

**INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC  
MOVEMENT FOR INTELLECTUAL  
AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**



**PARTICIPATION,  
REPRESENTATION, AND  
COMMITMENT TO WALK  
TOGETHER**

**CONVERGENCE 2023**

# PREFACE



**Ana Maria Bidegain, Pax Romana  
ICMICA International President**

As we decided in the extraordinary virtual Assembly of June 2023, we wish to strengthen our movement's vision, spirituality, mission, and its international character. To this end, we anchor ourselves in our spirituality based on the message of Jesus, which leads us to action, giving priority to the defense and social and ecclesial inclusion of the poor and marginalized, and projecting ourselves into social and political participation at local and international level.

The good practices we have accumulated since the last century, have guaranteed the formation and consolidation of community life, and at the same time we have cultivated the synodal experience in the Church as a whole, with other lay movements, male and female religious orders, and hierarchy; both at local level, in parishes and dioceses, and at regional and global level. From this long pastoral practice, a profound and profuse theological reflection has emerged, which encouraged and was nourished by the proposals of the Second Vatican Council,

born of the historical context and which reflects the journey of the movement and its members, who in the poorest regions, with great generosity, embraced "going to the people", to the periphery, although this entailed political repression, even martyrdom and the incomprehension of other ecclesial sectors.

The new historical stage and the call of Pope Francis to build a synodal church from the peripheries find us weakened, but at the same time, his pastoral proposal fills us with energy and allows us to drink from the well of our own ecclesial journey. However, the path is not an easy one, because social and cultural individualistic habits have accumulated, which have destroyed social organization within states and in international life, as well as ecclesial community life.

Thus, the practice of participation and social and ecclesial commitment, fundamental axes of our way of being church and citizens, have been lost and present us with an enormous effort to reorganize ourselves. However, "at the grassroots" of our movement there is the courage to ask fundamental questions, as Marta Margotti's article points out.

This effort to re-launch avenues for the reorganization of the movement in this historical era marked by the technological revolution requires us not to reject it because of a series of undeniable problems it brings with it, but to strive to ensure that it is not at the service of the creation of financial profit, but as the Pope asks us to do, to put it at

the service of the care of the Common Home and especially of the most vulnerable, and at the same time to recreate our forms of participation, representation, and commitment.

We have an enormous responsibility as movements operating in the university world as students and in the professional milieu, trained to think and look for solutions by putting our intellects at the service of others, but not by strengthening the individualism of the dominant culture. This demands from us at the same time personal conversion and commitment if we want to look for new paradigms and models of social and ecclesial organicity.

"Convergence" has historically been a space for the exchange of visions, proposals, analysis of reality, and information where the members of the movement have been able to share their views and keep themselves trained and informed. This is why we have given it a central place on our redesigned website, which is now ready to be read in various languages. <https://www.icmica-miic.org/>

We hope that "Convergence" together with the movement's webinars and social media - along with participation in the various specialized secretariats - will help us to build a reflection that will energize our fundamental options to build a synodal church committed to the poorest and most vulnerable at both local and global levels and to seek new paradigms for the social and political reconstruction of states, such as an international reorganization of the world order that leads us to the real possibility that war and the use of arms will

not be considered a valid resource for conflict resolution.

This issue contains a series of articles that, from different angles, refer to the participation, representation, and commitment of citizens and members of the People of God and current challenges. This is a crucial problem both in ecclesial life when we want to build a synodal church, and in society when we want to build democratic, just, and equitable societies. Individualism, strengthened by neo-liberal systems, has been gaining ground among citizens and has dynamited both the necessary social cohesion and ecclesial community life.

Felix Grández Moreno, Movimiento de Profesionales Católicos, Lima - Perú in a suggestive article "Renewal and reorientation of our path" from the difficult socio-political context of Peru, encourages us and gives us hope to carry forward the necessary "... to walk together in this moment of history, which implies a renewal in our way of walking together, inside and outside the ecclesial institutionality ... to walk together supposes in this time to assume and respond to three challenges: to insert ourselves in the dynamism of the synodal process 2021 - 2024; to practice discernment and to walk as citizens to contribute to the rehabilitation of politics". Democracy and synodality. The challenge of participation presented by Marta Margotti gathers the reflections made by the MEIC (Movimento Ecclesiale di Impegno Cultural) of Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, and Liguria (ITALY) that took place in Casale Monferrato on 7 October 2023. The conference on "Democrazia e sinodalità. La sfida della partecipazione" (Democracy and synodality. The challenge of participation)

raises the difficulty of building organisational spaces and the contemporary difficulty both in society and in the church. The close relationship between democracy and synodality derives from the fact that both refer to how positive links between people in communities are created, maintained, and transformed, which contribute to strengthening social cohesion, in one case, and ecclesial communion, in the other. Of course, "democracy" and "synodality" are not synonymous, but one allows a better understanding of the other. Moreover, this dual perspective can suggest new ways of responding to the fraying of community bonds that weaken personal identities, life in common, and, ultimately, even the institutions that govern communities.

Stefan Gigacz from Australia, in his article, reminds us of the need to have a real representation of the laity in the Holy See, as established by the First Assembly of the Synod of Synodality last October. The Synthesis of the 1st Synod on synodality states "The promotion of missionary synodality requires "the establishment and shaping of councils and consultative bodies in which representatives of lay associations and ecclesial movements and new communities can meet, to foster lasting relationships between their life and work and that of the local churches" (Synthesis, Chapter 10, §i). (Synthesis, chapter 10, §i)

It seems that the importance of lay participation at the international level is not considered, at least, it is not mentioned, as if it did not exist, and that is why he wonders about the absence of representatives of movements such as ours in the aforementioned Assembly. He recalled that the subject had already been widely debated

during the Council due to the proposal and mobilization of leaders and advisors, led by Joseph Cardijn, who had been auditors at the last Council and who had succeeded in getting *Lumen Gentium*, approved in 1964, to recognize in similar terms the need for a structure proposed by the lay movements to maintain an organic dialogue between the laity and the hierarchy, ensuring representation of the diversity of lay movements.

"What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature... [The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to God's plan. They live in the world, that is, in every secular profession and occupation. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, out of which the very fabric of their existence is woven. There they are called by God so that, exercising their proper function and guided by the spirit of the Gospel, they may work for the sanctification of the world from within, as leaven. In this way, they can make Christ known to others, especially through the witness of a radiant life of faith, hope, and charity. Therefore, since they are closely connected with all kinds of temporal affairs, their special task is to order and shed light on these matters in such a way that they may be born and then continually grow according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer. And the following year, on 18 November 1965, the Council adopted its Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* §26, which, in effect, called for Councils of the Laity at all levels of the Church, from the parochial to the international."



Gigacz concludes "that the leaders of the movement and the chaplains were very successful with the proposals they put forward in their document calling "For a permanent organization of the laity in the Holy See". Now is perhaps the time to assess how those Vatican II orientations were - or were not - put into practice".

This requires us to call for a dialogue between the lay movements that have felt unknown and unrepresented as with the dicastery responsible for the laity.

From the Republic of Congo, Jean Baptiste Ndundu Nsituvila calls us to reflect on the experiences of life review in different contexts and how this methodology has helped us to form our spirituality. He brings us his own experience in Congo and Africa where he insists on discernment and listening in order to live a spiritual life resolutely oriented towards God, in a constant search for God and his will. This theme has also been reflected upon in other regions of the world and is central to the work of the Secretariat specialized in Formation and Spiritual Life, which today is adapted to the new possibilities and at the same time the demands of the changing times.

The lay theologian, Ramón Ibeas Larrañaga, from the movement in the Basque Country in his article calls us to reflect on the latest exhortation of Pope Francis: "Laudate Deum - A reading from the perspective of our movements" given that it calls us to action both in the ecclesial and social space in a world that "is falling

apart". Although written only a few days before the COP 28 meeting and showing the urgency of the deterioration of nature, as Ramón Ibeas says, the Pope reminds us that "it is important to bear in mind that we are not dealing with phenomena of nature itself in its normal course. Everything that is happening, much more intensely in recent years, is the responsibility of human beings, albeit on a different scale. In fact, and analyzing the data provided by the various scientific studies, we can affirm that it is not the poor countries but the rich countries that are most responsible for what is happening. They generate more than 50% of the pollution produced on the planet."

The Pope urgently calls on us to rethink the current technological paradigm, not because of the benefits that technology can bring, but because of the management that can be made of it for the general benefit, together with another enormous difficulty, which is the growing weakness of international politics. Along these lines, Ramón Ibeas questions us "The Pope also said that "there is also a weakness of institutions which, like Pax Romana, try to influence the world on the margins of the dominant discourse. Thus, (no. 34) the Pope says "Goodness, as well as love, justice, and solidarity, cannot be achieved once and for all; they must be conquered every day". It is this day by day that we, as Christian activists, must take as our point of reference. The values presented to us by Pope Francis must be cherished in continuity, not as something to be preserved, which is also true, but as

operative and transformative values" and he adds: "From these intuitions, ICMICA-Pax Romana and IMCS-IYCS, as Catholic intellectuals and students, should work to make our ideas and proposals visible in those spaces in which we have the possibility and opportunity to be heard, as well as acting in those spaces in which our activity can be transformative or an instrument so that those who lack a voice can be the subjects of their own future.

Indeed, we often cry out in the desert. So did the Israelite slaves in Egypt and, let us remember, God heard them and their liberation came. That is why we must work for multilateralism from below (no. 38), something that we must promote to influence and, why not, being present in the spaces of political decision-making, always defending the human person and his or her dignity (no. 39)".

He concludes with a call to our movement to advance in the conversion demanded by today's world and at the same time bring the hope that another world and another church are possible. "Let us set out on our journey encouraged by the reading of the last chapter, the sixth, of the exhortation in which we are offered a wide range of elements as spiritual references to be able to build this urgent new paradigm that will only be possible if we put at the center the other who suffers without forgetting that the planet, as a whole, also suffers as a consequence of our lack of truth, justice, charity, and love.

Rosaria Capone brings us the reflections of the MEIC (Movimento Ecclesiale di Impegno Culturale) meeting held in Rome in March 2023 on a central theme in the construction of democratic states, namely the administration of justice, which today is not

only a matter of concern in Italy, but also in Europe, and is central to the coexistence of citizens. His suggestive article "And deliver us from evil! Restorative Justice – Excursus" shows the various interdisciplinary reflections on the theme of Restorative Justice that has been present not only in the field of criminal law but in all the disciplines that ask themselves about an administration of justice that helps us to be better human beings. For Christians, this is a subject that cannot leave us indifferent and that requires us to put into practice our fundamental values and our ability to live in the community. A path that is being built, an emerging field of study, research, and intervention also from the social sciences, in the prevention of deviance and the management of conflicts affecting individuals and communities. A set of values, criteria, and strategies that aims to rebuild the sense of community, which is increasingly compromised today.

Begonia Ocio, representative of Pax Romana in the Council of Europe, makes an interesting report of the work done in the autumn session 2023, of the INGOS conference of the Council of Europe (cde) in Strasbourg. In it he shows us the importance of the work in the international bodies in which we have the right and recognition of participation, of the diversity of topics in which we could and should contribute, as the articles by Ramón Ibeas and Félix Grández remind us, repositioning with lucidity our presence in society and the church.

At the same time, it also shows the lack of direct participation of civil society, which should have been a priority for the Council of Europe.

This brings us back to the difficulties of society and the church in consolidating democracy and ecclesial community that were discussed at the MEIC meeting described by Marta Margotti. At the same time, it seems that the deficit of participation is partly motivated by the lack of an authentic representation of the citizenry that can truly participate in decision-making. Currently, INGOs are already present in these Steering Committees with the status of Observers, but the participatory nature of the INGOs belonging to the Conference seems to be incompatible with the current regulations that regulate acting as observers. In other words, the INGOs that are members of the Conference are currently empowered to make proposals for recommendations directly to the Council of Ministers, but we cannot influence the process of drafting the Recommendations prepared by the Steering Committees.

In other words, just as Gigacz shows the weakness of representation of the lay movements as a whole in ecclesial structures, in the same way, the deficit of representation with sufficient autonomy and agency in international bodies would lead to the deficit of greater citizen participation.

Stefano Ceccanti provides us with a reflection on the current political reality in Europe in view of the upcoming elections and the remote possibilities of the far right consolidating and its proposals becoming a political alternative for the whole of Europe and influencing the rest of the world's societies. The Eurosceptic groups Identity and Democracy and Conservatives and

Reformists as a whole are experiencing significant growth in some countries, but limited growth at the continental level, just under 5% of seats. However, the situation is not one to rest on our laurels given the enormous transformation that is taking place in the world order with a strong and aggressive presence of Russia and China not only in the Eurasian region but also in many countries in Asia and the South Pacific, Africa, Central and South America and the Caribbean.

Political analysis and participation have not been alienated to our movements and today Francis encourages us with Fratelli Tutti to an active presence but also, as Ceccanti points out, he brought to Europe a view from the South, not without risks, which demands from the laity and movements such as Pax Romana a continuous effort of analysis, organization, and participation. He concludes that today the Church is led by a Pope coming from the South who "is called to integrate these new demands with the traditional lessons of Gasperi, Adenauer and Schuman, which the Ukrainian conflict reveals to us as fully up to date. It is not an easy task, but a necessary one", and one to which movements such as Pax Romana have much to contribute.

We hope that this series of Convergence will help us to rethink our actions, in the church and society, in the face of the enormous challenges in which we are living and in which we professionals and intellectuals, trained to think, must contribute our vision and commit ourselves to the transformation of the societies in which we live so that they are more just, respectful of their natural environment and committed to peace in the world.

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# RENEWAL AND REORIENTATION OF OUR PATH



**Félix Grández Moreno, sociologist, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.**

The movement of the Church of the Poor, in Peru and Latin America, has a great experience of Synodality which it can share with the rest of the People of God. It is an experience spanning over 50 years of communion, participation, and mission.

Nevertheless, we as individuals, communities, and the movement are equally called to conversión and transformation at this moment in history, implying a renewal in our way of progressing together inside and outside of the ecclesial community.

Our experience as a community is such that, the way of walking together in this age, presupposes three challenges:

1. Insert ourselves into the dynamism of the synodal process of 2021-2024
2. Practice discernment
3. Walk together as citizens to actively contribute to the rehabilitation of our politics.

## 1. Insert ourselves in the dynamism of the synodal process 2021 - 2024.

The synodal process that began in October 2021 and will conclude in October 2024 is good news not only for the Church but also for today's troubled world.

It is good news because it confirms at a global level the path initiated at the Second Vatican Council, despite all the internal and external resistance. And it is also good news because the Church thereby reaffirms its readiness to place itself truly at the service of the greater human family.

The first session of the Synodal Assembly, held in Rome from 4 to 28 October 2023, is an important moment in this process and allows us to appreciate that synodality is not only a way of changing the governance systems of the Church at all levels but also, and fundamentally a way for the Church to become more pastoral.

Our movement is challenged to insert itself into the dynamism of the synodal process. This implies walking together among communities at national and international levels and, above all, walking together with the groups and organizations in the Church, society, and politics of which we are a part.

We must be creative and put in place the most effective ways to contribute to the process of conversion and reform of our Church, helping to eradicate the "weeds" of clericalism, abuses of power, self-absorption, and alienation from large sections of the poor of our time, especially young people and women. This is at the core



and heart of the rot immanent in the institutional church and hierarchy. It's even seemingly conspiratorial.

In this process, we have the opportunity to affirm the poor as the protagonists of the Church's journey, as stated in chapter 4 of the Synthesis Report of the synodal assembly, which goes so far as to say:

"The preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith: Jesus, poor and humble, befriended the poor, walked with the poor, shared the table with the poor, and denounced the causes of poverty. For the Church, the option for the poor and discarded is a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political, or philosophical one. For St. John Paul II, God grants them mercy first. This divine preference has consequences for the life of all Christians, who are called to nourish "the same sentiments of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Likewise, as lay people, it is up to us to affirm the common dignity of the baptized, by deploying all our initiatives within and outside the Church. What initiatives in particular? Those resulting from discernment. Proper discernment will lead us to attend to all indiscriminately, and not just the baptized

## 2. Practising Synodal Discernment

The synodal process is a process that requires discernment. Walking together implies knowing where to walk and that requires discerning what God wants and is doing among us, in the here and now of our history.

Many of the problems of our Church, at all levels, are due to the practical absence of discernment in general, and of synodal discernment in particular.

The attitude and capacity for discernment has been greatly weakened, and in some ecclesial settings, it has been lost in practice. This is caused by a culture in which compliance with rules and procedures rather than the exercise of disciples' freedom prevails.

What can we do to address this need for discernment in our lives, in our communities, and in the movement"?

We have before us the challenge of promoting synodal discernment through different instruments, starting with the review of facts of life (see - judge - act). But this requires in principle overcoming the deficits of formation and biblical and theological knowledge that we have accumulated in recent years.

To discern where to go requires an approximation of many areas of knowledge. The life review is one instrument, but it is not the only instrument of discernment.

As far as the matter of discernment is concerned, our movement is in a position to accept, for example, the approach of Pope Francis in the Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, on the climate crisis, when he says: "We need to rethink together the question of human power, what is its meaning, what are its limits? (LD 28).

About the method of discernment, lessons should be learned from the recent experience of the synodal assembly, especially with regard to the formation of "minor circles" and "conversation in the spirit".

For the rest, the reading of the 115 convergences, 75 questions to be addressed and 81 proposals of the Synthesis Report constitutes, in the immediate future, the beginning of a new exercise of discernment in view of the synodal assembly of October 2024.

### **3. Walking together as citizens to contribute to the rehabilitation of politics**

The synodal journey of the Church and our movement is very important at the ecclesial level, but it is also important in the social and political sphere, both in our country and in the world.

The synodal journey does not only imply that the different ecclesiastical bodies walk together. It also implies walking together with the different sectors of the people, especially in the territories where the needs, joys, and hopes of the people live.

In a context of serious institutional crisis and political polarisation, walking together implies inserting ourselves in the world to seek to give it meaning and hope, and to try to stop its dehumanization and the invisibilisation of our neighbor.

There can be no synodality of the Church without lay people intervening visibly in the public space. In the context of widespread mistrust and disconnection between society and the state, we have the opportunity and the possibility to animate the public, and civic conversation at local, national, and global levels.

Care for human life and the Common Home is an important space for the renewal of social and political discourses and practices.

It should be borne in mind that, more than an act, care is an attitude that encompasses a whole range of dimensions of human existence.

This is why listening and dialogue, gestures, and words are so important for generating links, closeness, and accompaniment, which seem to be the new ways of rehabilitating politics and affirming a sense of the common good.

It is a matter of promoting and putting into practice fraternity and social friendship in the neighborhoods, in the communities, in the field of culture, artistic creation, democratic politics, and the transformation of the economy.

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We are living in an unprecedented time in the Church and the world, a time of deep shadows and new hopes. It is a time of conversion to make paths where there are none, or where there seem to be none.

The synodal journey is, in good measure, the journey of the disciple. The experience of walking together is a personal and inalienable spiritual experience, as well as a communitarian, human, and simultaneously civic experience.

We are called to walk, but also to think and do together. Synodality opens us to the possibility of new interventions in the ecclesial and public spheres, where our spirituality, our knowledge, and the learning we have accumulated over time are linked in a new way.

*Lima, November 2023*

## DEMOCRACY AND SYNODALITY. THE CHALLENGE OF PARTICIPATION



**Marta Margotti, Conseil national du Movimento ecclesiale di impegno culturale, Italy.**

Why do young people and adults alike, generally, run away from commitment? Are there any options that could be explored to motivate active participation? How can we build the 'common house' together? These questions, and many more, were the focus of the Meic inter-regional conference of Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, and Liguria, that took place in Casale Monferrato on 7 October 2023.

The meeting on 'Democrazia e sinodalità. La sfida della partecipazione' (Democracy and Synodality. The Challenge of Participation), addressed with courage and clarity, the factors behind the crisis that grips both civil lives, with the difficulties that affect all democracies, on one hand, and Christian communities, with the laborious attempts at synodality, on the other.

The close connection between democracy and synodality stems from the fact that both concern the ways in which positive bonds between and among people are created, nurtured, and transformed in communities, which contribute to strengthening social cohesion, in one case, and to ecclesial communion, in the other.

Certainly 'democracy' and 'synodality' are not synonymous, but one allows for a better understanding of the other. Even more so, this double gaze can suggest new ways to respond to the fraying of community ties that weaken personal identities, common life, and, ultimately, even the institutions that govern communities at large.

As emerged from the speeches at the conference by Filippo Pizzolato of the University of Padua, and Monica Quirico, of the Theological Faculty of Northern Italy in Turin, as well as from the words of Renato Balduzzi and Monica Rimoldi who moderated the day; the difficult resilience of democracy at the social level and the obstacles to experimenting with forms of synodality in the Church reflect a 'crisis of participation' that cuts across individual choices, the relationship of the individual with the environment in which he or she lives and the institutions thereof.

It is no coincidence that considerations on electoral abstention and disaffection towards civic participation bodies, for example, in schools or neighborhoods, are often on the same wavelength as complaints about empty churches and the absence of young people in parishes and Catholic associations.

The difficulties of participation in the 'common home' are further amplified if we move from the Italian national situation to the reality of Europe, and if we observe the transformation taking place at the global scale. One of the modes of participation today is how to build community relations in increasingly globalized and complex societies, but also how to guarantee and govern those relations so that they are respectful of shared rights and duties.

The questions that emerged during the conference are many, and none of them are easy to answer. For example, who decides? Does excluding someone from collective decisions limit their freedom, or does it weaken the whole community? How do we strike the balance between individual freedom and community solidarity? Is there a unique model of democracy to be exported from the West to the rest of the world, or does the current crisis call for a rethinking of political representation as it was developed by liberal systems? And is synodality not in danger, in the end, of being a formula to confirm hierarchical, clerical, and male-centered governance in the Catholic Church?

The questions that need to be answered concern precisely the sustainability, not only ecological, of the current systems of governance of societies and communities and, ultimately, the sense of common living, of the 'good living' of individuals and communities.

In the face of widespread malaise regarding the meaning of common life, it is evident how futile it is to propose solutions drawn from the past or to delude oneself about a rapid change of course, capable of changing the future. Uncertainty about tomorrow is not the origin of this malaise, but a consequence of it. The possible solutions are not in the hands of others but in our own.

The dialogue that developed on the MEIC day is an attempt not to stop in the middle of the Ford and to bet on the creative and transformative power of even small groups.

When the date of the conference was set, one could not have imagined the exact coincidence with the holding of the Synod on Synodality, the publication a few days earlier of Pope Francis' exhortation 'Laudate Deum' on the climate crisis, and the recent news of the theme of the next Social Week of Italian Catholics in Trieste, entitled precisely "At the Heart of Participation".

On the other hand, the growing instability of the international system, from Ukraine to Africa and the Middle East, and the rising sovereignist rhetoric about defending national interests with the instrumental rhetoric about the 'invasion' of migrants were predictable. It was also easy to imagine those fundamentalist drifts that, in Italy and elsewhere, in the name of a largely invented tradition, use religion to justify immobility in the face of change.

The conference is not a point of arrival, but a stage on a journey that has its origins in the choices made by the MEIC in past years and, at the same time, looks ahead. In love, as we are with the Italian Constitution and the Second Vatican Council rooted in the Gospel, our goal - as individuals and as grassroots realities - is to be "thinking hearts" for a future that is already present.

Three words retained on the MEIC day summarise the meaning of many possible initiatives: responsibility, formation, and solidarity. Responsibility towards the "common house" to counter the indifference that blinds us to the needs of people and the urgencies of society, formation of minds and consciences to light the way, and active solidarity not to lose anyone along the way.



## FOR A GENUINELY REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL OF THE LAITY AT THE HOLY SEE



**Stefan Gigacz, Cardijn Institute Australia**

As the Synthesis from the First Assembly of the Synod on Synodality noted, the promotion of missionary synodality requires “the establishment and configuration of councils and advisory bodies at which representatives of lay associations and ecclesial movements and new communities can meet in order to foster enduring relationships between their life and work and that of the local churches.” (Synthesis Chapter 10, §i)

What might such a configuration look like?

As it happens, leaders and chaplains of several lay apostolate movements, including Joseph Cardijn, sketched out their answer to this question at a July 1964 meeting to prepare for the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council, which was to discuss the Schema on the Church.

Those movements, also known as Specialised Catholic Action movements, were: the International Young Christian Workers [IYCW-JOCI], International Young Christian Students [IYCS-IYCS], International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth [MIJARC], International Commission Hearts-Vaillants-Mes-Vaillantes [now MIDADE], the

International Movement of Apostolate of Independent Social Milieus [MIAMSI], International Federation of Catholic Rural Adult Movements [FIMARC], and the World Movement of Christian Workers [WMCW-MMTC].

They presented their vision for a partnership model of the relationship between lay movements and the institutional Church in a paper entitled “For a permanent organization of the laity at the Holy See.”

Sixty years later, the model proposed those movement leaders and chaplains still offer lessons for the development of a synodal Church. Let’s take a look at it.

### Issues of concern

The paper opened by listing the three major issues that the movements wished to highlight. The first of these was “the discovery and enhancement of the proper mission and specific tasks of the laity in the Church today,” a phrase that strongly echoed Cardijn’s position in the Vatican II Preparatory Commission and Conciliar Commissions on Lay Apostolate in which he emphasized, “the specifically lay apostolate of lay people.” This lay apostolate, Cardijn, and the movements contrasted with the “hierarchical apostolate” of bishops and priests.

The second issue the movements highlighted was “the vital necessity” that they had identified “to ensure a direct and permanent presence of the laity within the Hierarchy and in particular

with the Holy Father.” This concern similarly echoed a longstanding dissatisfaction on the part of the movements with the lack of understanding of their work by Vatican officials.

Following on from this, the third issue the movements wished to prioritize was the establishment of “institutional forms” in the Church that would be progressively implemented in order “to achieve an effective and efficient dialogue” between clergy and



laity. Hence, the a need for a permanent Vatican structure to facilitate this.

### **A representative Vatican body for laity**

Concretising their proposal, the movements called for the establishment of a new, permanent, post-conciliar Vatican body based on “representation of the laity at the Holy See.”

Now, before the Council, there had been a pre-existing “Permanent Committee for International Lay Apostolate Congresses” or COPECIAL, which had been established by Pope Pius XII after the First World Congress on Lay Apostolate in Rome in 1951. This was a structure in which all members were appointed by the Vatican.

The movements were dissatisfied with this structure. Hence, the movements’ diplomatic insistence on a clean break with the past such that the new post-conciliar body should “not depend on the past which would impose its demands”!

Moreover, it was particularly important to get the new Vatican structure right since, as the movement leaders and chaplains were very aware, the new entity would become the model for future regional, national, and diocesan structures.

### **A precise objective**

As a result, the paper pays particular attention to setting out the objective of the proposed new laity structure. Here it is perhaps worth quoting the relevant paragraphs in their entirety:

As a community of Christians and also a hierarchical institution, the Church is incarnate in the world to be a leaven of redemption and sanctification. In this global mission, the action of the laity and that of the clergy are inseparable but there are specific tasks that fall more directly to both.

The evolution of the world, moreover, tends to considerably amplify the extent and decisive importance for the Church of specifically secular tasks and therefore of the activities and institutions of the laity. This results in the need for a suitable organization for the latter. This is what the different apostolate movements in different areas strive to accomplish.

It appears that the development of the laity requires that a progressively greater place be given to it in the institutional frameworks of the Church.

Such a presence of the laity at the Holy See will also powerfully help all Christians to become aware of their Catholic character, in a world that is becoming more and more universal.

The concern here of the movement leaders and chaplains was to ensure that the new structure would take on a different form from that of other more hierarchical Vatican bodies.

Instead, they proposed that the new structure should be based on the “specifically secular tasks” of the lay movements and their activities and the need for an “institutional framework” in the Church to support the needs of these movements.

Rather than a regulatory body, the movement leaders and chaplains advocated for a Vatican structure that would assist them in their work.

### **Dialogue**

In particular, the movements proposed a new entity that would facilitate dialogue not only among the movements themselves but also with the institutional Church:

Through the institution that is being studied, an organic dialogue would be established between the hierarchy of the Church and organized laity. This dialogue could include the following two aspects:

- Authorized representatives of the laity would keep the pope, his collaborators and the central institutions of the Church informed in a natural way with respect to the evolution of the world, the problems and aspirations of Christians and non-Christians, the actions of the laity in the world and the Church with all its difficulties and its achievements.
- At the same time, thanks to these direct contacts, in a spirit of faith, the representatives of the laity would increasingly assimilate the thought and fundamental orientations of the pastors of the Church.
- As a result of such an institutionalized dialogue, the conditions would develop for an official and harmonious participation of the laity in both religious and secular institutions which concern them in the development of concrete orientations in the areas relating to the action of the laity.

Particularly noteworthy here is the emphasis on dialogue facilitating a greater understanding of the Church's teaching in contrast to traditional approaches based on submission to the authority of its teaching.

### **A representative Council of the Laity**

The recommendation, therefore, was for the establishment of a "Council of the Laity" which would have a secretariat of its own and act as a "center of dialogue" in line with the above objective.

This in turn necessitated the presence of the representatives of both the Holy See itself and of the College of Bishops. Contacts with other Roman Congregations would also need to be developed.

Above all, in order to ensure that the new

structure would operate as a Council OF the Laity, an "essential requirement" would be to ensure its "representativity," particularly among the "organized apostolate," in other words, among the lay movements:

The composition of this Council must be, as far as possible, representative of the laity of the entire Church. However, the current nature of the evolution of the world seems to us to require that a priority place be given in this Council to the organized apostolate.

This representativity would be achieved as follows:

- a.**Representation of the Hierarchy
- b.**Representation of the different forms of apostolate:

- by environments (children, young people, and adults): rural, worker, independent, student.
- other forms of Catholic action and apostolate
- movements of spirituality and piety

**c.** Representation of the Conference of ICOs. In conclusion, the movement leaders and chaplains also insisted on the need for consultation with national and international leaders from various continents regarding the design and operation of the proposed new Council of the Laity.

### **Outcomes**

If we now look at *Lumen Gentium*, as adopted in November 1964, we can see that the Council Fathers did define the role of lay people in terms similar to those that the movement leaders and chaplains had sought.

Thus, in Lumen Gentium §31 we find:

What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature... The laity, by their very vocation, seeks the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way, they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope, and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.

And the following year on 18 November 1965, the Council adopted its Decree on Lay Apostolate, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* §26, which did indeed call for Councils of the Laity at every level of the Church from parish to international level:

In dioceses, insofar as possible, there should be councils that assist the apostolic work of the Church either in the field of evangelization and sanctification or in the charitable, social, or other spheres, and here it is fitting that the clergy and Religious should cooperate with the laity. While

preserving the proper character and autonomy of each organization, these councils will be able to promote the mutual coordination of various lay associations and enterprises.

Councils of this type should be established as far as possible also on the parochial, interparochial, and inter-diocesan levels as well as in the national or international sphere.

A special secretariat, moreover, should be established at the Holy See for the service and promotion of the lay apostolate. It can serve as a well-equipped center for communicating information about the various apostolic programs of the laity, promoting research into modern problems arising in this field, and assisting the hierarchy and laity in their apostolic works with its advice. The various movements and projects of the apostolate of the laity throughout the world should also be represented in this secretariat, and here clergy and Religious also are to cooperate with the laity.

We can conclude therefore that the movement leaders and chaplains were largely successful with the proposals they set out in their paper calling for "For a permanent organization of the laity at the Holy See."

Now perhaps it's time to evaluate how those Vatican II orientations were implemented -- or not!

Read more: [For a permanent organization of the laity at the Holy See](#)

# THE REVIEW OF LIFE AT THE HEART OF THE ACTION-REFLECTION-ACTION METHODOLOGY



**Jean Baptiste NDUNDU NSITUVILA,**  
member of the DRC's Independent  
National Electoral Commission.

Life review and the Pax Romana methodology: Action-Reflection-Action, bring to mind several reference points. In particular, the Christian formation manual drawn up by the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS)-R.D. Congo, an edition of which has also been taken up by IMCS-Africa. Point 13 of the second stage of the spiritual life is entitled: "Listening and discernment". It reminds us that the spiritual life is resolutely oriented towards God, in constant search of God and his will. And the recurring question is how to know God's will. The writer of the Christian life module teaches us that God speaks to our hearts in a very simple, very unobtrusive way, through his word and events. He proposes a 5-pronged approach: Taste the word of God; Pay attention to the daily facts of my life; Discern the good or bad calls; Listen to the best in myself; Make up my mind and carry out what I have decided.

Knowledge of God's will is essential. The way I often advise IMCS leaders is to meditate regularly on the Word of God; take part in Eucharistic celebrations; attend retreats and recollections; carry out life reviews; heed the exhortations and messages of the Pope, bishops, priests, and even brothers and sisters.

However, I usually warn against the major obstacles to an intense spiritual life. These include the exaggerated pursuit of pleasure, which should not be confused with joy; greed, the unbridled desire to possess; vanity and vainglory, the exaggerated concern to have value in the eyes of men and to have a remarkable reputation; the exaggerated pursuit of power to be above others, to master them, to dominate them; not listening to others or not devoting oneself to others or being insensitive to their causes.

A good life review also requires attention to the quality of the spatial, temporal, and spiritual environment. In the digital and virtual age, temporal and spiritual conditions take on great importance.

### **I. God speaks to our hearts**

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name, that he may give you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; being rooted and grounded in love, that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses all knowledge, so that

you may be filled to the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3, 14-19). The Lord does not consider what man considers; man looks at what strikes the eye, but the Lord looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16, 7). To understand God's will, we must gradually acquire the practice of listening and discernment. One of the Bible verses suggested for meditation given the resolutions is Matthew 7:24-25, entitled "On the rock".

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice will be like a prudent man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the streams came, and the winds blew and beat against that house: but it did not fall, because it was built on rock.

The emphasis is on listening to the word of God. On the subject of the word, we can also shed some light by meditating on Matthew 13:1-23. In his explanation, Jesus says: "The one who received the seed in the good soil is the one who hears the word and understands it; he bears fruit; one seed yields a hundred, another sixty, another thirty". The Psalmist says: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path". (Psalm 119:105). The Word of God provides the light we need to move forward without stumbling in the Christian life. It is therefore desirable that individually or as a community, we find time for contact with the Word of God.

But when should we listen to God's word and how? In reality, we can listen to God's word at any time. However, there are times and periods that are favorable for listening to the word of God.

On the initiative of the Lord God, as with the young Samuel in the book of 1 Samuel 3, 1-10:



*... Samuel did not yet know Yahweh and the word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him... Yahweh began to call Samuel again for the third time. He got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am since you called me." Then Eli understood that it was Yahweh who was calling the child, and he said to Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if anyone calls you, you will say, 'Speak, Yahweh, for your servant is listening,'" and Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood by. He called out as he had the other times, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Listening to the word of the Lord God can take some learning and teaching. As Christians, we believe that the Holy Spirit teaches us and reminds us of God's word. The Holy Spirit helps us to bear witness and proclaim the gospel.*

It is also possible for us to come into contact with the word of God on our initiative: in the morning when we wake up, in the middle of the day, and before going to bed. The Eternal One spoke to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying: "Let the book of this Law be always on your lips: meditate on it day and night, so that you may do according to all that is written in it. Then you will be happy and successful in your endeavors". (Joshua 1:8) By reading and meditating on the Scriptures, the Bible, we can obtain what we need to commit ourselves. In Saint Paul's second letter to Timothy, he wrote: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

This contact with the word of God can be made in secret or public, individually or in a community, or a group. I often draw attention to prayer meetings. For Jesus said: "Again, I say to you, if two of you on earth agree to ask for anything, it will be granted them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18, 20-21) Mass or Eucharistic celebrations are part of these prayer meetings. More than 20 years ago, we used to get together in the Group of Catholic Students (GCS), a group of (International Movement of Catholic Students) (IMCS) sections from higher education and university institutions around Notre Dame du Congo cathedral in the Lingwala community of Kinshasa. We used to meet every Thursday evening. It was a prayer meeting for Catholic students and sympathizers where we would also share a Bible passage suggested by one of us, designated in advance. One of the scripture passages that still comes to mind is Philippians 2:4: "Let each of you, instead of considering his interests, also consider those of others." You could share with us why you have never forgotten this scripture

## **II. Collecting the facts of life.**

Prayer meetings require subjects for prayer. One of the first subjects of prayer is the facts of life. We must get into the habit of perceiving, experiencing, and commenting on the facts of life with God. Doing God's will is a subject of prayer through good discernment to make good decisions. An intense interior life can help us to identify paths or ideas to apply and those to avoid. We need to pray for our journey so that the guideposts for our lives become clear. Finally, our mission as the salt

of the earth and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16) is also a subject for prayer. Generally, in Pax Romana, as well as prayer meetings, we often organize life reviews, recollections, retreats, seminars, or even sessions that are moments of reflection or discernment. During these moments of reflection, we like to use the SEE-JUDGE-AGAIN methodology. Applied to life review, SEE-JUDGE-AGAIN leads us first to look at the facts of daily life.

The facts of daily life, according to the IMCS training manual, "Being a Christian Leader", leads us to consider the various external and internal elements that fill our lives. These facts and events that happen to us are materials given to us to build and orientate our lives. This data is varied. They include The environment, the place where I live, where I am, and the economic, social, and psychological circumstances of each day;

- My duties, my work, my activities, my daily responsibilities;
- Encounters, with people, with nature, with culture (readings, shows, art), with God;
- Internal events, my past, my health, my dispositions, my reactions, etc.
- External events, what's happening in my family, neighborhood, country, world, parish, diocese, Church, and so on.

Collecting data from daily life is crucial and should be done regularly, followed by a life review, recollection, retreat, seminar, or session on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, six-monthly, annual, bi-annual, or tri-annual basis. Immersion in the environment can help gain a better understanding of these aspects of life. For instance, in December 2002, we met at the IMCS Pan-African Assembly in Lomé, Togo, and immersed ourselves in poverty and HIV/AIDS to collect data on the situation of poverty and HIV/AIDS in Africa.

In October 2018, a MIIC-Africa session was organized on Catholic professionals and the call to good citizenship in Africa, the immersion organized in Yamoussoukro was inspiring on the relationship between Church and State. Personal data collected is intended to benefit individuals, groups, communities, and society as a whole. Capitalization of the data collected or an evaluation of the sessions organized may be required to facilitate the sharing of this collected data. During the Thursday GEC meeting, usually held at the Girls' Home at the Institut Supérieur des Arts Métiers (ISAM), we used to look back at the key events since the last meeting. Another example: For instance, when I was the Federal President of IMCS-R. D. Congo in 2001, we had to use SEE-JUDGE-AGAIN on the subject of the arrest of students at the University of Kinshasa. During the Thursday evening GEC meeting, we used to look back at the key events since the last meeting. We involved students from various universities around Notre Dame du Congo Cathedral, which gave a variety of perspectives. To present your point of view, advice, or suggest resolutions to the group, it is essential to understand the whys and wherefores. We were in our office in Kinshasa and had heard that there had been unrest at the University of Kinshasa. We got together quite quickly at the headquarters of the IMCS-RDCONGO federal office at the time, at 10 Rue Limété in Kinshasa, and we involved the president of the IMCS section at the University of Kinshasa. We carried out a cause-and-effect analysis, identifying the stakeholders and their motivations. Initially, we decided to deepen our understanding of the facts through investigations, which taught me to respect the work of a non-governmental human rights organization called the "Voice of the Voiceless".

Finally, we drew up a position paper for the M.I.E.C-R.D.Congo following the mass arrests of students at the University of Kinshasa on 11th and 12th December 2001, in which the Federal Bureau denounced the habits and behavior surrounding the negotiation of tuition fees at the University of Kinshasa. The students arrested were quickly released by the Congolese national police. One of them, Serge MAYAMBA, nicknamed "Lumumba", had nevertheless gone into hiding. We were relieved when we obtained information confirming that he was being looked after by leaders of an international human rights organization. Investigating situations, analyzing contexts, and defining legitimacy and legality are now part of my regular activities as a human rights defender.

Another way of perceiving and evaluating a successful life would be to examine our lives in the light of the four dimensions of God's love: length, breadth, height, and depth.

**Length:** the length of life, age, birthdays, and the time it takes for each individual to develop skills and ambitions. It's an important aspect of our identity. Generally speaking, each individual presents himself in terms of length. God gives each of us gifts and talents, creative possibilities. Everyone takes action to work on them or to discover them. Doors open and close over time (cf. Matthew 25). Some people, some of them brilliant, never go beyond this dimension, whereas alongside length, there is width.

**Breadth:** This is the aspect that enables us to be of service to others, and to work with others. Length without breadth is a river without an outlet.

Generally, at death, it is the aspect of breadth that feeds the testimonies. Interest in others.

**Height:** God's place in your life, so that you can face up to difficulties and challenges. Confidence in God. Deep faith in God.

**Depth:** An inner life of listening and meditation. A rich inner life. It is the opposite of a superficial life. It's about examining our roots in Christ, and our ability to keep our commitments or control our emotions. We generally need God's help for real inner transformation.

Recognizing God's actions and their benefits in our lives also provides opportunities to give glory to God for the facts, the events, and the results obtained; to bear witness to the many graces we have received over the years, but also to refine our vision, our objectives, our requests, and our prayers.

I would like to conclude this sharing by pointing out that this review of life, to which I invite everyone involved in Pax Romana, requires us to be driven by the values of truth, freedom, justice, and love. Our movement is not only individual but also collective. Just as each individual is invited to bear witness to these values, so our groups, communities, nations, and structures should be imbued with the values of truth, freedom, justice, and love. The social transformation that we all hope and pray for, and the changes for the betterment of all, begin with the proper preparation of the stewards that we are, to produce works for the glory of the Eternal God.

## LAUDATE DEUM: A READING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF OUR MOVEMENTS



**Ramón Ibeas Larrañaga; theologian; Secretary General of Caritas Vitoria and member of the Administrative Council of Caritas Española.**

In 2013, exactly 10 years ago, Pope Francis began his pontificate with an exhortation, "Evangelii Gaudium", followed by other texts and two reference encyclicals such as "Laudato si" and "Fratelli tutti". This year, 2023, he will publish a new exhortation, "Laudate Deum". Is the cycle of Francis' great documents coming to an end? Time will tell, but we might think so.

I approach the "Laudate Deum" with the interest of reading it as if it were an exhortation addressed to ICMICA and, by extension, to the IMCS. It is a document whose theological sources are drawn from the Second Vatican Council and the previous encyclicals of Pope Francis himself, and which, while finding a key in the thinking of Pope Roncalli, proposes that the Church and society make decisions in the field of action. Those who seek to find in it major theological-doctrinal proposals will find them, but as underlines to those already made in previous documents, and which this exhortation seeks to mobilize.

He insists, "the signs of change are already there" (no. 5); "We are verifying it, the speed

of global warming is unusual" (no. 6); to conclude by affirming that the imbalance is global (no. 7).

It is important to bear in mind that we are not dealing with phenomena of nature itself in its normal course. Everything that is happening, much more intensely in recent years, is the responsibility of human beings, albeit on a different scale. In fact, and analyzing the data provided by the different scientific studies, we can affirm that it is not the poor countries but the rich countries that are most responsible for what is happening. They generate more than 50% of the pollution produced on the planet.

The reality is worrying, but the exhortation is not catastrophic, there is still time, there are alternatives to the situation we live in and which include, for example, "advancing in the development of renewable energies to improve the situation and also employment" (no. 10). But the difficulties are obvious, even this statement by the Pope is not shared in other forums where the level of pollution and injustice involved in the generation of such energy, which requires batteries with a high content of rare minerals that are the cause of more than one war, especially in Africa, as well as the overexploitation of the land that contains them, is exposed. As we can see, there are no simple solutions, but it is necessary to work to find those that can help reverse the situation and put them into practice.

The introductory part of the document we are commenting on ends by affirming in number 15 that, despite the existence of elements that already seem irreversible, it is possible to correct some trends and reverse the climate crisis. In this regard, I would like to recall what happened during the period of confinement as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the truly surprising capacity for regeneration shown by the plant. Unfortunately, after that



period almost nothing has been corrected along the lines set out in "Laudato si' " and now ratified by "Laudate Deum". That is why the Pope is going to stress an idea that I consider central: if there is no change of model, if there is no change of paradigm, the future of humanity and of the planet as we know it is at stake.

### **Rethinking the paradigm.**

The exhortation revolves around the recognition that today both technology and the economy are the elements that define and design the globalized life of the planet. The Pope does not criticize them as tools; the necessity of both technology and the economy is not lost on anyone and, as he states in "Laudato si'", neither is their goodness. The question is how they are managed and, above all, at the service of what values, what project they are placed the service of. The question is "to think in terms of infinite or unlimited growth - the myth of modernity - which has excited so many economists, financiers, and technologists".

The current model subjugates and enslaves the human in the name of the system and a certain use of power (no. 24). Faced with this situation, "Laudate Deum" affirms, in number 26, the following: "human life, intelligence, and freedom are part of the nature that enriches our planet and are part of its inner forces, of its equilibrium". The world is not alien to us. Although Francis does not explicitly mention it, his speech does suggest the need to rethink the content of verbs: grow, multiply, and dominate, which we find in verse 28 of the first chapter of the book of Genesis in the Bible to, in line with the Pope's programmatic proposal, grow in humanity, multiply the common good and dominate our instinct for power by renouncing the use and abuse of things for our benefit and putting it at the service of what "Laudato Si'" defines as "the common home" and the common good of all beings created by God, not just humans. It is along these lines

that we must interpret the critique (no. 31) of the "logic of maximum profit at the lowest cost, disguised as rationality, progress and illusory promises (which) renders impossible any sincere concern for the common home and any concern to promote those who are discarded from society".

At this point, given the intention of the exhortation to focus on care from an ecological perspective, I consider it necessary to draw attention to some elements that are not explicitly mentioned but are deeply related to this idea and which we recover from other encyclicals such as "Evangelii Gaudium". They are those related to inequality and inequity which, in my opinion, should have been more explicitly present in this part of the analysis. The Pope does criticize a meritocratic conception that does not contemplate the injustice of inequality of origin or the means for the promotion of people, but he does not explain the causes.

### **Weakness of international policy.**

If I may be self-critical, it is also a weakness of institutions that, like Pax Romana, try to influence the world on the fringes of the dominant discourse. Thus, (no. 34) the Pope says "Goodness, as well as love, justice, and solidarity, cannot be achieved once and for all; they must be conquered every day". It is this day by day that we, as Christian activists, must take as our point of reference. The values presented to us by Pope Francis must be cherished in continuity, not as something to be preserved, but as operative and transforming values.

Returning to the text, and in particular to this number 34, we find the textual quotation of number 11 of the encyclical "Fratelli tutti", which incorporates an idea that, in turn, is rooted in the tradition of the Social Doctrine of the Church and in particular in John XXIII's "Pacem in Terris", number 163 of which states that "among the most serious tasks of men of generous spirit must be included, above all



of establishing a new system of relationships in human society, under the magisterium and the aegis of truth, justice, charity, and freedom: firstly between individuals; secondly between citizens and their respective States; and thirdly between States among themselves". Pope Roncalli's words remain immensely topical and link us to Gospel texts that evoke a preference for the poor and for a change of model, such as the beatitudes in Mt 6, the account of the last judgment also in Mt 25 and all of this underpinned by a desire of God, Lk 4, 18-19:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim a year of the Lord's favor".

These evangelical principles and inspirations were also taken up by Paul VI, who recalled them in his encyclical on the development of peoples: "Populorum Progressio", and which, as we have commented, are taken up as his own in Francis' doctrine and presented in different ways in both "Fratelli Tutti" and "Laudato Si".

These days when concerns about what is happening in Gaza and Ukraine continue to occupy us, these are values which, although in "Laudate Deum" they refer to the climate problem, are fundamental in the effort to achieve world peace. I invite you to take a closer look at Pope Francis' reflections in this regard, and above all to a leisurely reading and study of the "Document on human fraternity for world peace and common coexistence" signed together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019.

But it is not just a matter of principle. "Laudate Deum," asks to go further and proposes a coherent line of action, calling for "the most effective world organizations, endowed with the authority to ensure the eradication of hunger, misery and the defense of basic human rights for the common good of the

world" (no. 35). A call that transcends the environmental issue and points to the need to change the relational paradigm in the world, as expressed a moment ago in this article.

From these intuitions, MIIC-Pax Romana and IMCS-IYCS, as Catholic intellectuals and students, should work to make our ideas and proposals visible in those spaces where we have the possibility and the opportunity to be heard, as well as to act in those spaces where our activity can be transformative or an instrument so that those who lack a voice can be subjects of their future.

Indeed, we often cry out in the wilderness. So did the Israelites enslaved in Egypt and, let us remember, God heard them and their liberation came. This is why we must work for multilateralism from below (no. 38), something that we must promote with the aim of influencing and, why not, being present in the spaces of political decision-making, always defending the human person and his or her dignity (no. 39).

About how it is important to dwell on number 40 of the exhortation: "It is not a question of replacing politics". This is a very current temptation, but very unchristian. To us, the Gospel, the memory of Jesus of Nazareth tells us that we must use existing instruments, generate new ones, and, if necessary, because of their ineffectiveness, renounce others, but always with the intention of achieving effective cooperation. To this end, in the Pope's words, we need spaces for dialogue, consultation, arbitration, and conflict resolution with the poor in mind. In this line, I am of the opinion that Pax Romana and IMCS constitute privileged spaces in which this is possible if we are able to operationalize the potential of our movement. The exhortation ends with two chapters. The fifth chapter offers suggestions for work in preparation for the next Climate Summit, and the sixth and final chapter is where we find a series of orientations on which to build our contribution based on our identity as followers of Jesus of Nazareth

The Pope insists on some aspects that he considers key, such as the need to understand what is happening as "a human and social problem in a wide range of senses" (no. 58). In this fifth chapter, in addition to a review of the various Climate Summits, the world population, and Christians, in particular, are encouraged to mobilize with the next Summit, COP28 to be held in Dubai, as a horizon and reference point, where, despite the successive failures experienced at previous Summits, it is necessary, in the Pope's words, to work to reach efficient, binding and assessable agreements, but above all, "built on the commitment of all" (no. 59). Human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures", because, in this reflection, the Pope returns to "Laudato Si'" in number 89: "All beings in the universe are united by invisible bonds and form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion that moves us to a sacred, affectionate and humble respect".

Let us set out on our journey encouraged by the reading of the last chapter, the sixth, of the exhortation in which we are offered a wide range of elements as spiritual references to be able to build this urgent new paradigm which will only be possible if we place the suffering other at the center without forgetting that the planet, as a whole, also suffers as a consequence of our lack of truth, justice, charity and love.

Thank you very much.

Irun, 11th November 2023.

## AND DELIVER US FROM EVIL! RESTORATIVE JUSTICE - EXCURSUS



**Rosaria Capone, journalist, and professor of theology.**

In an ideal bridge, from the Age of Enlightenment with Cesare Beccaria to the Kitchener experiment in the 1970s in North America, we can read the principle of atonement of punishment moving from the concept that the punishment for a criminal act is not about revenge, but about creating a better society, to a future perspective. It is an approach to justice that focuses on what is to be healed, and repaired; on the lesson to be learned from a crime. This is, in a nutshell, the cultural evolution of a debate that, over the last fifty years, has focused on Restorative Justice (RJ). It has focused on an ambitious idea of justice that requires courage, as it places the person at the center and has among its founding values the key concepts of consideration, listening, and respect for others. Indeed, it aims to recognize all the parties involved in the crime: the perpetrator, the victim, their families, and communities, to recompose the conflict between them. It focuses on a true inter-relational method through which restorative culture can invest in work, education, and social work: all areas in which the essential elements become operational tools to implement strategies of prevention and intervention in disputes.

Far from having deflationary intentions, as Zagrebelsky argues, Restorative Justice consists of "a new and very old perspective at the same time, which could profoundly change the coordinates with which we conceive crime and the offender: from a solitary fact to a social fact; from an individual rejected by society to an individual who is still part of it, although representing the side of a pathological relationship. (.....) But there is still much to be done".

Franco Anelli, Catholic University Rector, said last year: "Restorative justice evokes three archetypes - justice, revenge, forgiveness - that run through human history and are at the origin of our culture. It is not an act of clemency, of forgiveness, but requires both the ability to manage complex dynamics and the convergence of very high sensitivities", an innovative tool that aims to rebuild the dialogue between victim and offender

According to Aristotelian thought, the first virtue which is justice, in the restorative category, has a deeper value and above all an ethical depth, which makes it much more complex than mere reparation. This virtue lies in the reactivation of the channels of communication between the subjects in conflict, in the re-elaboration of the relationship according to "relational" canons, and in the generation of consensual "solutions". It therefore operates a "revolution" insofar as it creates a "constructive space" in the field of criminal justice, summed up in the word encounter, between perpetrator, victim, and community; a dimension constituted by "experience" and "dialogue" between the parties. With a set of practices that place the victim at the center of the response to crime and, at the same time, tend to make the perpetrator/offender responsible for the effects of his or her actions.

A path that is being built, an emerging field of study, research, and intervention also from the social sciences, in the prevention of deviance

and the management of conflicts affecting individuals and communities is coming up. A set of values, criteria, and strategies that aims to rebuild the sense of community, is increasingly compromised today.

This whole debate, which has developed over the last decades, is reflected in the indications found in international sources, which attest to the great interest in both economic and social aspects in reducing the impact of the criminal justice system on people's lives. It has also been taken up by Directive 2012/29/EU of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime and making explicit reference to the implementation of "restorative justice services" as a tool, not only for the swifter resolution of conflicts, but also for the prevention of crime and the promotion of the well-being of all parties involved.

It is along these lines that legislative decree no. 150 of 10 October 2022, which develops the enabling law no. 134 of 27 September 2021, endowing the Italian penal system with an organic discipline of the Restorative Justice, matures and develops in the Cartabia Reform.

As Minister Marta Cartabia herself had the opportunity to affirm "restorative justice is a more appropriate response to the need for justice that we all feel in the face of the small or large events that mark the lives of individuals and peoples". And that, however, confronts us with a "new path, all to be discovered", as it implies a "total change of paradigm" which is "complementary", "transversal" to the execution of the sentence. On this subject, which also touches on the ethical responsibility of the believer, the Catholic intellectuals of the MEIC wanted to debate at the "E liberaci dal Male!" congress held in Rome at the end of March. And here we would like to review some of the reports that seem to us to be of substance.

## 1. Excess of evil, excess of good

"The theme", says the first speaker, philosopher Luigi Alici, "requires us to raise our eyes and stretch our gaze, because only in this way can we address the challenge of the two themes, Justice and Love, and try to focus on a profound relationship between the two different approaches".

The current historical-cultural context is dominated by the so-called biocentric paradigm, in the context of the ethics of environmental ecology, in the ongoing debate on the planetary crisis and the phenomenon of the Anthropocene, in which the human species could be primarily responsible for all climate change, to the point of becoming a geological agent. It would be desirable, therefore, for human beings to come down from their pedestal and stop assuming predatory attitudes towards nature, approaching technology with greater sobriety, and renouncing anthropocentric excesses in their authenticity. This entails the risk of rejecting personal identity, giving way to a culture of the impersonal which, with the end of Superman, sees the death of man as another side of the same coin. The development of digital technology confirms this to a certain extent, with its great promise to abolish the priests of knowledge and to dismiss the intellectual elites. Such orientations, which aim to reduce technosciences and restore the Promethean man, do not know how to give a man back his place and are stuck precisely in the impersonal. What remains is the myth of the algorithm, a decidedly superficial level, which leads to the desertification of the human. Man realizes the damage he has done but, in remedying it by freeing himself, he is incapable of recognising a personal dignity other than the dominant one. Therefore, the renunciation of dominating anthropocentrism ends up being a renunciation of the human in the absolute sense, thus losing the face of humanity itself.

In such a cultural context, what is it then that marks the difference between man and believer? According to the current pontiff, it is courage and the ability to seek the light amid darkness. For if on the one hand there is the struggle between omnipotence and impotence, on the other hand, there is the need for a rereading in the light of the category of fragility, in which one must enter, look inside, not remain on the periphery, and in which one must seek the signs of the Spirit. This is profound vertigo, given the difficulty of the game at stake, also in the face of the catastrophic surrender of believers, unable to recognize in the here and now the time of the Spirit. Fragility is a theological place where the Spirit spreads his gifts. Mercy is proclaimed in misery.

## 2. Justice and love

The French Revolution galvanized the revolutionary turn with three flags. After lowering the one of fraternity, the other two divided the field with clashes so violent that rivers of blood flowed. The banner of equality became the banner of social justice. Thus, the clash between justice, on the left, and liberty, on the liberal level, has been bloody; the former loses the battle with liberty, when the latter, in the encounter between the individual and society, flies above all in the realm of the private and not the public. Today, it is precisely the private that is declining as the form that must dominate above all else. Hence justice, in losing its character as a social catalyst in favor of equality, also loses its character as a universal virtue, to become more and more an algebra of private interests, condemned to be a sentinel that watches over these interests. Rereading chapter 12 of *Dives in Misericordia* we find that Pope (John Paul II) (Wojtyła) argues that negative forces have taken over justice, which is no longer honored for what it should be but is used to commit the greatest injustices: *summum ius summa iniuria*



Today we are witnessing an entropic process whereby, abandoned to itself, justice is sick and lives in a self-referential retreat. This is why we must rethink the dimension of mercy, which is not a voluntary and optional corrective.

The speaker concluded: "It is not possible to look inside justice, and recognize the endogenous pathologies that afflict it, without broadening our gaze towards a relational horizon understood as life with others." Indeed, one cannot ignore the historical relational dynamics in which people live, and one cannot fail to recognize the pathologies of the human being, pushed more and more towards the impersonal. As soon as one raises one's gaze to meet the face of the other, virtuous karstic paths emerge, for horizons open up that displace justice. According to P. Ricoeur, Alici argues, that justice is based on proportion, whereas human life is an experience of gift, of disproportion, where good and evil coexist. We understand this because the human person, which is not only a biological status, is the only place where the infinite and the finite touch.

### **3. Restorative justice, penal system, and fraternity.**

Professor Luciano Eusebi, from the Catholic University of Milan, said: "The person and the need to subvert the inveterate relational model of the Libra, to which we always refer to when we speak of justice, are the central themes of the second of the congress's keynote lecture".

The reflection, as difficult as it is profound, aims to unravel the idea, increasingly rooted in human society, that the discomfort caused by others must be rid of. With the underlying logic that one's good lies in eliminating the image of the other. It is the story of Cain that repeats itself incessantly.

When one no longer has a word to say for the other, it is all over. Cain is the image of each of us when, in the lane of our life, with people who give us a hard time, we would like to use a nice bowling ball to eliminate them. This is reproduced every time the Abel of the day ceases to be a Thou for us. The Libra leaning on the sword is the model according to which the relationship with the other rests on the judgment you have of him, and the consideration you think you deserve. It is the model of catastrophe, the one that has led us, in the last 77 years, to have weapons of mass destruction, to apply war-based opposition, whatever its level of camouflage, if it is not overcome, the future of humanity is not so secure. But creation is a gift of God and is entrusted to that alternative model which is not that of correspondence: the one according to which evil is responded with good. This does not at all mean being naïve, but rather showing pride in the forgiveness that is given. This concept is made clear to us by the famous expression of John Paul II who said: "There is no justice without forgiveness". This means, in order to be just and faithful to the creed, does not mean pretending that nothing has happened. Nothing could be further from Christianity than calling evil by its name. Forgiveness - for its part - contains within itself the pride of those who do not put themselves on the same level as those who committed the evil. In the same way that turning the other cheek in no way means offering oneself to receive other meaningless blows; just think of the dialogue between Jesus and the High Priest's servant. But it also means that there is still one cheek of mine ready to believe in the human dignity of the person in front of me, in his or her capacity to make new choices. The risk is great: we are wasting our democracy, reducing it to a purely instrumental conflict.



Even in questions of bioethics. Indeed, looking closely at Pope Francis' reflection on the culture of waste, as believers, we should ask ourselves whether certain emphases of these rights presented as fundamental, individual, do not become the negation of social rights. Because it is much more comfortable to say that the sick person has the right to die than to follow them when this requires commitment, cost, and value of the dignity of the person. Without extending the discourse any further, reference can be made to the paradigmatic dimension of criminal law, with which it can be shown how, even in the face of crimes, the retaliatory model is not productive. In such a question, the aim is to establish to what portion of wrongdoing should correspond: it should then be possible to assess how much of the total wrongdoing we can attribute to a person. Thus, to be able to recognize the factors that have affected, certainly not the use of freedom. This inevitably escapes us, not only in criminal law but precisely in the human condition. Far from being positivist language, it clearly expresses the thinking of the Church: in the *Gaudium et Spes*, it is said that God alone searches hearts so that we are forbidden to judge the inner guilt of anyone. That retaliation cannot be the task of law is reaffirmed by the fact that criminal law can never have the last word on the use of freedom. The last two centuries have produced hundreds of millions of dead, through wars, famine, and injustice: what has criminal law had to say about it? Nothing. It knows how to punish the individual, but says nothing about injustice in human relations. So criminal law, although important, must be taken in its proper dimension, according to Professor Eusebi. Otherwise, by focusing on punishment alone, society is miseducated to realize the factors that led to such criminal behavior.

These are not only factors of marginalization, poverty, and the like but also tax havens, without the elimination of which the mafias will never be defeated; sexual exploitation, which will not end until we educate ourselves that sexual relationality comes after establishing a human relationship that leads to recognizing the other as a Thou. A dimension that the idea of retribution erases and that costs us all something, while on the other hand, it does not win votes in elections. On the other hand, it is much easier, in the case of a murder on the road, for example, to raise the penalties much higher than in the case of voluntary manslaughter, because it is done - as they say - to restore justice to the families of the victims. This is not only hypocritical but also provides a cover for the fallacy of a retributive vision that leaves primary prevention completely out of the picture. It puts it out of play to the extent that intervention on the causes that led to the criminal act is neither investigated nor taken into account for a resolution; just as intervention on illicit profits, or as concrete action on causal factors, is put out of play. The hypocrisy of such a system of justice has gone as far as and sometimes goes as far as, the death penalty. A situation that led Cesare Beccaria to express his perplexity as to how it was possible for a state, in order to send out a message of respect for life, to promote public murder! Among other things, because what then, as now, should constitute an element of dissuasion, based solely on effectiveness sustained by fear, is contradicted by the facts. We can see how, precisely where punishments are more severe, crimes have increased considerably. Recalling the speaker Hegel who highlighted how the 18th-century philosopher, in his *Lineamenti di Filosofia del Diritto*, argued that the value that compensates for crime can vary and, from a material point of view, be most diverse.

Let us return to the central concept of the Person. The penalty imposed on the offender does not erase what has been committed. Nor, on its own, is it sufficient to stop other crimes, since it does not exclude their causes, while, on the contrary, true prevention comes from the activation of the motivational dimension. The worst thing - in this way - is that the victim is left with only the meager satisfaction of seeing the offender punished. The loneliness of the victim weighs like a boulder, almost disappearing in the sea of the metronomic political will to demonstrate its power with the inflicted punishment.

Certainly, on this path, the third paragraph of Article 27 of the Constitution of Italy, according to which punishments should aim to re-educate the convicted person, is disregarded. This a rule which, far from being sterile, reinforces the authority of society by means of a serious preventive approach, but also by forcing the offender to review his actions, to evaluate them by reworking them and committing himself to changing his lifestyle, indicating a path which would be much more effective than the transgression of a rule. Therefore, a real program, or rather a project for the guilty party - since we have not been able to overcome the non-existent dogma of a punishment that must necessarily be numerical-retributive - would also be able to offer something valid to the victims. An objectively difficult path, since it exposes offenders in relation to other, non-dissociated offenders.

The path traced thus far cannot but call into question believers and their witness throughout history, which has not always adhered to the Creator's command. Complicit in a superficial reading of Holy Scripture by the Hebrew people, whose Mesopotamian cultural roots go back to the

Code of Hammurabi, the Mosaic imprint of retribution has been carried down through the centuries, of which even Jesus, guilty of not having been the great retributionist like Moses, was a victim.

And it is precisely this retributive idea, taking over the whole core of the Christian faith, that has distorted its essence. What happens, with Adam first and Cain immediately afterward, points the way. God goes after Adam because this is the justice of the first step, sewing tunics of skin covers the nakedness of Adam's failure and that of each of us. Cain flees after the murder of his brother because he is aware that the law of the balance that he instituted becomes a boomerang for him - having considered Abel negative for himself, anyone could have considered him negative for himself and eliminated him - God marks him on the forehead so that no one will take revenge on him. Because the encounter with God makes Truth, that is why it is heavy; but it is still an encounter of liberation.

Thus, it is irrefutably revealed that what is salvific is not the evil suffered on the Cross, but the love borne on the Cross. This is the challenge of the Resurrection: to believe that faithfulness to good in the face of evil is the only thing greater than death. Therefore, the Christian is the one who remains faithful to the good even at the risk of death. There is no other motivating aspect of faith. The testimony of the Cross is the design of good in the face of evil. By getting out of the arbitrary pitfalls of a distorted reading of giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, i.e. the risk of the irrelevance of the Christian message to the collective dynamics of human relations, it is necessary to take up again the Montinian exhortation to build the Civilisation of Love everywhere, even in the relations between peoples, as a response to the truest and most real manifestation of charity.

And precisely in order to respond to Montini's yearning and to understand how much truth and commitment there is - on the part of believers - in the path of building the civilization of love, we must ask ourselves whether our democracies are capable of producing leaders who have great cultural visions, inclusive and non-divisive visions. Visions capable of transmitting to future generations that winning idea of peace proper to the European model: that of a progressive unification of peoples which - bypassing the stupidity of the exercise of war and the politics of oppression - does not proceed by conquest but by adhesion. And precisely in order to respond to Montini's yearning and to understand how much truth and commitment there is - on the part of believers - in the path of building the civilization of love, we must ask ourselves whether our democracies are capable of producing leaders who have great cultural visions, inclusive and non-divisive visions. Visions capable of transmitting to future generations that winning idea of peace proper to the European model: that of a progressive unification of peoples which - bypassing the stupidity of the exercise of war and the politics of oppression - does not proceed by conquest but by adhesion.

#### **4. Justice and dialogue**

"To say that this is an unjust world is to say that it is a world that does not recognize the Thou". From this clear assumption, which constitutes the final landing point of the report by Professor Montanari, also a professor at Cattolica, the delicate reasoning that links Justice and Dialogue is unraveled. We have become accustomed to hearing justice articulated in so many different nexuses: political justice, legal justice, and revolutionary justice, to name but a few. However, we are not familiar with the nexus between justice and charity, as it is not found in any context of correspondence.

This nexus is, of course, outside of any conspiracy, and, above all, it is a nexus that is strongly reminiscent of the I-Thou relationship. The theme of the Thou underlies and supersedes any social dimension. This is why the aforementioned concept of wasting democracy, in a current context in which the dominant logic of war depersonalizes people, means shattering society, producing a generalized individualism, starting even with language. Today, the word "relationship" has almost completely disappeared from the landscape of a pret -a-porter culture, to make room for the concept of interaction, which betrays an egocentric-egoistic vision that replaces the I-Thou relationship with the "Me-Me reflex".

Recalling the philosopher Agamben, Professor Montanari focuses on Kant's overturning of the Cartesian assumption: I exist therefore I think, and I exist insofar as I am about the other. Recognizing the other is therefore not an option, but a duty. This is the key to justice. Because we cannot dispose of others; we can ignore them, violating the principle of relationality, but we cannot dispose of them. Throughout time, justice has been considered as a value, running the risk of being placed on a slippery slope, synthesized in the alternative of relative and absolute values. An alternative that, on the other hand, should be avoided in order to focus on the indisputable concept of man as a finite entity. It follows that any thought, design, or product of man is, by its very nature, finite. The difference also belongs to our finitude and therefore cannot be demonized. This leads us to understand that there is an ulteriority which, in the world, is called otherness. This is the subject of the relationship: each 'I' is you of the other, and to withdraw into the "I-self" runs the risk of damaging oneself in this dimension of total ignorance-indifference of the other.

The time in which we live is the time defined by the sequence: globalisation-technology-finance. A pragmatic time in which, again Agamben argues, thinkability and representability have become empty because knowledge has simply renounced a logical representation of the world.

The social shattering produced by technologies, the dissolution of communal life, and the habit of immediate, unreflective, and argumentative systems of reasoning, led to emotional reactions - erasing at a stroke that stratified division between the people and the intellectuals in which the latter organized the world - does not say with what cognitive tools, with what mental mechanisms, with what knowledge of reality other than that conveyed by emotions and messages, decisions are made.

Quoting the book of Proverbs (12.17) Montanari reminds us: To speak the truth is to proclaim what is right. That is to say, not only to enter into verbal contact with the other but to respect their difference.

With subtle reasoning, the speaker explored how it is not correct to attribute to justice the concept that has always been associated with it over the centuries: equality. Thus, attributing a value element to a descriptive dimension of the human condition. I am already different from myself. Therefore, being different cannot mean negativity. The justice-equality binomial is a mistake because it implies the disavowal of otherness through its negative consideration.

It is better to use a term that is little in vogue today but which leaves no room for doubt: parity. Ontological equality, therefore material, carries the message that, since we are all equal as finite entities, I violate the other if I do not recognize it. One need only think of how, in the concentration camps,

names were taken away. A gesture of subtraction of equality and existential prevarication. Finite entity and existential equality. A concept is as true as it is difficult.

## 2023 AUTUMN SESSION CONFERENCE OF NGOS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE (COE) STRASBOURG



**Begoña Ocio, Pax Romana's permanent delegate to the Conference, in front of the slab with the declaration by the founders of the Council of Europe.**

The Autumn Session of this year 2023 was held from the 9th to the 11th of October, 2023, and as always, in the "Agora" building in Strasbourg.

The reports and debates in this edition have been devoted mainly to operational issues. On one hand, the Conference's relations with the other bodies of the Council of Europe, in the light of the priorities defined in the Declaration of the Reykjavik Summit while on the other, the internal workings of the Conference of the Autumn Session, in view of the new elections of the Presidency and Standing Committee that will take place next April, in the Spring Session of 2024.



## 1 Relation of the Conference with the other bodies of the Council of Europe

The Declaration of the Reykjavik Summit, May 2023, (see: [rm.coe.int/4th-summit-of-heads-of-state-end-government-of-the-council-of-europe/1680ab40c1](https://rm.coe.int/4th-summit-of-heads-of-state-end-government-of-the-council-of-europe/1680ab40c1)) has more outlined priorities to be addressed by the Council's bodies. As Marija PEJCINOVIC, Secretary General, announced at the Spring Session of 24-26 April 2023, these priorities emphasize, among other issues, the need for more direct involvement of civil society.

In this sense, on September 15, 2023, the first meeting of the Secretariat took place with 85 NGOs, 45 belonging to the Conference and another 40 external to it (see: [www.coe.int/fr/web/portal/new](https://www.coe.int/fr/web/portal/new)) At this meeting, the first outline of remodeling was thought that the application to the Steering Committees, which deals directly as the advisor to the Council of Ministers, was presented. preparing guidelines for Resolutions, Recommendations, etc.

In May 2024, Lichtenstein will organize the next Committee of Ministers and it is hoped that by then the new project can be presented.

From the point of view of improving the Conference's relations with these Steering Committees, the most prominent demands made by the Assembly were the possibility of cooperating directly in the presence of representatives of the Conference on these Committees and the recovery of lost competence such as the authorization of the chairpersons of the working committees of the Conference and consult, at any time, the files corresponding to the various resolutions, recommendations, etc., during

the preparation process of meeting resolution. Currently, there is already the presence of INGOs in these Steering Committees with the status of Observers, but the participatory nature of the NGOs belonging to the Conference seems to be incompatible with the current rules governing the performance of the observers. In other words, currently, the INGOs that are in the Conference are empowered to make proposals for recommendations directly to the Council of Ministers, but they cannot influence the process of preparing the Recommendations as prepared by the Steering Committees. The Assembly proposed that this issue be worked on by the new management team that will be elected in the subsequent elections.

According to the presentation of Daniel POPESCU, on the occasion of his appearance before this Assembly, (Head of Democracy and Governance of the CoE,) directly responsible for the remodeling of these bodies, the interest of the CoE in strengthening the presence of Civil Society is likely to result in the proposal to elect some direct representatives of the Conference in different instances.

During the Reykjavik Summit, Edgard ERMISCHER, President of the Conference and the only representative of civil society on the Committee of Ministers had the opportunity to note that several ministers were completely unaware of the existence and functionality of the Conference. To alleviate this lack of connection, it seems that these ministers want to promote an annual meeting that will allow them to be aware of the work of INGOs.(Chairman's statement regarding the conference's presence at the Reykjavik Summit)



Finally, in this section on relations between the Conference and the other bodies of the CoE, it is worth highlighting the approval of the Recommendation presented by the Committee for the monitoring of AI regulation. This recommendation is aimed at regulating AI for use in education (see: <https://rm.coe.int/conf-ag-2023-rec4-projet-de%20recommandation-concernant/1680ac8e26>)

## **2- Inner Workings of the Conference: Elections, Spring 2024**

The renewal of the Presidency and the Standing Committee, which will take place at the next General Assembly in April 2024, took up most of the last day's session. On this occasion, the calendar for the presentation of candidates was established and the conditions and rules that regulate this process were recalled (see: <https://www.coe.int/fr/web/ingo/committees>) (Click on Sessions)

In this context, there were some important caveats for all INGOs. On the one hand, the importance of having all the data that identifies the INGOs updated in the Conference Database. On the other hand, there should be no changes in the electronic coordinates of the person who will be in charge of voting in the Spring Session between now and the end of the elections. As announced, the voting will be computerized, to bridge the online with the face-to-face votes.

Finally, within the next six months, the evaluation of the participation of INGOs in the activities of the Conference will take place in order to renew the recognition of the participatory status of the INGOs. They are waiting for the questionnaire that will be sent to them.

For its part, the Assembly proposed to improve internal coordination between the

development of the work of the Committees and the functionality of the Standing Committee. In this regard, it was proposed to hold 2 to 3 meetings throughout the year between the chairpersons of the Committees, the Chair of the Conference, and the members of the Standing Committees, and the proposal was well received.

## **3- Development of the work content of the Committees**

There are a few new features since most of the committees are completing the work started in 2021, in order to take advantage of last year's extension while beginning to prepare the new theme that the committee will have to validate at the next Spring session. In this sense, the Migrations Committee will have begun to prepare the new objective to be achieved regarding the problem of housing as a key condition for the successful integration of migrants into society. All the contributions that can be made to this suggestion will be of help to the committee.

In this Autumn Session, the committee for the defense of women's rights played a crucial role. On the morning of the session on Monday the 9th, a special space for a round table in which the chairpersons of all committees participated. Each committee explained a specific problem about women and what it consisted of, according to the relevance of each case. This meeting showed that all the committees took this issue into account. In the future, the INGOs will try to see if it is possible to address a specific aspect across the board. (See: <https://rm.coe.int/note-conceptuelle-du-debat-du-comite-les-ong-en-tant-que-defenseurs-de/1680ac9e30>)

Thinking ahead on the next "legislature", a presentation of two new possible topics was proposed: Quality urban planning and the

environment as social rights. (Architects' Group + Davos Forum) and, on the other hand. The problem of work in conditions of modern slavery, linked to human trafficking and smuggling.

In this last issue, Katharine BRYANT and Abigail MUNROE presented strong points, based on surveys carried out over the last 5 years in relation to 160 countries. With data collected directly and indirectly through ILO and IOM reports. Its objective will be to draft a Recommendation that will help promote measures that show transparency throughout the supply chain.

Finally, the new committee on the Right to Sport throughout Life, held a meeting in parallel to the session, in order to finalize the delimitation of its content and consolidate the network of INGOs that will support it.

An appeal was made to the members of the PAX ROMANA network to join the networks of these new groups. Contact can be made to Begoña Ocio directly, or by email: [delegue-coe@icmica-miic.org](mailto:delegue-coe@icmica-miic.org), to contact the president of the correspond Your ding committee.

The chairperson reminded the committees that they are expected to remain active in the next legislature and that participation in any of them would be equally interesting. These legislatures are:

- Rights of migrants, refugees and exiles
- Interreligious and interfaith dialogue,
- Environmental and health crisis,
- Social rights and monitoring of the European Social Charter,
- Rights of the child,
- Women's rights,
- Artificial intelligence
- Education.

To consult detailed information on each committee, in relation to the work carried out during these 2 and a half years, go to the website of the Conference: <http://www.coe.int/fr7web/ingo/committees>.

Among the documents that all the committees publish in their corresponding section, you will find the "Rapport, April 2023". The report includes what has been done so far and forecasts for the future.



*Speech by the Irish Ambassador to commemorate Anti-Poverty Day. Presentation of the English copy of the Slab with the declaration by the founders of the Council of Europe.*



*Rodin's sculpture "The Burghers of Calais". This sculpture presides over the entrance to the Palais de l'Europe, home to the Parliamentary Assembly and the CoE's Committee of Ministers.*



***Headquarters of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe.***



# TOWARDS EUROPEAN ELECTIONS AND BEYOND



**Stefano Ceccanti, Professor of  
Comparative Public Law and Political  
Science at Rome's La Sapienza University.**

The European elections in June are taking place at a very delicate stage.

There is an increase in inequalities within mature developed countries, which goes hand in hand with a no less dramatic rebalancing of inequalities between these countries and those with recent development.

The EU's "Next Generation EU" program during Covid represented a historic turning point, embracing a new paradigm of pro-market and pro-democracy engagement, rather than previous obsessions with austerity, accepting the idea of using European debt to ensure effective solidarity, which is being consolidated with the revision of the Stability Pact.

A new policy paradigm that requires a new institutional structure more capable of making majority decisions and reinforcing cooperation, especially among countries that have already chosen to split the monetary system.

Differences with what has happened in other contexts, in particular in the United States of America, where Trumpian populism still seems

highly competitive for next November's presidency. This is certainly a very serious global problem, for a better understanding of the situation. The European situation, in the run-up to the June elections, looks decidedly better. The apocalyptic scenarios have been discouraged. The formation, in the future European Parliament, which we will vote for in July 2024, a majority in which populist and extremist forces are decisive does not seem at all realistic.

The Eurosceptic groups Identity and Democracy and Conservatives and Reformists as a whole are experiencing significant growth in some countries, but limited growth at the continental level - just under 5% of seats. Some interesting sites, starting with Europe Elects, regularly update at the end of each month the possible composition of the European Parliament based on polls on voting intentions.

Of the 27 national results, compared to 2019, we see a greater fragmentation and the relative (very relative) shift in favor of the Eurosceptic right, more to the detriment of the first group, the centre-centre-right EPP, which would fall by about twenty seats, while remaining in the lead, except for the second and third groups, the Social Democrats and the Liberals, which would lose about ten each, while maintaining their respective positions.

As is well known, the European elections are important above all because they are the prelude to a fundamental step in a few weeks: the election, by secret ballot, at the beginning of the legislature with an absolute majority of the members of Parliament. The President of the Commission will be the first indicated by the Council of Heads of Government. The candidate who goes to vote in the House is chosen by the latter body, in which the two objectively most relevant governments, the German and the French, are led by pro-European forces, a social democrat, and a liberal. Therefore, not even the President of the Italian Council, beyond her subjective wishes, can pretend to circumvent them.

There are different motivations for those who foresee a Trumpian scenario and also for the European Union, something that the figures radically disprove. The first may simply be ignorant or, at best, desirous to mobilize the electorate by portraying themselves as winners on their own. Let us focus on this first. If it is not ignorance, it is still unfounded propaganda that ignores or hides three fundamental elements: first, the 2019 results are forgotten (for example the demo socialists did badly then, so they can't lose much now); second, the European elections are the sum of 27 national

results that are largely balanced because the voting motives are predominantly national, relating to the desire to reward or punish incumbent governments, which are of different colors. Third, we vote with proportional systems that photograph limited movements of votes in seats, which do not amplify them. More precisely, the game is played in the most populous countries, which have the largest number of seats.

In 6 of the 27 states, just over half of the MEPs are elected: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland. In Germany, compared to 2019, the AFD will increase significantly (in the group with the League) and the Greens, who then did a feat, will drop and there will be minimal movements among others. In France, there was a great fragmentation in 2019 that will tend to be confirmed. In Italy, the main movement will be within the center-right, where the FDI will take votes and seats away from the League. In Spain, PP and Vox will take over the remains of the already deceased Ciudadanos liberals. More interesting from a political, not numerical, point of view, are the data from Poland, where last October saw a political election campaign with a life-or-death head-on clash, with overtones of the Italian campaign of 1948, between the popular Tusk and the Pis, Meloni's ally, with the government alternating in favor of the former.

Everything indicates, therefore, that the cornerstone of the future majority will be similar to the present one, i.e. based on the three groups of democrats and socialists, liberals and populists. From the point of view of concrete political options, we know that the people who adhere to the realities of the Pax Romana in Europe move largely within the



boundaries of the pro-European majority, with a predominance of democrats and socialists, but also with presences among that part of the popular closest to the open inspiration of post-war DC and the liberals.

However, this clearly cannot mean that the outgoing majority will rest on its laurels.

What are the main challenges for continuing the turning point that occurred with Next Generation EU?

The first is institutional. Just as the post-war institutions could not simply be replicas of the previous ones, even if in the European case the need for discontinuity derives from success (the club is registering more and more membership proposals) and not from failure, the unanimous --confederal logic seems obsolete. Already ineffective in managing a Europe of 27, it would be fatal for an even larger EU. There is therefore the need to differentiate between different levels of membership and to apply the majority principle more strictly to the hard core of a federal logic.

The second is that of the international role to be assumed, playing a driving role in the birth of the European institutions and NATO. The Union, especially after the departure of the United Kingdom and in the face of the uncertainties of the US orientation in addition to renewed institutions, also needs a common defense policy to face crises on an equal footing with the United States and in coordination with them. The crises develop close to its borders, and a common foreign policy that will also lead to coordinated representation at the UN, based on forms of coordination of the only permanent seat on the Security Council, that of France. In all this, we must also consider the problem of the role of the ecclesial community. Today it is a small minority in Europe, but not an irrelevant one, especially if we consider that Europe is a federation of many minorities. The pontificate of Francis, coming from the global South, has placed European Catholicism in an unprecedented position. The demands of the global South have recovered positively,

but there is a risk of an inverted problem compared to the two previous pontiffs: a reading based on the North-South axis risks devaluing other dimensions such as the clear distinction between democracies and autocracies, typical of European pontiffs. In particular, the experience of relations with American democracy, structurally different, positive and supportive for Europeans, conflictive and full of dark areas with the global South, runs the risk of not understanding the difference between the necessary closeness between all democracies with which The Catholic Church was linked to the Council by pragmatic, albeit necessary, agreements with autocratic regimes. The risk is that of an unconscious return to a kind of equidistance between forms of state, similar to that expressed by some of the BRICS countries, heirs of the non-aligned. Now, if the canonization of Archbishop Romero recognized, albeit belatedly, the reasons for a South that could not make the fall of the USSR a priority but was rightly opposed to certain options supported especially in North America, it seems important that the European legacy of close links between democracies, including the North American one to which the continent owes the spread of democracy before and after 1989, should be kept firm, also in comparison with the reconfirmed aggressiveness of Russia and China. Yesterday, it was the West that had to incorporate the parts of truth coming from the South in the various strands largely amenable to liberation theologies from the vast process of liberation initiated by the Medellin Assembly of 1968.

Today, it is the Church led by a Pope coming from the South that is called upon to integrate these new demands with the traditional lessons of Gasperi, Adenauer, and Schuman, which the Ukrainian conflict reveals to us as fully current. It is not an easy task, but a necessary one.

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**We wish you all a happy New Year 2024!**

