THE CHURCH GOING FORTH Wine with Drops of Vermouth in "The Joy of the Gospel"

Pope Francis' exhortation Evangelii Gaudium stimulates evangelization and evangelizers to renew their efforts at reaching out to the people in our world, particularly the poor and marginalized. The author focuses on mercy as a central perspective to understand God and the church's mission. Thus, the "other" in poverty and exclusion gains center stage. A central feature in the process has to do with inculturation. However, there are also several problems the Pope does not tackle or solve, like the access to the Eucharist for many communities, the question of curial centralism or the equality of men and women. The author hopes that mercy as a principle and the option for the poor will open the church for its mission.

After every Roman Synod, it is a task of the pope to send a resumé as an "Apostolic Exhortation" to the Catholic community. Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* has to do with the Thirteenth Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that discussed the "New Evangelization or the Passing On of the Christian Faith" in 2012. The pope mentions the synod in several places (cf. EG 14, 16, 73, 112, 245), but does not summarize the materials given to him; rather, he made of them his own independent programmatic presentation of his pontificate. The arena for the New Evangelization is the missionary church in today's world.

With Evangelii Gaudium the Catholic Church is returned to the reflection on "joy" and to a proclamation of the Good News of the Gospel. In the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes of the Council (1965) and in the Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete in Domino of Paul VI (1975) there could be indicated some interrupted beginnings, reforms, and reversals on the pathways to hope and Easter joy. Evangelii Gaudium sets a counterpoint to an Augustinian theology with its deeply rooted pessimism that took on a hegemonic role more and more in the post-Conciliar period. Francis returns to the words of John XXIII, with which he opened the Second Vatican Council on October 11, 1962: "Mother Church rejoices that ... this longed-for day has finally dawned

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when ... the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is being solemnly opened." Francis allies himself with John XXIII, in that in his Gospel there is no place for "prophets of doom" (EG 84) and all those who "always forecast disaster" (cf. EG 159). Both of them believe that the "conversion of the Church" and a "continuing reform" of the Church (cf. EG 26) is necessary which must renew structures and contents that have become pastorally excluding, unintelligible or meaningless. Pastoral conversion means conversion to a "condition of permanent mission" (EG 25; DAp [= Concluding document of Aparecida] 551).

Pope Francis asks his pastoral collaborators: how can you fearlessly navigate the streets of the contemporary world if your driver's license is expired, your vision is limited and your street maps are out of date? With his "Joy of the Gospel" the pope offers contemporary pastoral workers a missionary navigational guidance system in line with his own basic intentions. Of course not all new streets are contained in this guidance system. Many roads that the world has already long travelled and access to which are already possible are not known or are not even perceived within the church. Opening up cultural fortresses takes time and prophetic anticipation. Francis says expressly: "I dream of a 'missionary option,' that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation" (EG 27).

New possibilities can be anticipated in dreams. The dreaming pope has many brothers, like Joseph had in Egypt, who out of anxiety about this new reality that will rob them of their power, are already thinking about how to dispose of this dreamer in the next available cistern.

In what follows, an attempt will be made to forge some pathways through the massif of mission that Pope Francis has presented us in his Apostolic Exhortation.

Mercy

The key to the meaning of many of the gestures, words and writings of Pope Francis is God's mercy. It laid out the path of his own life already early on. Already on September 21, 1954—on the Feast of St. Matthew, the tax collector who became a disciple of Jesus—at the beginning of spring and a holiday for university students in Argentina, Jorge Mario Bergoglio heard the merciful call of God for the first

time: "who came to him and commanded him to follow him." Later, in his last radio interview before his election as pope, he spoke of this experience in which his priestly vocation was born: "God came right in front of me: ... I felt as if someone grabbed me from inside and dragged me to the confessional."2 This episode sums up the action of God in his life, and determined his motto as bishop: "He looked on him with mercy and chose him" (miserando et eligendo): "Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting in the tax-collecting booth and said to him: Follow me!"3 In the house of the tax collector Matthew Jesus justifies his mercy toward tax collectors and sinners in the rejoinder to the rigorism of the Pharisees: "I wish mercy, not sacrifice" (cf. Mt 9:13; Hos 6:6). We dare not crop the mercy of God with the shears of legalism. The grace of God's call, his mercy for those whom he calls who are weak, the constant conversion of the People of God, and the need of their shepherds to be self-critical are the leitmotifs of the magisterial document about "The Joy of the Gospel."

The central theme of mercy belongs within the more comprehensive semantic field of justice toward the poor, the recognition of the "other," and the humble-magnanimous service in mutuality, solidarity and peace: "The church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by love for mankind, hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might" (EG 188; cf. 183). Mercy is the all-embracing response of God to humankind, because "the salvation that God offers us is his work of mercy" (EG 112). This indomitable mercy is the synonym for the constancy of his endless love (EG 3; 6). On the basis of this identification with love, Francis holds with Thomas Aguinas that mercy is "the greatest of all virtues" (EG 37). In mercy God reveals God's own self as sheer gratuity and sense of proportion. Francis emphasizes with Thomas Aquinas "that the precepts that Christ and the apostles gave to the people of God 'are very few" and "that the precepts subsequently enjoined by the church should be insisted upon with moderation 'so as not to burden the lives of the faithful' and make of our religion a form of servitude, whereas 'God's mercy has willed that we should be free" (EG 43). And the pope adds: "This warn-

¹ Sergio Rubin/Francesca Ambrogetti, *El Jesuita: Conversaciones con el cardenal Jorge Bergoglio*, Buenos Aires 2010, 128. Also CNBB, *Papa Francesco: Mensagens e homílias*, JMJ Rio 2013, Ed. CNBB 2013, 99.

 $^{^2\,}$ Evangelina Himitian, A vida de Francisco: o Papa do povo, São Paulo: Objetiva 2013, 24f.

³ Pope Francis' motto comes from a sermon of the Venerable Bede (Hom. 22; CCL, 122, 149-151) where he comments on the call of the apostle and evangelist Matthew. The text is read in the Liturgy of the Hours on the feast of Saint Matthew on September 21 (cf. Mt 9:9ff.)

ing ... is most timely today" (ibid.). The utterly free mercy is the categorical imperative of a ministry "that really permits reaching everyone" (ibid.). "The church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel" (EG 114).

What the Bible offers on mercy is quite clear, so that "no ecclesial interpretation has the right to relativize it" (EG 194). Confronted with the poor and the "other," this mercy is called to do battle for justice and recognition. We dare not become sympathetic accomplices of a dubious "orthodoxy" toward "intolerable situations of injustice and the political regimes that prolong them" (ibid.). For Jesus, mercy toward the poor is the "key to the kingdom of heaven" (cf. Mt 25:34-40; EG 197). Francis grasps the very heart of mercy: Because God is faithful, God is also merciful; and because God is merciful, God is also just.

The Poor - The "Others"

The option for the poor has one of its roots in the mercy of God as the gift of redemption. Hence it is, first of all, God's option, who bestows on the poor "his first mercy" (EG 198). He entrusts the kingdom to the "little flock" (Lk 12:32). "Full of joy in the Spirit, he [Jesus] blesses the Father who draws the little ones to him" (EG 141; cf. Lk 10:21). If the joy of the Gospel is to reach all people, why privilege the poor? The universality in Evangelii Gaudium, just as in Gaudete in Domino, is a universality with priorities: "We cannot and dare not forget that the Gospel with its so distinctive external splendor and its profound content has been above all proclaimed to the poor and to the little ones" (GD 42). Thus we can presume that the Good News is to be proclaimed to all via the poor and the "others." They are the way, not the border. The joy of redemption shines in those places where our Redeemer expressed himself: in the manger, at the baptism in the Jordan, in the house in Nazareth, in his sojourns, on the cross, and at the resurrection. The priority of simple places and people echoes also in Francis' document: "Today and always, 'the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel,' and the fact that it is freely preached to them is a sign of the kingdom that Jesus came to establish May we never abandon them!" (EG 48)

The option for the poor is an "option for those who are least, those whom society discards" (EG 195). The option for the poor and for those who are "other" may not be separated. In Nazi Germany, the Jews were generally not the poor, but they were the least. Shouldn't they have had a right to Christian solidarity for that reason? The

status of cultural otherness does not automatically coincide with the status of social class.

This universality with priorities is not only about the subjects of evangelization, but also about the contents of the Gospel. In connection with ecumenism that Second Vatican Council recommended keeping in mind "that in Catholic doctrine there is an order or 'hierarchy' of truths within Catholic doctrine" (UR 11) and thus a "hierarchy of values" (GS 37, 1). That holds for the entirety of doctrine, but there is also in proclamation a hierarchy of propositions, of which some are more important and less important. Francis recalls this "hierarchy of truths" (EG 246), and calls into question "the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines" and recommends instead "to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary" (EG 35). The option for the poor and the "other" is at the top of this hierarchy.

"Inspired" by the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5), "the church has made an option for the poor that is understood as a 'special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the church bears witness" (EG 198). Pope Francis wants "a poor church for the poor We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom God wishes to share with us through them" (EG 198).

The priority of subjects and of the doctrinal contents has to have its practical consequences in pastoral conversion. Because of this Francis asks therefore "to seek, as a community, creative ways" (EG 201), so that the poor and the least become the pastoral priority in our communities.

Reciprocal Power of Attraction

If the Gospel is preached and can be experienced among the abandoned and the despised, then it takes on a special power of attraction for the entirety of humankind. The Word of God is of itself attractive, for "the incarnate Son, as the revelation of infinite beauty, is supremely lovable and draws us to himself with bonds of love" (EG 167). Proclamation and passing on the faith happen above all through the attracting power of symbolic signs and gestures and not through an oppressive excess of words or deeds. Entirely in accord with Benedict XVI Francis can say: "It is not by proselytizing that the church grows,

but 'by attraction'" (EG 14). The patience to listen and to serve is more important than the normative, coercive and impatient talk of those who want others to make our convictions their own.

In a video message to his fellow citizens on the occasion of the feast of Saint Cajetan, Pope Francis criticizes the discourse of persuasion as the purpose of missionizing, and asks: "Do you want to convince someone to become Catholic? No, no, no! You are to meet him, he is your brother! And that is enough. And you are to help him; everything else will be done by Jesus; the Holy Spirit does this." Francis rejects "spiritual besiegement," market strategies, and the reduction of religion to precepts and punishments. Completely in the perspective of Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975), this pope knows "that contemporary man would rather [listen] to witnesses than teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, then it is because they are witnesses" (EN 41). Our "going forth into encounter" leads us on a path upon which God allows himself to be found by those who are in flight away from God's love and truth. At a meeting at Saint Peter's Basilica with youth from the Italian Diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio on August 28, 2013, Pope Francis deepened this dimension of encounter: "We do not possess the truth, we do not carry it around with us. We encounter it. That is an encounter with the truth that God is, but we must seek after it"5—often on the garbage heaps. The attracting power of the Gospel unleashes a reciprocal movement. The "mysterious wisdom" of God that is lived among the poor is shared with the Church only if the Church becomes truly at home among the poor, and the attractive character of the Good News only becomes something the poor can experience if they have open access to the Church and if the Church becomes the "house of the poor" (DAp 8; 524) with open doors and windows.

The power of attraction of the Gospel is rooted in the communal joy of the vision of a horizon. "People live poised between each individual moment and the greater, brighter horizon of the utopian future as the final cause that draws us to itself" (EG 222). Time, in the dimensions of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, is "God's messenger" (EG 171).

⁴ Homily of Pope Benedict XVI at the opening Eucharist of the Fifth General Assembly of the Latin American Bishops' Council on May 13, 2007, in: *Aparecida 2007 – Schlussdokument der 5. Generalversammlung des Episkopats von Lateinamerika und der Karibik* (Stimmen der Weltkirche, no. 41), 312ff. Published by the Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, Bonn 2007.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/speeches/2013/august/documents/papa_francesco20130828_giovani-piacenza-bobbio_ge.html

But the attracting power of the Gospel is not something automatic ("ex opere operato"). The inner attractiveness of the Gospel requires for its transmission a "positive language ..." that does not remain "in complaints, laments, criticisms, and reproaches" (EG 159; cf. 157). The essence of Christianity is Jesus Christ: "There can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord" (EG 110) in love (cf. EG 164). Important for putting forth the central tenet of the kerygma is "approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and a welcome that are nonjudgmental" (EG 165).

And finally: "The kerygma has a clear social content: At the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others" (EG 177; cf. 179 and 258) in the concrete conflicts of the world. "True Christian hope, that seeks the eschatological Kingdom, generates history" (EG 181), and leads to conflicts. The Good News of the Risen One always means shalom: "Peace is possible because the Lord has overcome the world and its constant conflict" (EG 229; cf. Col 1:20). Between the Word of God that the Church proclaims and the Word of God that is incarnate among and in the poor, there is a reciprocal power of attraction, a community that speaks and listens.

Inculturation

Our Christianity "would not do justice to the logic of the Incarnation" (EG 117) if it were to yield to the thesis of a Christian "Leitkultur." Francis dreams not only of a Church of open doors that waits at those doors for a disabled humanity, but also of a Church that sets out to encounter a disabled humanity in dialogue (EG 165) at the peripheries (EG 20). Inculturation is a synonym for "going out to the others" among whom the Church can learn new languages, "the renewal of forms of expression" (EG 41) and the simplicity of expression. "Simplicity has to do with the language that we use. It must be one that people understand, lest we risk speaking to a void [There] are words that are suitable in theology or catechesis, but whose meaning is incomprehensible to the majority of Christians If we wish to adapt to people's language and reach them with God's word, we need to share in their lives and pay loving attention to them" (EG 158). This reception of other cultures in the Church "becomes an instrument of the Spirit for enlightening and renewing the world" (EG 132).

Cultures are life projects with chaff and wheat. Thus "the revealed message does not identify with any of them; its content is transcultural" (EG 132). So one must renounce any effort "to impose a specific cultural form ... together with the Gospel" (EG 117). The processes of

inculturation prompt us to distinguish between normative, paradigmatic, and conventional elements in the expression of faith (cf. EG 32, 41, 43). The *sensus fidei* or *fidelium*—Francis speaks of a sense of the flock (EG 31)—"helps them to discern what truly comes from God" (EG 119; cf. EG 198; gender questions) or is a human norm (cf. EG 68-70). Inculturation is the way to realize the catholicity of the Church in the Pentecostal multiplicity of cultures. It is the way to come into conversation with humankind: "In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her own genuine catholicity and shows forth the 'beauty of her varied face'" (EG 116; GS 40).

Inculturation is the presupposition for a pentecostal reality of languages becoming truly dialogical in the world. In pastoral dialogue it is about a "participatory process." The pope envisions "means of participation ... and other forms of pastoral dialogue" (EG 31) in the Church but has also dialogue with humankind (cf. ibid.) and with cultures in light of their tendencies to exclusion and violence (cf. EG 74) in mind. Francis refers to three special areas of pastoral presence: "dialogue with states, dialogue with society—including dialogue with cultures and the sciences—and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church" (EG 238). The conversation partners in this dialogue are the simple people who are ready for a new social contract (cf. EG 239). This dialogue demands "a deep social humility" (EG 240) because he knows that he can no longer distinguish between "higher" and "less high" cultures, but rather has to meet everyone on an equal level.

Drops of Vermouth

This pope who is so pushing forward will have to work through blocked and open new pathways in the missionary massif. In the matters of changing mentalities and fear of loss of power he may run into solid granite. In other areas renewal will not come simply by changing personnel. *Evangelii Gaudium* does not take up other blockages that have developed in the throat of the Church in the course of centuries. A fresh climactic new beginning of structural reforms is a road still ahead for Pope Francis. The detritus of unclarified relationships, the burden of imbedded structures, and shepherds despondent and cowed by control mechanisms often block missionary progress and pastoral conversion. The pope knows that the joy of the Gospel and a "new stage of evangelization" (EG 17) will not come from infantilized Christians, but will go forth from free and responsible people.

The pastoral needs challenge the sacramental structure of the Church, which often is marked by an ideal prelapsarian depiction that has not taken into account processes of historical change and the time after the Fall. Francis raises a soft protest against this when he writes in regard to the reception of Holy Communion: "The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect, but a ... nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems" (EG 47).

The discussion about admitting divorced men and women to communion is only a part of the problem. Forgotten by church authorities and also in Evangelii Gaudium appear to be all the communities without priests who have no Eucharist, to whom the Concluding Document of Aparecida (2007) manages to say: "Recalling that the Eucharist makes the Church, we are concerned at the situation of thousands of communities deprived of the Sunday Eucharist for long periods of time" (DAp 100e). In Brazil it is a matter of more than 70% of the communities. Canon law goes even further, which in its last sections and in a causa minor reminds us that the salvation of souls must always be the supreme law (canon 1752). The denial of the Eucharist to communities that have not been formed in the middle of a city should be a question of conscience for the Church. The extrasacramental path to salvation onto which the majority of Latin American Catholics are directed is a pastoral hotchpotch and calls into question the contemporary understanding of the basic sacramental structure of the Church.

"A church that 'goes forth' is a church whose doors are open" (EG 46; cf. 27), Pope Francis says. But it calls to mind the familiar gate-keeper of Kafka's tale "Before the Law" who, when asked about opening times, answers in a monotone: "Not now." The presence of a gate-keeper in the person of a text editor of *Evangelii Gaudium* is detectable, above all, where the document speaks of ministerial priesthood and the possible role of women in decision-making in the Church (cf. EG 104).

In a class society still marked by patriarchal structures, the proposition of the equal dignity of men and women in which the priestly function is reserved only to men stands from the get-go under the suspicion of ideology. Can one compartmentalize the sacramental priesthood in a quasi level of function as a division of labor, in order to rescue the claimed equal dignity of man and woman (cf. EG 104)?

If one tries to establish the "great" dignity of the Christian at birth (thus at baptism) does one not reproduce thereby, in an historically and socially obsolete manner, the model of a court in a feudal society in which being born man or woman decided whether one would be lord or servant?

The gatekeeper as text editor was certainly also at work at that point where the pope's efforts at decentralization who, as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, supported humbly the curial centralism, was changed into a "sound decentralization" (EG 16; cf. 240) under the principle of subsidiarity of Catholic Social Teaching. Subsidiarity makes possible adult relationships between local churches and the Roman Curia that are always "sound." It makes possible self-initiatives to go to the margins and to come "into contact with the suffering Body of Christ," to get down to equal footing, without fear of the "smell of the sheep" (EG 24) or the censures of the gatekeepers.

In many questions the pope comes up against the boundaries of his professional freedom. He too is inspected at the "toll house" of a thousand-year tradition of the Church that has created knots from cultural, psychological, social, and doctrinal strings that cannot be undone in a conventional manner. Francis will have to watch out that the innovative flow of his free speaking is not choked off by the continuity neurosis of curial gatekeepers. For example, it can almost surely be said that a passage about the forms of expression of other religions that says that they lack "the meaning and efficacy of the sacraments instituted by Christ" (EG 254) did not come from Francis' pen. Here the post-conciliar International Theological Commission has inserted itself in a self-referential way, where it would have been much more weighty to cite Gaudium et Spes with its authoritative character for the world church: "For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" (GS 22; cf. EG footnotes 199, 200).

Francis lives beyond being bounded by inner-churchly fences and trenches. Every day he surprises us with signs of a "multifaceted culture of encounter" (EG 220). We must support Pope Francis with critical solidarity in his "going forths," we must alert him to his gate-keepers, and recall for ourselves his own courage to risk: "Let us try a little harder to take the first step!" (EG 24)

Presupposition for the joy of the Gospel is that it is proclaimed by a merciful and anxiety-free church. Mercy sets the boundary to evil, which allows an anxiety-free church to be without boundaries. This is the church that Francis envisions when he invites us "to the challenge of finding and sharing a 'mystique' of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide that, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage" (EG 87).

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ABSTRACTS

Das Apostolische Schreiben Evangelii Gaudium von Papst Franziskus regt die Evangelisierung und die Evangelisierenden an, ihre Anstrengungen zu erneuern, um die Menschen in unserer Welt zu erreichen, besonders die Armen und Ausgegrenzten. Der Autor sieht die Barmherzigkeit als zentrale Perspektive, um Gott und die Aufgabe der Kirche zu verstehen. Dabei wird der "andere" und ausgeschlossene Arme in den Mittelpunkt gestellt. Ein wesentlicher Bereich hat dabei mit der Inkulturation zu tun. Es gibt allerdings auch Probleme, die der Papst nicht anspricht oder löst, wie z. B. den Zugang zur Eucharistie für viele Gemeinden, das Problem des kurialen Zentralismus oder die Gleichstellung von Mann und Frau. Der Autor setzt seine Hoffnung auf das Prinzip Barmherzigkeit und die Option für die Armen und Anderen, die die Kirche für ihre Mission öffnen werden.

La exhortación Evangelii Gaudium del Papa Francisco fomenta la evangelización y los evangelizadores a renovar sus esfuerzos por encontrar a la gente en nuestro mundo, particularmente a los pobres y marginalizados. El autor enfoca la misericordia como perspectiva central para comprender a Dios y la misión de la iglesia. De esta manera, el "otro" pobre y excluido ocupa el centro de interés. Un asunto de central importancia en este proceso tiene que ver con la inculturación. Sin embargo, también se notan algunos problemas que el papa no trata o por lo menos no resuelve, como es el acceso a la eucaristía para muchas comunidades, el problema del centralismo curial o la igualdad de hombres y mujeres. El autor pone su esperanza en la misericordia como principio y en la opción por el pobre que pueden abrir a la iglesia para su misión.

L'exhortation du pape François *Evangelii Gaudium* donne un élan à l'évangélisation et aux évangélisateurs afin qu'ils renouvellent leurs efforts pour aller vers les habitants de notre monde, particulièrement les pauvres et les marginalisés. L'auteur choisit la miséricorde comme perspective centrale pour comprendre Dieu et la mission de l'Église. Ainsi, l' « autre » dans la pauvreté et l'exclusion prend la place centrale. Un trait-clef de ce processus concerne l'inculturation. Cependant, plusieurs problèmes ne sont pas traités ou résolus par le Pape, tels que l'accès à l'eucharistie pour de nombreuses communautés, la question du centralisme romain ou l'égalité entre hommes et femmes. L'auteur espère que la miséricorde comme principe et l'option pour les pauvres ouvriront l'Église à sa mission.