

The Torch of Renewal

The snare has been broken , and we have escaped (Psalm 124.7)

The winds are not favourable for a renewed Church. For 45 years we have been talking about her, hoped for her renewal, and again and again comforted ourselves: the change will come with the next pope, the next bishop, a rejuvenated curia in Rome, Utrecht or wherever else. When I arrived in The Netherlands, in 1980, a colleague spoke to me about a 'winter' that had set in in the Church of this country. Shortly ago and thirty years later the same word was used by a colleague in the United States, and he did not refer to the Church in The Netherlands or his own country, but to the church universal. The present pope's term of office started with a programmatic cry of distress: 'the dictatorship of relativism'. Which meant he was to continue the Roman line. Already for 150 years Rome has been haunted by the fear that renewal can only end in chaos. It is this fear that at the Second Vatican resulted in many conflicts and bad compromises in the final documents. These conflicts and compromises multiplied in the following years, as various countries formulated what they hoped for. The Episcopal nominations in the seventies and eighties finally introduced a decisive return in all countries. 'Back to the old doctrine' was the wake-up call, which in fact meant: 'back to the old order and the old authoritarian relationships', with a few deciding again what was good or bad for the many.

In The Netherlands the development was more dramatic and catastrophic, but also more honest than in for example Germany. Still, The Netherlands maintained a tacit leading position, for till this day the German Catholics can learn from their Dutch fellow faithful what is in store for them, with a ten years' delay. Meanwhile the German Catholics are quickly catching up, for the new parish structures that must cover up the dramatic shortage of priests are leading to a breakdown of the customary pastoral service, and this infuriates even German Catholics. Pope Benedict, whom the people in Germany were so proud of, provokes more despair than enthusiasm, and his governance usually leads to more crises rather than to controlling them. The sexual abuse affairs have fully ruined the credibility of the bishops, because they are unable to react adequately. As a consequence there is, also in Germany, an increasing call for protests and transgression of the laws, for resistance and planned disobedience. Unfortunately, in Germany, too, the critical intelligentsia have long emigrated from the Church, which does not really contribute to vociferous and organised criticism.

What's more, the optimists of the sixties have underestimated the power of the secularisation processes. Modern or conservative, more than half of the membership of the Catholic Church has departed. Which means that the number of the renewers was doubly decimated. Have we, children of the Council, reacted as we should? I am not sure. We did not dare really to resist, and left the tough critics out in the rain, even when their names were Edward Schillebeeckx or Hans Küng. Small items of criticism we celebrated as heroic deeds, but married priests were thrown out, not to speak of the ordination of women. The insatiable wish for harmony among Catholic Christians forced us to accept half-hearted solutions, to cherish nostalgia and wallow in endless self-pity. We might have joined the Old Catholics of the Union of Utrecht, set up our own communities, force a few bishops to retire, or require an archconservative pope to step down because of a schism 'caused by the top'. What should or could we have done? I have no answer, and in any case this question was raised too late.

But I do know something else, and that could be the message of this meeting today. Behind this moaning about defeats a quite different story is hiding. It is the story of a renewed and often hidden Church that is not only found in Czechoslovakian Bratislava, Brno or Prague, but also in the agglomeration of western Holland, in Roermond and Leeuwarden. For a long time already this Church has reformulated the structural questions in terms of equal rights and democracy in the church, remodelled schisms into the

relationships of family members, actively established friendship with other religions, and accepted secular - although it is also a society of new gods. It is the story of a church that gradually sheds off the cocoon of the Middle Ages, leaves it behind without much ado, and enters the new situation. Strictly seen this road does not betray catholic identity, but it is a return to its essence. We only reject restrictions that have long lost their legitimacy. It is not with us, but with the lords of the old wineskins that the burden of proof lies.

1. WE CAN CELEBRATE NEW LITURGIES

You know the actual situation better than I do: the dissatisfaction of those who are not offered Sunday Eucharists in the parish churches any more, and the impatience of others who have already enlarged the ramifications of Catholic worship. Speaking of new liturgies I mean celebrations in the most variegated forms as these have developed in the past decades. There are celebrations on various occasions and for different groups, Catholic or ecumenical, interreligious or secularised. They offer reflections and discussions, meditation and dance, meetings of women and men, gays and lesbians, in their own groups. Their quality is no longer measured by traditional faith formulas, but by the way in which they relate to the big questions about being humans, about human hopes and human limitations. We do all this without a bad conscience, for we have learnt from our own origins and the first era of Christianity. To be sure, Christian worship has always centered around the memory of Jesus' life and death. The aim has always been to share life in his name. But creation and the world of fellow humans were always part of it. Apparently the sacrifice theory played no role in the young church, and people were open to the world. The *Didache* tells us: "Just as this wheat was spread over the mountains and collected to become one bread, just so your Church must be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom". And no less a person than gospel writer John replaces the classical, and for the later tradition so important story of the institution of the Eucharist by the washing of the feet: "He poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet"(John 13.5) adding: "no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him"(John 13.16). So servanthood offered to the entire world is the issue, and the humility of the 'delegates' is an essential element in it. In any case, when the times are changing freedom and creative imagination are required. Rome's sudden control and correction regarding each and every liturgical text in the entire world has little relationship with the Christian spirit of freedom. So why this needless fuss?

Dear friends, we *can* celebrate new liturgies. Of course, the Eucharist with its remembrance of death and resurrection, is part of it, but in recent decades we learnt to take a fresh look at this, too. Imperceptibly and already for a long period we have even taken our distance from many elements of the liturgical movement, introduced in The Netherlands by Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960) and others. It promoted a strictly regulated and often elaborated and monastic liturgy, canonised a medieval model of order, and most of all emphasised the role of a minister - be he priest or bishop - rising high above the congregation. The ideal of 'actual participation' was still mainly seen as 'attending', and the priest was seen as the vicar of Jesus Christ himself, acting in his name. As late as the thirties of the twentieth century Ildefons Herwegen, abbot of Maria Laach, spoke about a 'führer concept'.

What a contrast, in mood and hopes, is there with the booklet *Church and Ministry* (Kerk en Ambt) that was published in September 2007 and with its sober picture of the situation swept all triumphalism from the table. The distress of many communities is a crying shame, and the theological views have changed. It is not a magical transubstantiation that is celebrated, but a sharing of life; there is no change of foodstuffs but the issue is the conversion of our lives in the name of Jesus; we do not perform a complicated sacrificial rite but we celebrate God's gifts of life and the dedication of our lives.

The Dominican policy statement discusses the emergency case in which the Eucharist is celebrated without a minister who was ordained by a bishop. At the same time this is an unavoidable and unproblematical reaction to the failures of church leadership. Good reasons are given for this, but at the same time it corrects age-old deformations. For, to use an image, the cradle of the Eucharist stands in the

midst of the congregation, who is responsible for it, not a group of ordained ministers. Such celebrations primarily live from the Spirit that was poured out over the community, not from the powers of a minister who is isolated, magically prepared and imported from elsewhere. According to St. Paul the community is the body of Christ, not the consecrated wafer. In the second millennium the community was called the 'mystical' body, which meant a degradation. So whenever a community gathers in the name of Christ, Jesus *is* in their midst. He realises himself in their being together; he offers himself in their commemoration, their discipleship and hopes. So whoever, assigned by the community of the baptised, makes the congregation capable of acting and speaks on their behalf, has a place in their midst, in the name of Christ, and irrespective of sex, civil status or other qualifications.

So we *can* have our celebrations and we should, come to think of it, be grateful for the present shortage of priests caused by the church's leadership. For this invites us to look again at this fundamental and elementary truth. This truth, and the praxis of this re-interpreted service to the community, has finished with an old taboo. For a long period such a taboo may have been of vital importance, but in times of cultural upheaval breaking taboos is unavoidable, because it forces us to develop elementary insights. Challenging this taboo provides new life for a community. I suggest that priestless parishes, and parishes that have realised this truth, get into touch with each other and exchange ideas about how to give form to Eucharistic celebrations. A Eucharist need not be the massive and solemn ritual that was developed in late antique times, when bishops celebrated in large and crowded cathedrals and imperial church-lords were in power. I do not condemn them, and I respect the bishops' concern for the unity of the churches. But the Eucharist can be celebrated in any place where Christians come together and - as the *Didache* puts it - the shattered wheat becomes one bread. Such a coming together, such a local community is the soil celebrations grow from. This is what Vatican II means by local church, not an entire diocese.

2. WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE SACRED

The church leaders and many of their supporters are vexed by the fear that our culture has lost the sacred. The present bishop of Rome has developed this into an outspoken crisis hermeneutics. Which is understandable since Rome still locates the sacred in churches and sacral vestments, in old symbols and rites, and in people who pretend to act 'in Christ's name'. I can understand this fear all too well, for in some way or other it has affected all of us. We have all suffered as this holy atmosphere, this sanctified brotherhood and this respect for our sacred acts gradually evaporated. But we also had forty years to reflect on this.

We can relive our long and complicated history of the sacred. The Christians were the people who took the nimbus from the heads of the old deities and put it on their ministers, buildings and actions - not always consistently, for they still attributed a huge amount of divine holiness to those in power, the emperors and then the kings. This is not our theme for today, nor will we work out the second, late medieval wave of desacralisation. Numerous customs and rituals (we usually call them superstition) were condemned by the church, just like the so-called witches who were cast out, humiliated and burnt in waves of public hysteria. We should not forget these victims when we talk of the age of rational Enlightenment. The Christian churches increasingly restricted the sacred, limiting it to persons, spaces and times selected by themselves. This heteronomous definition of the sacred affected the sensibility for the mystery of reality more and more. Slovenly distinctions were made between holy and impious, consecrated and profane, legitimised by God or dubbed purely secular, corporeal or destined to perish. For this period, with the Baroque as its peak, the Catholic church can claim a triumphant history. It is still there, in the big papal shows with their hundreds of thousands, if not even millions of enthusiastic fans. Only as late as the twelfth century the leaders of the Christian community were seen as the exclusive guardians of the mysteries and forbidden any vital contacts with women. Finally, at the Council of Trent (1545-1563), they appointed themselves as the only legitimate representatives of the sacred and as sacral people, even ontologically distinguished from the average Christian (23th session, 1563). Almost cynically the Code of

Canon Law (1917 & 1983) still grants the laity the right “to be assisted by their pastors from the spiritual riches of the Church, especially by the word of God and the sacraments”.

Let us end here these retrospections. In any case I am convinced that the processes of secularisation in our culture should mainly be interpreted as a reaction to this deprivation. The world, inclusive of the laity, was declared fundamentally unholy, and thus it was understood by world and laity. The organisation of the Catholic church was bankrupted by its clericalised monopoly of holiness. For a long time the sacred seemed to have disappeared, dissolved into thin air. So the saviours of the old order are confronted with a permanent eclipse. In no century this world was so massively reviled, never has there been so much fear that people could adapt to it and lose their Christian identity. From the eighties of the past century Rome has developed a specialism in organising religious happenings, but the taste for the sacred has long been gone. No trace of Taizé, of an Indian ashram or a Baptist celebration in New York’s Harlem can be observed. The same holds good for the elaborate services in German cathedrals. There, too, the atmosphere is missing that brings us into touch with the mystery. Many of us, let us be honest, are profoundly disillusioned about this development. Many of us feel nostalgia for the old time religion.

This change of experience is one of the reasons why young people are not found in either the traditional communities or the reforming ones. Unprejudiced, they experience the mystery of the world all over the world, only not in the church. They look for it, and experience it, in art, especially in music and dance, in unexpected encounters, in love and sex, in the frenzy of what happens in their cities, in unexpected silence or in a word that restores their dignity. The sacred is everywhere. One only needs to find it.

On this point, too, I think we are not far from the initial Christian position. In contrast to the highly developed ritualism of everyday Jewish life, and in even stronger contrast to the Gnostic and mystery religions of the Hellenistic world, Jesus’ message gave an extraordinarily profane impulse. The man who felt God had left him and who died at the cross as a cursed criminal, did certainly not live according to the norms of regulated piety; he kept aloof of this purposely.

The ministries in the young church, including the ministries of leadership, were clearly not defined in religious, but in profane terms. There were the ‘ancients’ of the Jewish synagogue system, the ‘deacons’ with their functionally formulated tasks; then the *episkopoi*, just simple overseers as they were called in commerce and army. I do not say these functionaries had no connection with the sacred. At their accession to office there were prayers and their tasks were clear. But their contacts with the sacred did not flow forth from their persons, and were not established by a special mission from above: their source was that they worked within the community and performed what was needed.

From here we should make a new start. It is not our task to tell where the sacred manifests itself, but the sacred presents itself in incalculable ways. That is why the ears and the eyes must be kept open. This also includes contacts with other religions, with muslims, reacting to the challenges of Buddhism and meditation, penetrating into one’s deepest self, and friendship with a world that offers countless wonders. Long ago Harry Kuitert wrote: no religion or sacrament can function on Sundays if they are not fed by the weekday experiences. So we should not expect too much of our religious meetings; they do not offer the great revelations.

At the same time it must be made clear at last: whoever thinks he or she acts in Christ’s place misses the target as long as this pretension is not supported by a Christian community, by a body of Christ, if it does not integrate the experiences of the profane and omnipresent sacredness or does not make discipleship viable. This means: all of us can experience the sacred: for this we need no father or pastor, no cleric or shepherd. We need not be, therefore, priests or lay pastors, deacons or prayer leaders. A sacred event does not depend on a priest, but the sacred event and the communion of the congregation gives leaders, female or male, their worth. Whoever or whatever prevents a community that is reconciled in itself, to celebrate on its own responsibility?

3. WE CAN BE SISTERS AND BROTHERS

In The Netherlands and in other western countries the decline of the Catholic Church started with conflicts about organisation and structures of authority. In 1970 Rome rediscovered the privilege of papal infallibility. This was quickly followed by debates about ministry and celibacy. And from 1980 onwards the priestly ordination of women is discussed. Their background was formed by questions of doctrine, especially regarding christology and sacraments, but here, too, the views on church and society made themselves felt; we can think of the disciplining of liberation theology. Suspending numerous priests - and not only because of celibacy - the Church lost her best people, and many of them have never overcome this humiliation. In Germany, as in The Netherlands, a class of disappointed but highly committed Catholics came into being, and despite their disappointment they have remained passionate fans of this church. Many highly qualified victims of the Roman regime I also met at the Radboud University and elsewhere. The churches in our countries have not managed to completely overcome this bleeding. But the dramatic shortage of priests, the implosion of the classical pastorate and the breakdown of the parishes - internally or from the outside - are not sufficient to make the bishops start thinking.

But this is again only one element of history. In recent years the other element has led to a learning process that was not easy but proved beneficial. It had again to do with our Catholic socialisation in beautiful rites and prayers, in a liturgical cosmos that enthralled us. I remember the words of a Dutch bishop of the council generation who kept a correct course till he became an emeritus. In a situation of deep humiliation by Rome he was asked why he did not throw down the gauntlet. His answer: "My generation is concerned about a sincere belief and a humane society, but we remain wholeheartedly connected with this Church. Why? From our infancy we have always experienced liturgy as a great feast, as a convincing orientation, as a world full of beauty". I know many former priests who never forgot these experiences. The liturgical movement had contributed to it, for it forged a vital link between the liturgical changes and the hope for more humaneness, closer bonds with the people, and more internal power.

For many this bond was the first step towards a breach, experienced as painful by the older generation, and more as a matter of fact by the younger ones. The problem was the very authoritative and sacramentalistic element in this liturgy. Authoritative: because it made all essential performances dependent on the ordination by a bishop who till this day enters the scene with a costly crosier, a Phrygian cap and Byzantine court colours. Such features may have suited a feudal society, but today they are only unnatural and other-worldly. And in this line they may also assume supernatural connotations. After the moment when almost every theological underpinning for this pontifical self-awareness had collapsed, there was not only a problem for the hierarchy and its deeply conservative followers; many others were also profoundly marked by it.

I also remember the annual congress, in Prague, of a progressive theological periodical. A liturgy was planned, but unexpectedly this clashed with the plans of a local community. As we were waiting in puzzlement there was a sudden call to all priests to come to the altar. Without any hesitation our ordained and critical friends obeyed and we felt how suddenly our community was split: there were the clerics, close to what was going to happen, and here were the 'lay people', men and of course all the women, who were allowed to receive the gifts of salvation from the clergy's hands. Many Catholics have not only remained harmony-minded, but also fixated by authority.

It means that mourning processes are still necessary. We must and we can do away with this legacy in good conscience. At last we must and we can draw the consequences of insights we have been familiar with for a long time. We had better stop talking about a mystical body. Often, and really tastelessly, body was interpreted as corporation, which of course needed a head. Our main guideline is offered by St. John: "The anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you" (I John 2.27). The Second Vatican Council has made it unequivocally clear that the People of God in its entirety precedes any form of internal structuring. Even the 1983 Code of Canon Law declares that through baptism all believers "participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ"(c.204). This document painstakingly avoids drawing further consequences, but in an epoch in

which the entire clerical system is collapsing it is time to ask if the emperor really wears any clothes. When today bishops and priests refer to their ministerial powers, can they please also carry the burden of proof. About St. Ambrose there is a story that, while he had not yet been baptised, the call of a child in the congregation made him a bishop. From the moment the Roman system of law collapsed, in the time of the Big Migration, the orderly collaboration of the local communities when a bishop was to be appointed was torn down, and till this day nothing was done to reintroduce these democratic structures. Only the older orders, for instance the Benedictines and Dominicans, stuck to them. But these age-old structures imply that people from any class, including women, married people and homosexuals, can be charged with the tasks of leading the congregation, including the presidency over the Eucharist and teaching the faith. We could be sisters and brothers.

Accordingly it is our right and our duty, as nexts of kin, without internal inhibitions and under the said conditions, to celebrate the memory of Jesus' death and resurrection, our Christian faith and our congregation, as this is in fact done in many places. It is not us, bent under debatable patriarchal restrictions, who tear apart the net of apostolic community; the hierarchs have already long torn it, against their better judgements. A few weeks ago the German bishop thought fit to take measures against a priest who, against the background of the abuse cases, criticised celibacy. Then a prominent journalist gave up his honorary ecclesiastical functions, saying "the reservoir of trust is definitely empty". This holds good for all of us, 45 years after Vatican II and looking at the most recent developments. By now we have the right and the duty to act ourselves.

We are living in a secularised epoch, in which only the authentic word and the credible deed apply. In this situation the simple but decisive question is: Can we tolerate that the Christian message is deformed by authoritarian abuse and manipulated in the interests of an institution? The issue is not, let us be clear about this, that we must just become credible again, that would be too simplistic. The central argument is: as Christians we unreservedly promote the imitation of Christ, who risked his life for the well-being of people, particularly the deprived. The credibility regained in this way would only be 'collateral gain'.

4. WE MUST TAKE THE RISK

What I am telling you, dear friends, is not new, but it is getting actual meaningfulness. In the recent months the crisis in the Catholic church of the countries of the West-European world has reached unprecedented rock bottom. Still, neither Rome nor the bishops even dream of renewing structures and spirituality. Vatican II is still ignored. This is not only a repudiation of internal renewal, but also a scandal because it betrays the elementary impulses of the Christian message. In the past decades we witnessed the actual decay of ecclesiastical structures, we were confronted with triumphalism, sexism and argumentativeness. If we start again today, this includes a radicalism that is even greater than when we started reforming nearly 45 years ago.

All over the world the end of established and mass churches has come. As a consequence we must reconstruct the shape of the church from at least the third century onwards. This does not make all later developments and achievements meaningless. But especially those elements which are usually labelled 'typically Catholic' and for which Rome claims a 'Catholic continuity', have lost their automatic authority and ask for revision. Among them are the priesthood in its present form, the universal monopoly claim of the Christian faith, the clerical structures of ministry which bereaves the congregations of all powers and of all merits, the monopoly of a papacy that has widely distanced itself from the biblical Petrine ministry. The massive titles of Christ's vicar, of visible head of the body, of infallible shepherd and teacher, and all this covered with a cloud of sacrality: all of these profoundly deviate from the Christian message. Apart from God we call nobody any more a father or mother. That sexist world view we want to discard, and the rights of the community, perished when the late-Roman empire went down, are the cradle and the conditions for any priestly, prophetic and pastoral competences.

I am quite convinced: for the sake of Christ we must make a start, otherwise the torch will not burn any longer in the Catholic church. That is a liberating, but also risky perspective. We do not want a schism, but will not suffer ourselves to be pushed outside the Catholic church as was done in the past years. We cannot simply set up new communities, but in fact they did grow up already in many places, and more of these may come. It is hardly possible to establish a new succession through the imposition of hands, but we also know that in case of necessity we can do without it. No one has a master plan for the establishment of a renewed church, but we can build further on much groundwork that has already been done. We have, for example, at least three women bishops in our continent, and we know the churches of the Union of Utrecht that are very, very close to us.

The dissolution of ecclesiastical structures, which is taking place anyway, makes things considerably easier for us. When people learn to relativise the dogmatic and largely Hellenistic teaching frameworks of the past, wide horizons are opened to them. It becomes possible to have intensive meetings with non-Catholics, non-Christians and non-religious people. Jesus of Nazareth, whom we confess as the messiah, did not found centres for doctrine or morals, but set up a practice of life that solidarises with those that ask questions, look for help, suffer and are oppressed.

So what do we have to do?

1.

Every renewal starts with a new *self-awareness*. We can approach priests and bishops with great self-confidence. For we know better than before: with them lies the burden of proof as regards their claims and deeds vis-a-vis the congregations and Christian groups. We have good Christian arguments for saying that their authority is very questionable and shaky as long as they were neither sent nor legitimised by the Christian communities. They must not only anticipate practical resistance, but they are also in for tough theological protests. The challenge is to unmask authoritarian ideologies as infected by party interests and power, as lacking in solidarity.

2

Renewal is based on correct insights concerning the competencies and obligations of a community of the baptised. Of course these cannot be listed abstractly, there is always a specific context. The global players for 1.3 billion people will always need a strong framework of ministry and governance. Neither the petrine office for the church universal nor the leading service of dioceses must be done away with. But wherever they fail the congregations must take over. We do not want the debates about structural problems to degenerate into a pure struggle for power, even when power interests may play a role. But we must at last establish again a theology-founded exchange, and question the regulations of the late antique, medieval and more modern national and established churches. Traditions, too, are constructed and deployed as ideologies.

3.

Christian renewal, which is also Catholic renewal, grows from the *public congregation* of people of the same mind. A new self-consciousness frees us from the pressures to conceal and individualise issues, a practice that may be dangerous. We must look for new forms of strategically calculated openness. More is possible today than twenty years ago, among other things with the help of modern communication media. Our coming together must not only serve mutual strengthening but also mutual criticism and correction. Renewal asks for creativity, but it must be protected against wishful thinking, new arrogance and - as Luther called it- "the threat of the zealots".

4.

And renewal also lives on the refusal to let ourselves be devoured by *chaos*. Not everything new is good. For the continuity of a Christian church I think the following elements are indispensable. We build upon:

- *the experience of the sacred*. We cannot do without a liturgy that is regulated and orientated towards God's mystery;

- *the presence of the Gospel*. We cannot live without well-cared-for preaching, based again on our holy books;

- *the visible praxis of sharing*. Indispensable, accordingly, is a way of life that includes a fundamentally open solidarity and the willingness to share our own lives with others; a structure that is open internally but shows stability to the outside. So we need to develop the skills for collective acting.

This last factor is sensitive, because it expressly opposes the official monopoly claims of the hierarchy. The booklet *Church and Ministry* written by the Dominicans offers a clever solution. We do not want to disrupt the official ministerial structures, although forty-five years after the Council, they are ruining themselves. But, legitimised by the authority of the congregation, we replace them in those situations where baptised men and women are denied the right to celebrate the Eucharist and gather on self-chosen occasions. We do not renounce our right to celebrate as long as there are competent baptised people. Formally we do not attack the Episcopal ministry. But we know: the apostolicity of the church is not ultimately guaranteed by the chain of the laying up of hands, for these chains are fundamentally fragile. Apostolicity is first of all guaranteed by the congregations forming a unity and remaining faithful to the faith of the apostles - which is not identical with the dogmatised formulas of doctrine.

5.

Imperative are regular contacts and cooperation with non-catholic churches. Not even the Catholic church is entitled to closing its boundaries and to say other denominations are not churches. We must see each other as members of one family. Kinship does not exclude differences, but it lives on a deeply felt unity. The more the official church pushes us towards the edge of heresy or schism, the more we need anchoring through contacts with other churches. In doing so we anticipate on a situation that will arise anyway, sooner or later.

6.

My final remark concerns the most sensitive and most worrying item in this renewal project. On the one hand the reactionary forces have gained enormous weight. We cannot simply say that young theologians and priests are our allies; sometimes the opposite seems to be the case. On the other side the reform-minded groups lack a progeny of people who think critically and independently. On certain occasions we still seem to bear strong; the crowded church at Edward Schillebeeckx's funeral showed this. But how many people will still come to similar occasions ten or twenty years onwards? Many of them now address their religious questions in the context of other religions. At most one of their legs, if any, stands on church grounds. To a certain extent they may enrich the Christian traditions; Christianity need not feel threatened by any other religion. But it would be disastrous if the Christian sources would just dry up. In my view there is only one way to escape from this dilemma. That way is the new groups which we, the nostalgic children of the Council, should finally retire from. The young amongst us must develop their ideas themselves, choose their ways of discussion, and work out their own rituals for remembering Jesus. If you trust the message of Jesus this shouldn't cause problems.

Finally

So let us carry further the torch. Its name is not 'church', but 'remembering and following Jesus'. Not some Roman institution, but Jesus is the Light of the Nations. I am quite sure that this torch is still alight. Now bearing torches was not a romantic pursuit originally. Torches must fight the night, and only in contrast to darkness they have illuminating power, only in a storm they show their full glare, depending on the weather they burn what has become arid. Sometimes we shall get dirty hands, for there is never a torch without soot. This, too, we should keep in mind when we call Jesus the Light of the World. This title is very promising and we gladly build on it. But its realisation requires daily dedication, and the amount of effort it requires cannot be foretold, however great our hope.

THESES attached to the paper read by Hermann Haring, Utrecht 16 Oct 2010

Thesis 1: A renewed church

Rome is obsessed by the fear of relativism and chaos, hence the repeated call to stick to the old Roman continuity. Yet, since Vatican II the 'hidden' church has gone through a process of profound renewal. The cocoon of the Middle Ages was shed off and real continuity is rediscovered.

Thesis 2: New forms of liturgy

In recent decades much creativity and imaginative power was invested in developing new liturgical forms. Their quality is measured by the way they deal with the central questions about human existence. They do not *a priori* rule out traditional forms but add to them, thus criticising a triumphalist and self-centred sacramentalism.

Thesis 3: The community of the baptised celebrates

The basic characteristic of churches and christian communities is that they are groups of baptised people who have received the Holy Spirit. This fact should be the starting point for church leadership and structures of ministry. Authoritarian and sacramentalistic structures have no christian origins. The present shortage of priests can help to rediscover this truth.

Thesis 4: The sacred as an ecclesiastical monopoly

In the course of time the Catholic church has coupled the sacred with political power and visible symbols, reduced it to a private monopoly, and in doing so supported processes of secularisation. The sacred must again be looked for in everyday life, and can be experienced there.

Thesis 5: Renewal or nostalgia?

"The anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you" (I John, 2.27). This democratic insight contradicts the feelings of nostalgia also found in church critics, who should finally round off their mourning phase.

Thesis 6: Do realise the risks

The radical reform of the (Catholic) church entails risks. That is why resoluteness, prudence, intensive communication and exchanges with other countries must go together. Leaving the church or resignation would, however, be a wrong course. Leavers lose any influence, and resignation means the loss of all life. After all, Noah built his ark *before* the Flood came.

Thesis 7: So what to do?

1. Be self-assertive (the burden of proof lies with Rome and the bishops).
2. Develop concrete and effective ideas.
3. Set up strategically planned publicity.
4. Keep guard over the basic rules for the church's activities (experiencing the sacred, presenting the Gospel, living in solidarity, developing competences).
5. Exchange with non-catholic churches.
6. Find young people.

Thesis 8: There is no time left

The actual crisis asks for acting *now*. For Noah built his ark *before* the Flood came.

Hermann Haering,
GOP Congress in Utrecht, 16 October 2010