly to this: "Today the proclamation of the kingdom of God continues throughout the world within rapidly changing circumstances." The document recognizes that some developments are "particularly challenging to the Church's mission and self-understanding": realities such as religious pluralism, young "emerging churches", an increasingly global, secularized culture, and the explosion of new and varied means of communication.

It's difficult to predict the human, social, cultural, and pastoral challenges that will arise as a result of globalization, increased urbanization, the digital revolution, and the so-called 'post-truth' era. In addition, there are myriad forms of injustice, environmental problems, and crises of democracy as well. "One could say that today we are not living an *epoch of change*," astutely observes Pope Francis, "so much as an *epochal change*." As a consequence, we're being called as People of God to journey along new paths.

All of this is a call for reform. It's more than merely adapting to new or changing circumstances. Rather, there is need for a discernment process, for listening to the Holy Spirit's voice in order to discover what He is saying to the Church, or better, to all of Christianity. It is reform that demands change in both structures and mentality. First and foremost, it calls us to begin anew, rooting ourselves in that *fundamental reality of the Crucified and Risen Jesus*, in that radicality demanded by the Gospel.

Truthfully, today's crisis isn't about the Gospel message nor the Church in its essence as People of God, in whom the communion of the Triune God is rendered visible and alive to humanity (*cf. LG 4*). But rather, if we look at some long-held Church paradigms, once effective ways of translating and living Christianity at the doctrinal and pastoral levels, we see they were conditioned, at times, by factors unique to a given period in history, unique to an era markedly different from our own.

We need to "express the substance as such – but to say it in a new way", emphasized Pope Benedict XVI in a 2010 interview with author Peter Seewald, in order to translate this treasure of our faith "in such a way that in the secular world it is a word for this world." It is about "holding fast ... to the Word of God as the decisive word – and at the same time giving

Christianity that simplicity and depth without which it cannot be effective.”¹.

And so, in the wake of this adventure of our times, *Ekklesia - Paths to Communion & Dialogue*, has come to life. Born from the merger of two prior magazines by Città Nuova press: *Charisms in Unity* (which for nearly 30 years explored new developments related to Church charisms and religious communities) and *Gen's* (founded in 1971, it focused on pastoral themes and priestly life). In the light of the Focolare Movement’s experience, *Ekklesia* wants to promote the valid contribution of all God’s People -- lay, ordained and consecrated persons -- in order to facilitate fruitful interaction between the Church’s charismatic dimension and her territorial dimension, expressed in dioceses and parishes.

The word *Ekklesia* literally means “assembly,” people who are conscious of the calling to be protagonists together on a common journey. The subtitle, “*Paths*” describes both the experimental and experiential aspects of this project; and *Communion and Dialogue* reveals its direction and goals. We hope these issues, in their print and digital formats, and various languages, will be both an expression of, and in service to, the community of its readers.

The Italian edition will be published every three months; each issue will address a contemporary, relevant theme in its *Focus* section. This will be followed by other sections, like *Witness*, which gives space to Church charisms, both old and new; *Best Practices*, which highlights examples of fruitful pastoral initiatives in the local church; *Church in Dialogue* and *Readings*, that highlight ecclesial developments, events, documents, and useful publications. A selection of articles, starting from this first issue, will also be available online in English.

We hope this initiative will be fruitful. For its content, growth and development, we count on the input of all our readership. In this way, *Ekklesia* will become what it is meant to be: a source of inspiration, an instrument for formation, and a call to action.

¹ *Light of the World: The Pope, The Church and the Signs of The Times* edited by Peter Seewald, Ignatius Press, 2010, pgs. 64 & 66.