

Research Results Vol. 6

Valentin Feneberg/Johannes Müller SJ

Evangelicals – Pentecostals – Charismatics

New Religious Movements as
a Challenge for the Catholic Church

Systematic summary
of the results of the International Conference
Rome, 9 to 11 April 2013

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Preface

Fifty years ago the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism "Unitatis redintegratio" was approved with an overwhelming majority vote by the Council Fathers and was promulgated by Pope Paul VI. Looking back at the past half century of ecumenical commitments in the Catholic Church we may state with gratitude that mutual convergence, friendly relations and similarities with regard to the understanding of faith, being Christians, the life of the churches and ecclesial communities have increased. Nevertheless the ecumenical challenges have not become smaller, but on the contrary they have become greater and more complex. One of the essential developments has to be perceived in the increasing pluralisation leading to a confusing fragmentation of Christianity in today's ecumenism in which an opposite tendency to the original efforts to achieve more unity among the Christian churches and ecclesial communities has to be seen, so that in the field of tension between unity and diversity completely new questions have emerged.

This development was decisively promoted by the strong increase of Evangelical and Charismatic movements, Pentecostal communities and churches which today represent the second largest reality in terms of numbers after the Catholic Church. This phenomenon can be found all over the world and is without doubt an elementary challenge that the Catholic Church has to deal with in the present ecumenical situation. If one wants to approach this phenomenon in an honest way, including manifold perspectives, one has to perceive it primarily as a global one which admittedly presents itself in quite different ways in the various continents – Latin America, Africa, Asia, North America and Europe. Consequently it seems to be reasonable and necessary to ask in a differentiated way for the reasons not only for the birth and the growth of these movements, but also for their large success. The perception of the concrete reality then calls for a theological and spiritual discernment of spirits in so far as on the one hand, there are challenges the Catholic

Church has to face, as for example the significance of spiritual experience in the ecumenical dialogues and the importance of the theology of the Holy Spirit, and where on the other hand the conception of a prosperity gospel and other problematic missionary methods are to be observed and have to be contradicted with evangelical frankness. Against the background of such discernment of spirits one can finally ask for the pastoral consequences for the Catholic Church in dealing with this worldwide phenomenon.

For some time the Commission of International Church Affairs of the German Bishops' Conference has dealt with these numerous tasks and has organized in an agreeable and fruitful cooperation with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity the International Conference "Evangelicals – Pentecostals – Charismatics. New Religious Movements as a Challenge for the Catholic Church" which took place in Rome in April 2013. This Conference shed light on the complex problems and has been met with great interest during the process. To present the results of this conscientious work to the wider public the Commission for International Church Affairs does not only submit a complete documentation of the conference but has asked its research group to work out a systematic summary of all questions, results and perspectives discussed during the conference which is now available in the form of this present publication.

I am very grateful for the excellent work done by the research group in the context of the preparation and realisation of the International Conference and for the commitment shown by the Commission for International Church Affairs of the German Bishops' Conference presided by Archbishop Ludwig Schick. There are valuable instruments available which may serve as a solid foundation for further contacts with these New Religious Movements which the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity will have to deal with increasingly in the future. With the publication of this present brochure I express my hope that in

today's ecumenical situation the above mentioned global phenomenon will be given the attention it claims and deserves, and that especially the Catholic Church will allow itself to be challenged by this phenomenon and be inspired to undergo a spiritual renewal with practical consequences.

Rome, July 2014

KURT CARDINAL KOCH

President of the Pontifical Council
for Promoting Christian Unity

1. Introduction and background

For some decades, a revival of religions has been observed all over the world. This concerns above all such religious forms which traditionally and from the perspective of the major Churches are described as sects. The scientific world uses the broad term “New Religious Movements”. The worldwide growth of Christianity is also mainly due to evangelical movements, Pentecostal churches and charismatic movements. Today, their membership is estimated at more than 400 million people. Particularly for the Catholic Church, this phenomenon represents a major challenge, above all with regard to traditional church structures.

Against this background the Commission for International Church Affairs of the German Bishops’ Conference has dealt with this issue for a long time. Already in the mid-1990s the then president of the Commission, Bishop Walter Kasper, instructed the Research Group on the Universal Tasks of the Church to examine the phenomenon of sects or New Religious Movements in a long-term research project.

After a first literature study it was decided to deepen the current state of research in four exemplary country studies. The selected countries were: Costa Rica for Latin America, the Philippines for Asia, the Republic of South Africa for Africa, and Hungary for Eastern Europe. These studies have been completed and the results have been published.

To present the results of these studies and to discuss them in a broader context the German Bishops’ Conference organized an international conference in Rome from 9 to 11 April 2013. The aim of the conference was to look for pastoral strategies and concrete orientations for action, especially for those local churches which are particularly affected by the phenomenon of the New Religious Movements. The Research Group on International Church Affairs was responsible for the organization of the conference which was held under the patronage of Cardinal Kurt Koch, since 2010 president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

In order to have the broadest discussion possible representatives of the Vatican, of continental bishops' conferences and of the local churches, representatives of mission agencies as well as academic experts were invited to the conference. On the first day the conference dealt with "State of affairs and contexts of the New Religious Movements". On the second day "The phenomenon of New Religious Movements seen from different perspectives" with different focuses regarding contents and continents, was discussed. On the final day the conference tried to find "Consequences for the pastoral work of the Catholic Church".

The following statements are not to be regarded as a conference report but they are an attempt to summarize its essential results systematically. First of all the global phenomenon of the New Religious Movements is to be outlined, with the differences among the different continents being emphasized by means of an example. This is followed by a description of the causes and circumstances of the success of these movements. This stocktaking is the basis for naming existing challenges and fields of tension. In the last paragraph a look to the future is taken with the aim to point out a few pastoral consequences for the Catholic Church.

2. Diversity and differences between the New Religious Movements

The New Religious Movements are a universal church phenomenon which is characterized by large differences and an almost incomprehensible diversity which makes the comparability of the different continents, countries and regions only partly possible. Karl Gabriel already mentioned this fact in his summary of the results of the above mentioned country studies. Partly disputed and tainted terms such as "sects", "fundamentalists" or generalisations such as "the" Pentecostals or "the" Charismatics make this even more difficult. A frequently used metaphor is "market of religions" or "market of faith". This market is as complex and limitless as the globalized market of goods and services. The supplies available on this market, where everybody choses what he likes and what

he considers right, are so complex and diverse that the market cannot be arranged in a fixed coordinate system.

In order to present a certain insight into the facts, a few characteristics of these movements in Latin America, Africa, Asia, North America and Europe will be presented at least in a fragmentary way in the following paragraphs without any claim to completeness. An exemplary overview is given as it was also the case during the conference in Rome. In this context there are many references, especially to the causes and factors of the success of the New Religious Movements.

2.1 Latin America

With regard to Latin America the key question of the conference was how those responsible within the Church perceive the phenomenon of the New Religious Movements. The problem of the “exodus” from the Catholic Church cannot be overlooked on this continent in the meantime: One fourth of the Catholics have joined these movements in the last decades. In Brazil in 1960, 90 % of the population were Catholics, today less than 70 % are of the Catholic faith. About 20 % of the population belong to different Protestant churches, with an amount of 70 % being Pentecostals. In addition, half of the Catholics may be classified as Charismatics. At least this indicates a certain openness of the faithful regarding this phenomenon, especially for its spiritual elements.

The lack of attention shown by the Catholic church in Latin America to this development was mentioned as one of the basic problems during the conference, as was also confirmed by the Guatemalan Bishop Rodolfo Valenzuela. Different statements, however, were characterized by some optimism and hinted at a “path to recovery”, because the pluralization of the Christian churches has led to a new awareness of the New Religious Movements by the church hierarchy who can no longer – as it was done in the past – defame them or easily dismiss them as “sects”. It remains unclear, however, in how far this new point of view is really spread within the Catholic Church.

What makes the New Religious Movements and especially the Pentecostals so attractive in Latin America? Margit Eckholt mentioned different factors:

„On the one hand religious experience, a stronger emotional appeal, a proximity to psychotherapy and to processes of healing, an open, public way of dealing with “conversion”, with the direct influence of religious attitudes and decisions on personal, family, occupational or societal developments, and on the other hand a new “enactment” of this style in the media, in TV programmes and talk shows which target a broad public, as well as in politics and particularly the advertising strategies of political parties in electoral campaigns are typical of this „Pentecostalisation“ and make these changes of the religious scenario important.”

In any case the Pentecostals have been able to establish close links with the poorer sections of the population who feel more attracted by the Pentecostal interpretation of the Gospel. Since the beginning of the 20th century they have successfully gained this “target group” by integrating themselves into local cultures and living spaces. They have become “authentic popular religions” taking their strength and legitimacy from the proximity to the people and the knowledge of the given socio-cultural situation. The proximity to syncretism also adds to this as it makes a close relationship of the Christian faith with indigenous rites possible.

Inculturation has become something like the guiding principle of the rise and heyday of the Pentecostal churches in Latin America, i.e. the integration of theological doctrine and church practice into the respective socio-cultural context. The success of this process seems to be the most important factor for the achievements realised so far by the New Religious Movements. Against this background the Catholic Church in Latin America has to deal with the critical question in how far and why it has lost, at least partially, its ability to inculturation in this region.

All this must not hide the problematic parts related to Pentecostal churches in Latin America. One factor is the tendency to desolidarization, as fixed structures and traditional institutions, which can save a religion or a religious movement from fragmentation, are missing. There

is the danger of an externalization of faith if the message of the Gospel is reduced to the material advantages of faith and only little consideration is given to people who are marginalized or who have failed.

From this point of view one can talk of an ambivalence of the pentecostalization of the Christian faith in Latin America. On the one hand Pentecostal churches succeed in creating new forms of inculturation of the Christian faith and to establish community structures with a close proximity to the faithful. In an attractive way this corresponds to modern forms of expression as for example individualism, liberality, flat hierarchies or possibilities to participate. In addition, the charismatic way to practise religion promotes the liveliness of the life of faith in the communities. On the other hand the risk is given that this way is oriented too much to the desires and needs of the people marked by these characteristics of modern times.

2.2 Africa

The New Religious Movements in Africa present an image which is also quite ambivalent, but there are large differences among the various countries. Knowing this, the conference was confronted with the question: Which potential for conflict can be found in the phenomenon of the New Religious Movements? The African participants indeed were far less optimistic as regards a dialogue with these groups than the participants from Latin America. The high potential for mobilization of the New Religious Movements and the very active participation in these movements were mentioned as positive factors. Partly they also show a modern social profile which is expressed in tolerance, a sense of responsibility and openness to the future shown by their members, as is also revealed in the study on South Africa. Their charismatic tinge can intensify this.

During the discussion the potential for conflict within these movements was again and again pointed out, especially in discussions on Islam. The reason for this is often a demeanour which is considered to be too self-confident or aggressive by Muslims and which causes irritations and

encourages Islamist reactions. Clearly expressed was also the criticism of a questionable theology of prosperity, which announces success in this world and material prosperity to be evidence for God's grace. "My God is not a poor God", "God's will is not for us to be poor", "Refuse to die in poverty" are mottos used by Pentecostal preachers in Africa. This way of preaching, however, is at the same time one of the main reasons for the success of New Religious Movements in Africa because it directly refers to the social misery many Africans are finding themselves in. A massive and clever use of mass media reinforces this message. The Catholic Church, however, raises fundamental theological doubts about this way of interpreting the Gospel. It regards this as an instrumentalization of the Bible as many Nigerian bishops pointed out.

In Africa the prosperity gospel can be found in different context-specific versions, as was explained by Andreas Heuser. The "Progressive Pentecostalism" is characterized by its presence in urban environments, the financial power of its churches and its active social work. All this is regarded as proof of their strength. Poverty, however, is interpreted negatively as "curse of the devil" and not as a result of structural injustice. The prosperity gospel spiritualizes wealth and shows only little understanding and compassion for the poor. It was criticized that this variant of Pentecostalism was intransparent which means that clear structures of social work are missing (a "Trial and Error System" is existing). In addition, it was said that these movements take up an internal perspective in their social initiatives which makes cooperation with other organisations to combat poverty almost impossible.

The group "Transnational Business Management Christianity" aims at promoting entrepreneurial activities and transfers them into the life of the Church. This Christianity is orientated towards private commercial principles and is in danger of instrumentalizing the faith. Completely different is the situation of the "Theology of survival" which is especially active in slums and which has weaker structures than the other groups. Their main topic is to ensure subsistence and not to preach great wealth.

What characterizes Pentecostal churches in Africa is their influence on political structures and the balance of power. During the conference Andreas Heuser presented case studies from West Africa where a “Pentecostalisation of Governance” has taken place. This corresponds to the self-perception of African Pentecostal churches as strong political players in societies being in a process of transformation.

So President Obasanjo was set up as a Messianic figure in Nigeria from 1999 to 2007. He benefitted from an alliance of Pentecostal church leaders who took a strong influence on the presidential office to keep down other religious forces, especially Islam. In 2008 a transfer of ritual practice and symbols to everyday politics took place in Ghana. President Atta Mill expressed his desire to make Ghana a “prayer camp” thus representing a theocratic version of politics. Also in Côte d’Ivoire the Pentecostalist president Laurent Gbagbo was playing a Messianic role in the years 2010 and 2011. This stylization legitimized his unlawful seizure of power which was accompanied by narratives having the effect of a historical authority on the one hand describing the liberation from colonial dependence by a “Messiah” and which legitimized the impending civil war on the other hand.

The strong politicisation by the Pentecostal churches in Africa created an intense political motivation thus promoting political participation but it has only little to do with democracy, because what we are dealing with is a moral dualism (“good” and “evil”, “battle against the devil”), exclusion and an instrumentalization of politics for religious purposes.

2.3 Asia

Due to the encouraging image given by the case study on the Philippines the key question as regards Asia was the following: How does the Catholic Church deal with the New Religious Movements in a constructive way? John Prior showed that also on this in many parts non-Christian continent there is a large number of such movements to be observed now, but their numbers are still smaller than those in Latin America and Africa. Of about 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide about 130 million are

living in Asia, half of them on the Philippines. On the other hand 43 % of the Christians in Asia are members of such movements. Turning to these movements takes place in different patterns in all countries, also in those with the fastest increase: Indonesia, South Korea and the Philippines. Different from other continents the target groups are the educated middle-classes who are streaming into the large metropolitan areas (“urban migrants”) and who hope to receive support and security by the Pentecostal churches in a modern world which has become confusing. Another joint characteristic is the Asian tendency towards syncretism (“both and” instead of “either or”) which, in contrast to Africa, reduces the possible conflict potential considerably.

Neo-Pentecostals are now the largest renewal group in India. There are four reasons why the faithful are attracted to these groups: Firstly they offer a space for the wish of the faithful to “experience God”. Secondly there is a continuous and close contact with the Bible; thirdly religious activities take place in very small, close groups where the faithful feel at home and secure. Fourthly these groups ensure sustainable pastoral care.

A similar picture can be found in Indonesia. The members of New Religious Movements mostly live in towns and about 60 % of them belong to the Chinese-Indonesian minority. Emotional reasons and a feeling of boredom in life make them join these movements. The groups seem to be “unrealistic places of escape”, out of touch with reality. Fighting against social injustice is almost of no importance, at best some kind of “charity ethics” is practised. Charismatic Catholicism in Indonesia can be characterized as some kind of “religious entertainment” which is largely shaped by the urban middle-classes. Contacts to the predominantly Muslim population do hardly exist, but there is no (different from Africa) open rejection. The motto is: “To live and to let live”.

In South Korea (and Japan) there is a strong relationship between Pentecostalism and local Shamanism, a kind of syncretism which also exists in Indonesia. Pentecostalism and Shamanism are functionally equivalent. It cannot be unequivocally determined whether we are dealing with a pure syncretism or “only” with a connection of different religious forms, which varies according to needs and networks. No matter how this situa-

tion is assessed, the relationship of different religious traditions is one of the main reasons for the growth of the New Religious Movements in Asia. As in Latin America their ability to inculturate plays an important role in Asia, too.

The situation in the Philippines is remarkable because there is a high level of charismatic receptiveness which is not only restricted to the New Religious Movements, but which can also be found in the established churches. The Catholic Church regards this phenomenon calmly and even optimistically. One of the reasons is the fact that several large charismatic movements (58 % of the movements) are in contact with the bishops' conference, which was confirmed by auxiliary bishop Pablo Virgilio Siongco David. Here an obvious difference to Latin America can be observed. An important role is also played by the so-called BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities), which have similar subsidiary structures what may explain why the extra-ecclesial New Religious Movements play only a minor role.

The brief survey of Asia shows that the New Religious Movements seem better prepared to meet the challenge of inculturation. In the Catholic Church there are deficits as regards finding answers to the spiritual and social needs of the mentioned target groups. The traditional hierarchical structures often do not seem to satisfy these needs. In addition, there are critical questions whether the Church does react sufficiently to the living conditions and the dynamics of the social environment in the respective countries. Especially in Asia it is important to take the traditional socio-cultural traditions and the spiritual religious heritage very seriously. On the other hand it has to be thoroughly analysed why the New Religious Movements tend to exclude the issue of social injustice and restrict themselves to the charitable support of the victims instead.

2.4 North America (and Europe)

“New Religious Movements in the context of a growing religious pluralism in secular societies” was the topic dealing with the regional focus on North America and Europe. Detlef Pollack pointed out that the United States and Europe show great differences as far as religiousness is con-

cerned, especially considering religious practice (daily prayer, for example). Europe is by far the most secularized continent so that New Religious Movements are playing only a minor role. Even if some studies have published higher numbers, the real number of the members of the New Religious Movements in Germany is between 70,000 and 100,000. In America, however, 30 per cent of the Protestants are Evangelicals. The degree of religiousness in the USA is much lower than in Latin America. So it can be observed that traditional churches as well as the New Religious Movements have only little influence where secularization is strongest. So Europe was only a marginal factor during the conference.

In the USA, the Catholic Church and the New Religious Movements after much discord in the past have become “players in the same field” with strong interdependencies in the meantime. One of the reasons, for example, is the common opposition of religious groups to representatives of the “sexual revolution”. The Church(es) and the New Religious Movements are kindred spirits as far as questions of value are concerned. In addition, a kind of “educational expansion” among American Evangelicals has promoted an approach. Common ground as regards social doctrines also fosters a feeling of closeness. Not least the increase of the Catholic Charismatic Movement has allowed closer relations.

So in the United States there is a strong development towards a dialogue between Catholics and Evangelicals. Large similarities in the question of sexual moral, the attitude towards marriage and the protection of human life, in the fight against poverty and discrimination and the commitment to religious freedom contribute to this. There are, however, obstacles as far as dealing with the respective converts is concerned and as regards the use of the Holy Scriptures. Whereas the Catholic Church follows the practice of interpretation, the New Religious Movements keep to a literal adoption of the contents of the Bible which they indiscriminately consider being infallible. This different approach to the Bible presents a fundamental problem of the dialogue between both groups. The same applies to the interreligious dialogue between (Catholic) Christians and Muslims, as the exegesis of the Bible on the one hand and of the Koran on the other hand follows completely different patterns. According to

Bishop Denis Madden, one must not overestimate theological controversies in the case of the USA, but one has to take a look at the similarities in questions of social ethics.

This short survey of the phenomenon of the New Religious Movements in the “Global South” shows the many differences to be found among these movements, which partially explains why the reaction of the Catholic Church is by no means consistent. An essential conclusion which was often expressed during the conference was the demand for regional and local studies based on empirical knowledge. Otherwise there is the risk of generalization which is not objectively justified and which is of little help.

3. Causes and factors of the success of the “New Religious Movements”

As varied as the forms of the New Religious Movements are the causes and factors of their success. Almost every participant in the conference tried to give an explanation of this success. It became obvious that there are legitimate different interpretations to approach this phenomenon or its causes. All these explanations are closely related and are much more differentiated than can be shown in a short survey. Nevertheless at least some factors shall be considered which were frequently mentioned during lectures and discussions.

Perhaps a general distinction can be made between *outer social causes* and *causes within the Church*. The first form an environment favouring the success of the New Religious Movements and it is a large area which is highly complex, multi-layered and partly contradictory. In this context the subjects of globalization, urbanization, rationalization, modernization, secularization, pluralism, relativism or insecurity in the “risk society” came up. These items will be discussed in more detail later.

First of all the *causes within the Church* are mentioned: A correlation of the strength of the New Religious Movements with the weaknesses of the Catholic Church can be clearly observed. An important factor is the dis-

pleasure of the faithful with the established Churches as regards topics such as hierarchy, participation of the laity in general and of women in particular, numbers of priests, etc. The same applies to the understanding of spirituality and religious practise.

Urbanization plays a central part in all continents. In urban regions where the social structure and other social factors have become very confusing and complex the New Religious Movements offer orientation and communion. Due to their small-scale and community-oriented structures they can better react to this predicament than the large churches. Joining them presents a way out of personal or interpersonal situations of crisis, if people feel insecure and overtaxed. In this environment the New Religious Movements are regarded as a place where people can find counselling and refuge. So religion is made a “reactive religion”, as in this interpretation the New Religious Movements concretely deal with the crises of the faithful and cater for the people.

José Casanova has underlined this explanation and linked the phenomenon of urbanization with that of secularization. He characterized it not only as an anti-religious development outside the Western world but also as a phenomenon of the differentiation of secular spheres. So secularization does not displace religion but individualizes it which leads to a larger religious pluralism. He says that secularization is a form of modernization which causes trouble for religion in Europe but which does not automatically show anti-religious traits in other regions of the world. Especially in the “global South” modernization and urbanization are accompanied by religious pluralism thus leading to more religious dynamics. So religion does not seem to be a traditional and obsolete concept as in Europe but it is seen as a phenomenon of modernization and globalization. So the success of the New Religious Movements goes hand in hand with a secularization understood as follows:

“While in Europe processes of modernization, urbanization, and democratization have been historically associated with un-churching, de-confessionalization and drastic secularization, in Latin America today as earlier in the United States processes of democratization, urbanization and modernization have been associated with fluid changes in denominational affiliation and born-again religious revivals.”

Casanova deduced from this that the traditional concepts of secularization (and fundamentalism) are not sufficient to understand religion in modern society. What is important is to work with concepts such as de-confessionalization, religious individualization and pluralization. This applies especially to Latin America. Here de-confessionalization has not led and does not lead to anti-religious secularization but to a religious pluralism within and outside the Catholic Church, which finds its expression in an increasing religious individualization even if the formation of communities in the context of the New Religious Movements takes up a lot of space.

Philip Jenkins also took up the topic of “modernization as urbanization” thus deriving a demographic or spatial argument from this. Due to the fact that the New Religious Movements are present and centred in regions with extremely high population expansion he came to the conclusion that they were growing very fast compared to other religious groups in other regions. This suggests that in the long run they will be even more successful.

Another factor important for the success of these movements which has not received enough attention so far is the role of the (new) media. The new movements use the media very efficiently, especially in missionary campaigns as was impressively related by Archbishop Buti Tlhagale from Johannesburg. They know how to present themselves effectively in this field which results in a professionalization of their visibility and in a greater range and so in an increase of their target groups.

This shows that the New Religious Movements control the instrument of strategic planning, which means the systematic analysis of the weak points of the competition, to obtain advantages for their own activities. So mission means the use of own advantages as well as discrediting the competition. One can even speak of a process of instrumentalizing and economizing religion. This concept functions in a world, where the logic of globalization and the forces of capitalism are gaining ground. The family-like structures and their economic interpretation of the Gospel (“prosperity religion”) allow these movements to give answers to questions of the modern times such as individuality, subjectivity and free-

dom. In this respect they know how to profit from the modern age. Bishop Norbert Strotmann from Peru, who addressed this topic in detail during his lecture, summarized his observations as follows:

“The “New Religious Movements” typified as they are with an Anglo-Saxon mentality, with their extremely local core of action (a subject-centred faith), a minimum proper institutional, partly using external structures (hosting) whilst at the same time making maximum use of today’s electronic media, are no product of chance, but the result of central think tanks which know what they are doing, that is not only marketing. The product of the “New Religious Movements” is *delivered to its target audience* in an extremely decentralised and highly flexible manner with all available technical means and according to the appropriate market studies. New members are not only *supplied with faith*, but are *trained for transmission of the faith from the outset* (snowball principle). This *technically versed pastoral mission projection* corresponds to an intensive theoretical and theological assessment of the topics of *post modernity* and *globalisation*. The missionary project of the “New Religious Movements” appears to be *tailored to the present situation* and its fundamentally new conditions for action.”

Also Detlef Pollack explained the success of the New Religious Movements with theories on the “mobilization of resources”, which means the ability of these groups to make use of the availability of time, money and staff in an optimal way in the sense of economic and medial efficiency.

Another subject matter mentioned by almost every participant in the conference is the successful inclusion of the laity practised by the New Religious Movements. This is especially important as the established churches show large deficits in this field, especially if it is accompanied by a kind of (neo-) clericalism. The inclusion and active participation of the laity in clear church structures is one characteristic of the success of these movements. Many faithful are encouraged by family-like grassroots structures to become members of the movements and to get actively involved in their work.

This applies all the more to the participation and involvement of women which is only insufficiently or hardly found in the Catholic Church. Even if there are clear differences on the different continents and in socio-cultural traditions, in all lectures the active participation of women was

mentioned as an important reason for the success of the New Religious Movements. They offer concrete help to women in precarious situations, which is possible due to their grassroots and small-scale community structures. This happens directly by concrete pastoral care but also indirectly by offering help to husbands and fathers of the family so that they are “kept away from the bottle” thus making everyday life for women and families worthwhile again. In addition, women react especially to the charismatic spirituality of these groups, as was emphasized by some lecturers.

The lack of inculturation, especially found in the Catholic Church was mentioned already. One can also express it the other way round: The success of a religion essentially depends on its ability to inculturate its doctrines into the local cultures. Due to their grassroots structures and their syncretist practice the New Religious Movements are more successful in this respect than the Catholic Church. This was confirmed by Michal Fuss’ thesis who stated, referring to the sociologist Ulrich Beck, that especially in modern risk societies there are strong links between spiritual awareness and ethnic cultures and the New Religious Movements know how to profit from this. Fuss worded this argument once again in a more theological argumentation:

„...according to the analogy of the incarnation of Jesus the message of the Revelation always reaches the lived religion of the people and when this is changed a new process of inculturation is needed. The fatalistic lamentation about the rapid and world-wide loss of members of the Catholic Church for the benefit of Pentecostal communities should correspond to a serious search for the “signs of the time” under which a fundamental paradigm shift of religious experience is indicated.”

This statement underlines the importance of inculturation as a “positive” reason for the success of the New Religious Movements. The point of reference is their charismatic spirituality, which many faithful in Latin America, Africa and Asia feel closer to than to the religious practice of the Catholic Church which is marked too much by Western culture and its rational world view. This, however, is far from being a world-wide accepted model and the New Religious Movements have recognised and used this knowledge. So they question the worldview of Western meta-

physics and theology which is considered to be too dualistic because there is no room for “intermediate worlds”, where angels, demons and spirits are active. These “worlds”, however, play an important and often essential role in the spirituality of many believers in the third world.

New Religious Movements express some kind of religious criticism which does not reject religion as such but its conventional forms which do no longer reach many people in other cultural contexts (pre-theism instead of atheism). The Trinitarian image of God is no longer the centre of religious experience of the whole Christianity which is shown by the recognition of “intermediate worlds”. From that point of view the charismatic spirituality of these movements is a “positive” reason for their success, because many believers feel better in such context and take a conscious decision for this way of living their faith. This attitude is partly intensified by the social reality, if, for example, many believers especially in the slum regions of the third world explain their misery with the activities of demonic forces or deeds of the Devil. This applies less to the urban middle-classes in Asia where the Charismatic spirituality is an important independent reason for the success of these movements.

In addition to the room for “intermediate worlds”, there are further Charismatic elements in the spirituality of the New Religious Movements, as for example the baptism in the Spirit or the promised healing of body and soul. According to Philip Jenkins the aspect of healing plays the biggest part. He considers this aspect to be one of the most important incentives to convert to one of the new movements. Moreover, the topic of healing is the factor which most likely opens the doors to ritual syncretism, as indigenous practices often offer much space for the healing of spirit and body. So the argument of inculturation into given socio-cultural structures is once again referred to.

The complexity of reasons, which could only be outlined here, shows the importance of an interdisciplinary approach of research in this field, because the mentioned factors do by no means only refer to theology and they cannot be understood by religious answers alone. Rather it is important to use methods of social science to be able to give a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon. The many different results of the

conference which would not have been achieved without the academic competence of the lecturers underline this postulate.

4. Challenges and fields of tension

Without doubt the success of the New Religious Movements presents a significant phenomenon in Christian modern times to which the Catholic Church has to react in many different ways. In this context it is essential to understand these movements primarily as a question and a challenge and less as a threat, which has to be “eliminated”. On the one hand this would be utopian and on the other hand the in many respects undeniable legitimacy of these movements, which in several aspects seem to offer better answers to the “signs of the time” than the Catholic Church, would not be taken into account. Analysing them can be an incentive and even offer the chance to form the Christian faith in the complex modern times in a more up-to-date and attractive way. Of course the description of the conference results firstly points out the fields of tension and lines of conflict the Catholic Church has to deal with. It should, however, not do this in a spirit of resignation, but should understand these challenges as an incentive for a constructive handling of the mentioned problems. In the following paragraphs some fields of tension as well as possible solutions which were presented by the lecturers and discussed during the conference will be introduced.

A first and very fundamental line of conflict is the question whether and in how far one should face the New Religious Movements as dialogue partners or whether one should primarily look for a confrontation with them. The participants in the conference reached a clear consensus: Only an open and honest dialogue can help to deal with these movements in a correct way and to shape an unavoidable co-existence constructively. A polemic or exclusively conflict-ridden confrontation, however, is an unsuitable means to promote the unity of Christians, which demands mutual recognition and acceptance and which is justified by the right to religious freedom.

In other words: It is important to expand the ecumenical dialogue. All lecturers stressed the importance of dialogue. Today the Catholic Church also shows an openness to dialogue with these groups as was especially revealed by Cardinal Kurt Koch's lecture. For a long time this had been difficult because the Charismatic Movements sealed themselves off, were unstable and their views seemed to be too different so that a dialogue at eye level was impossible.

What is important for dialogue is the knowledge that these groups are by no means a completely homogeneous phenomenon which calls for a differentiated approach to the respective movements. Of course this leads to difficulties, as for example to an increasing "pluralism of dialogues". A primary criterion for the choice of dialogue partners has to be the question in how far these movements do affect the Church. So the challenge particularly consists of the concrete choice of dialogue partners within a wide range. In order to be able to take adequate and intelligent decisions the Catholic Church does not only have to accept the phenomenon of the New Religious Movements but also has to show an openness for the respective contents expressed by these movements, which means to refrain from unfounded generalizations and to show a genuine interest for their beliefs, motives and methods. It is important to listen actively, because only then a constructive dialogue can emerge from a superficial conversation.

There have been calls to engage in an ecumenical dialogue of spiritual experience which deals with the different forms of spirituality in a discourse. The New Religious Movements practice some kind of religious criticism which does not reject religion as such, but its conventional forms as they do no longer appeal to many people in the most different cultural contexts. Against this background the spirituality of the New Religious Movements can be regarded as a "sign of the times". Michael Fuss explained with clear words how one can accept them without giving up one's own authenticity, because dialogue

"does not mean the recognition of an indiscriminate pluralism of offers for salvation, but an emphasis of the abundance of salvation in its historical uniqueness which exists for all mankind. Applied to ecclesiology this means an adherence to the only realization of the

Church desired by Christ in its full form with a simultaneous acceptance of the dynamics beyond its borders.”

This view leads to a call for a “New Pentecostality” of the Church as it was expressed by the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopacy (CELAM) in Aparecida by analogy to the Pentecostal movement. So Pentecostality becomes the “spirit of dialogue”, i.e. it makes a large ecumenical community possible.

The openness for dialogue is connected to the field of tension of plurality and unity. The catholicity of the world-wide Church always means the inculturation into completely different contexts and so it also means plurality. On the other hand there is the real danger of fragmentation as is shown by the number of 35,000 churches world-wide calling themselves Christian churches. This field of tension between the unity of the Church and the acceptance of its plurality was also mentioned during the conference but the focus was on the concept of unity. What is always important is a plurality within the unity of Christians, because one must not lose sight of the goal of unity and one cannot deny that plurality is a fact. In this context it was found out during the conference that a “universal Church” in the sense of a religion of many differentiations is needed. This was accentuated from a sociological point of view by José Casanova, who regarded the promotion of religious individualization and especially of internal religious pluralization within the Church as the correct answer given by the Catholic Church to the changes within its environment. According to the postulate of social sciences the manifold challenges in a pluralist world demand a pluralization and differentiation within the Church.

Related to this is a further field of tension, i.e. between inclusion (e.g. the Philippines) and exclusion (partly in Latin America) of the New Religious Movements practised by the Church. In this context the local communities, i.e. a “pastoral development from bottom to top” (individual and subjective and, , authentic religious experience) play an important part. As is shown by the example of the Philippines, an essential criterion for a successful inclusion is the question, in how far the Catholic Church itself by practising an openness for the Charismatic spirituality of the faithful

“picks them up where they are”, which means in how far it meets their religious needs. At the same time this would contribute to overcome the field of tension between a rational theology and the acceptance of the already mentioned “intermediate worlds” (spirits, healings, angels).

So a central challenge for the Catholic Church is the better inculturation of its theology and pastoral practise into the respective socio-cultural contexts, as was again and again emphasized during the conference with reference to the success of the New Religious Movements. The common-sense practice of the faith in Western Europe is definitely a form of such inculturation in a world marked by rationality, secularization and economic efficiency, but the Church runs the risk of regarding this region as the centre of the universe being a model for other continents and countries. The spirituality expressed in the Southern continents, however, is based on other ideas of the right practice of the faith and follows its own paths, to say nothing of the fact that the quantitative focus of the Church (number of the faithful) has already shifted to this region. An openness of the Church is also necessary as regards the variety of spiritualities.

Irrespective of all pleas for more openness by the Catholic Church to the New Religious Movements there were many contributions to the conference representing the thesis that these movements will “professionalize” structurally in the course of time and will be adjusted to the official churches because only by this they would be able to survive on a long-term basis. For this purpose an institutionalization and a bureaucratization are inevitable, emphasized Philip Jenkins:

„As Southern churches grow and mature, they will assuredly lose something of their sectarian character, and become more like the major churches, with all that implies for the nature of leadership, worship style, and so on.”

The Church has to meet the challenge of the New Religious Movements constructively. It should not make every effort to analyse structural differences or even try to copy the structures of these movements. According to Jenkins the Church should face the danger of secularization which threatens the churches as well as the bureaucratized New Religious Movements. In contrast to Casanova he accentuated the negative aspects

of secularization, which together with the increasing modernization represents a threat to all forms of faith.

5. Pastoral Conclusions

On the last day the conference dealt with the “conclusions for the pastoral care offered by the Catholic Church”, i.e. with an outlook to the tasks that have to be tackled now. In this context the lectures and especially the discussions again and again referred to the regional stocktaking, to the reasons for the success of the New Religious Movements and to the analysis of the fields of tension and challenges. So this final part offers something like a summary of the preceding presentation.

The three steps “see – judge – act” were recommended to the Catholic Church as a fundamental way to proceed and as a methodical approach. In concrete terms this means to take the phenomenon of the New Religious Movements into account, to follow new ways of pastoral perception (seeing), to analyse the perceptions in order to achieve justified results (judging) and to design concepts of action and to implement them (acting). To carry out the first two steps it was recommended to establish interdisciplinary “round tables” which analyse the ecumenical situation and provide information and material necessary for the dialogue. Reflection in the sense of a critical but constructive self-reassurance of the Catholic Church can be added as a fourth step. It is an internal and external reflection because as was summed up by Bishop Strotmann in his lecture, the existing pastoral concepts

“without a new culture of knowledge vis-à-vis pastoral reality will not get far. Without new means of gaining knowledge they can either not respond to the existing problems or indeed they respond to problems that do not exist. Hitherto the ecclesial inner perception was suitable for stable ecclesial spheres of activity. Today it is not adequate; a capacity for complex, dynamic context analysis is needed since the latter is multidimensional. And this differentiated, dynamic context – as our project makes very clear – confronts the Universal Church with fundamental management problems. Particularly for this it must initially gather the necessary sensibility and apply new means of gaining knowledge.”

A central aspect on this way is a stronger inclusion of lay people and a clear no to clericalism to bring the Church again closer to the people and to let the people who are religious and responsible persons develop their own ideas. So “round tables” established to analyse the situation, could be a good means to involve lay people in the process of a new pastoral orientation of the Church. To this purpose it is not necessary to reinvent the whole structure and hierarchy of the Church, but an adaptation to the present time is important. Simpler structures and more space for an independent life of faith, in other words a “reduction of the apparatus” as Bishop Strotmann has said is called for. Following the Medieval teachings on the transcendentals we can say that the New Religious Movements have succeeded in making their members feel their faith to be “simple”, “good”, “true” and “beautiful”. The Catholic Church should transmit the faith to the people in the same way. Everything depends on a “convinced-convincing” transmission of the faith.

The demand for more subsidiarity and for more weight lent to the local churches is related to this, because they are elements which distinguish the New Religious Movements and which are a key to their success. The Catholic Church should take this demand seriously because only then will it reach more closeness to the faithful. It is essential to develop the service of the laity within the Church and to transfer more responsibility to the faithful. This includes an intensified and better cooperation between priests and lay people who shall complement each other to overcome clericalism which is very pronounced in the Catholic Church.

A stronger role of the local churches and the promotion of basic communities are an indispensable means to reach this goal and at the same time an active and participatory life of faith would be encouraged. This requires of the Church not to treat lay people paternalistically but to recognise their skills and to promote them. In many places of the universal Church such approaches to this can be found, but this development has to be strengthened world-wide. Pastoral offices for qualified lay persons could contribute to this, for example. They could offer guidance in a world of religious pluralism and could accompany seekers spiritually. So they would take responsibility for tasks which do not have to be limited

to clerics. By this way the problem that there are comparatively few priests on the Southern hemisphere (as far as the number of Christians is concerned), which makes the Church “vulnerable” to the mission of the New Religious Movements, could be reduced.

What is especially needed is a stronger participation of women and the implementation of their right to have a say. In almost every lecture or contribution to the discussion this point was regarded as one of the central reasons for the success of the New Religious Movements and as a fundamental question to be answered by the Catholic Church. A strengthening of the family and an “empowerment” of women in everyday life and in the Church can contribute to this. This applies particularly to cultures in which the structures of “machismo” make the life of women more difficult. In addition, women have to accept more responsibility in the form of offices and tasks within the Church so that their equal status is recognised and promoted.

It is not less important to deal with the conceptions of the New Religious Movements, especially with their understanding of spirituality. This is not only a pastoral but also a theological challenge. Only by this is a “reform” of spirituality in the Catholic Church possible, for example by the acceptance and the inclusion of new forms. Nevertheless the aim is not to copy the methods of the New Religious Movements but to carry out a productive transformation basing on the theological and spiritual foundations of the Church. The same applies to the methods of evangelization used by these Movements.

On no account may their partly highly questionable methods be simply adopted. The Church should distance itself from the promise of earthly happiness, because “not only are people who have failed excluded but the Christian option for the poor and the weak has virtually been reverted”, as Cardinal Koch stated. This “option for the poor” has to be remembered again and again, no matter if it is “convenient or inconvenient”. A charismatic spirituality does not contradict this but it can lead to a living relationship with Christ, which includes the commandment of love of neighbour.

Of course dealing with the phenomenon of the New Religious Movements is a task which has to be performed by the Church also in its role as a universal Church, for instance on the level of the “Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity”. At the same time it is desirable and even necessary for the a.m. steps to be carried out in a decentralized way. This applies especially to the action level, because pastoral strategies and plans can only be developed on site, i.e. where the Church really exists. Everything has to start at the lowest level, within the local communities and local churches where the faithful are living and where they are active.

A certain reorientation of the Catholic Church has to be aspired in order to seek and to find the correct pastoral answers to the “signs of the time”. At the same time the dialogue with the New Religious Movements has to be cultivated to avoid the risk of dealing mainly with internal issues and of resembling a ship heading towards the wrong direction. Although it is loaded with much knowledge and many plans it does not reach the faithful. It is important to define the goals of the ecumenical movement so that the dialogue will not miss its target, because the following also is part of an analysis of the current situation: We need a clear idea of the direction of the journey in order to avoid the danger of a wrong course. Such goal was expressed by Cardinal Koch in the last lecture presented at the conference. He pointed out that what is important in the end is to restore the unity of Christendom, because everything else basically contradicts its self-image. This, however, presents a tremendous challenge in view of the enormous internal pluralization within the “ecumenism of Christians”. The Catholic Church has to face this challenge, even if this requires perseverance and patience.

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