

THE ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS AND NEW COMMUNITIES AS INSTRUMENTS OF FORMATION AND EVANGELIZATION

Abstract

Being aware of the crisis of the Church's pastoral activity in the field of education, both in the European and the Croatian context, the author of the article indicates to new and unused opportunities that are yet to be identified, prudently evaluated and integrated into regular pastoral program of the local Church. For several decades, the Church has been affected by a phenomenon i.e. the emergence and rapid spread of numerous ecclesial movements and new communities that increasingly determine its mission in the modern world. The Holy Spirit gifts the people of God with the impressive richness and diversity of charisms through these movements and communities as well as through their extraordinary missionary zeal. Undoubtedly, the author emphasizes that despite their deficiencies, they represent a significant potential for the mission of the universal Church, and especially for its mission in the European de-Christianized context. The second part of the article deals with arguments that support the author's assumptions about the movements and new communities as powerful centers for Christian formation where the bearers of a new evangelization were born and raised.

Key words: ecclesial movements, new communities, integrated pastoral care, new evangelization.

Introduction

John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have repeatedly called the whole Church for the urgency of the new evangelization. Although this call refers to the Church worldwide, it primarily refers to the Western Church that requires the new evangelization the most. In order to respond to this call adequately, the theological and pastoral analysis of the existing pastoral trends is required. Moreover, if we want to transmit our faith to future generations adequately and effectively, in addition to our received knowledge of faith, a good knowledge of the cultural matrix/patterns of our time is needed. Such knowledge as well as communication codes/models of a particular environment enable us to transmit the truths of the

Catholic faith in an adequate way. In other words, the above prior knowledge will be a “key vehicle” i.e. the prerequisite competence not only for Christian proclamation of the Good News, but also culturally appropriate way to communicate with other people. The first part of the article deals with the identification of the major challenges the Church faces today in carrying out its mission, at both the European and national levels. The analysis referring to the national level is supported by the latest research results about religious practice in Croatia. Finally, the third part of the article highlights some specific features of the movements and new communities which truly determine them as the effective instruments/ bearers of the new evangelization.

1. The Social and Cultural Context (in Europe)

Western civilization we live in has increasingly become more and more ambivalent, complex, and even confusing. It is marked by phenomena such as: the dictatorship of relativism, an expression often used by Pope Benedict XVI, referring to repudiation of absolute truths and immutable values which God instilled into human nature¹, and the prevailing culture in a liquid modern world as called by Zygmunt Bauman², one of the leading sociologists of our time. Having no solid foundations, such culture rejects universal truths replacing them with a multitude of different opinions and being unable to reach consensus on the values that form both an individual and society as a whole.³ It is a secularized⁴ culture

¹ Cf. Benedetto XVI, *Luce del mondo. Il papa, la Chiesa e i segni dei tempi*. Una conversazione con Peter Seewald, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2010, 60.

² Cf. Z. Bauman, *Modernità liquida*, Lateranza, Roma-Bari, 2008; Z. Bauman, *Vita liquida*, Lateranza, Roma-Bari, 2009; Z. Bauman, *Dentro la globalizzazione. Le conseguenze sulle persone*, Lateranza, Roma-Bari, 2012.

³ Pontificio consiglio Pro Laicis, *Christifideles laici. Bilancio e prospettive*, S. Rylko (ed.), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010, 11; B. Mondin, *Nuova evangelizzazione dei paesi d'antica cristianità*, in: Cristo, Chiesa, Missione, Urbaniana University Press, 1992, p. 199-200.

⁴ In order to distinguish the secularization from secularism we refer to the interpretations of two eminent Catholic theologians: Walter Kasper and Rina Fisichella. According to Kasper secularization originally meant the transfer of an object from the sacred to the profane domain or from Church property to secular property. From there, today's understanding of secularization gradually developed. In a broad sense, it denotes the process by which a good (object, institution, region or society) explicitly loses spiritual characteristics and takes the mundane (secular) ones. In this sense secularization shows not hostility to religion, but puts (restricts) it to the private sphere. Cf. W. Kasper, *Il Vangelo di Gesù Cristo*, TBC, Queriniana, Brescia, 2012, (orig.: W. Kasper, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Herder Verlag, Freiburg, 2008), p. 253-254. Unlike secularization, according to Fisichella, secularism denotes the shift away from the Christian faith that is supposed to be voiceless (deprived of right) when it refers both to private or public life. According to its principle, one's own existence is built up, overpassing religious horizon, which is reduced to the private sphere and have no influence on human relations. Secularism

permeated by the mentality of individualism⁵, hedonism, consumerism, nihilism⁶ and the culture of interpersonal rejection (exclusion).⁷ Such culture is affected by a deep anthropological crisis that undermines the natural foundations of human beings, men and women (gender ideology) as well as the basic institutions of society: marriage and family.⁸ Final-

has a well-defined position even in the private sphere: it is taken into account only partially when it is a matter of ethical judgment or behaviour. Cf. R. Fisichella, *La Nuova Evangelizzazione, Una sfida per uscire dall'indifferenza*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 29.

⁵ In the context of individualism, we can only mention some of its consequences for society that Pope Francis brings in his programmatic document *Evangelii gaudium*: "We should recognize how in a culture where each person wants to be bearer of his or her own subjective truth, it becomes difficult for citizens to devise a common plan which transcends individual gain and personal ambitions. In the prevailing culture, priority is given to the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional. What is real gives way to appearances. In many countries globalization has meant a hastened deterioration of their own cultural roots and the invasion of ways of thinking and acting proper to other cultures which are economically advanced but ethically debilitated." Papa Franjo, Apostolska pobudnica *Evangelii gaudium – Radost evanđelja*, KS, Zagreb, 2014, 61-62 (hereinafter: EG).

⁶ Giovanni Reale, an Italian philosopher, believes that the metaphysical nihilism is the main feature of the Western world. Nietzsche anticipated nihilism that has spread in today's culture. It manifests in shadows, hiding under masks. Reale counted seven such masks that conceal the metaphysical nihilism. The first mask is materialism. Above the world of sensory there is more important, more harmonious and more durable world. The world discovered by Plato. Hence, it is necessary to rise above the material in order to discover the world we live in. The second mask is exclusively trust in science; scientism. The third is ideologization; modern man's belief that truth and moral are subordinated to power. According to Reale, the fourth mask of the Western nihilism refers to forgotten happiness. While the Greeks sought for the happiness knowing that it can be found in a true measure and harmony with everything, the Western man seeks it in prosperity. Instead of happiness and harmony with everything he is looking for things. The fifth mask is infinite progress, i.e. the continual growth of new wants and needs, and all for the cause of having new things and thus increasing production, consumption and profit. Violence is the sixth mask. Unidimensionality of man is the last, the seventh mask. The man broke the relationship with the absolute, declared himself the center of all and soon started to realize more clearly that after the annihilation of faith in God and the destruction of the values, he himself became a victim of his devastating nihilism. Cf. A. Vučković, *Imena i Riječ*, Svjetlo riječi, Sarajevo-Zagreb, 2009, p. 215-217.

⁷ Unfortunately, modern, fluid, consumerist and individualistic society, has become more a place for production of human beings who gradually become superfluous. Moreover, the consequence of our way of life and organization of society resulted in the existence of zombies: people in the periphery of society belonging to no one (socially excluded) and striving for their survival. Pope Francis has repeatedly spoken about their needs condemning the culture of selfishness, rejection and social exclusion. Cf. EG 53, 191; Francesco, *Discorso del santo padre Francesco ai partecipanti all'incontro mondiale dei movimenti popolari del martedì 28 ottobre 2014*, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2014/october/documents/papafrancesco_20141028_incontro-mondiale-movimenti-popolari.html (20 December 2016). Cf. Z. Bauman, *Vite di scarto*, Lateranza, Roma-Bari, 2014.

⁸ R. Gerardi, Introduzione. Insegnare la prassi?, in: *Insegnare la prassi cristiana. Percorsi di teologia morale, spirituale, pastorale*, R. Girardi (ed.), Lateran University Press, Roma, 2011, p. 14-15.

ly, we live in a culture where” ... the man has delegated the technique to produce any-thing being unaware of a grave danger threatening him. The technique, in fact, has gradually taken control not only over nature, but over the man reducing him to an object of his own experiments and ignoring his interests.”⁹

Besides, viewed through the prism of pastoral theology, one of the basic characteristics of the modern Western man is his religious indifference and closure in the so-called weak thought.¹⁰

At the beginning of the new millennium, Europe finds itself in a rather paradoxical situation. On the one hand, its cultural identity was certainly formed under significant impact of Christianity, but on the other hand, initial healthy emancipation from controlling religion, gradually turned into a progressive exclusion of religion from social life and its reducing to the private sphere.¹¹ Unfortunately, an increasingly waning influence of religion in shaping the social fabric and the irrelevance of Christian act in private life are evident in our context. Thus, the real challenge for the Church’s mission in Europe is to bring the Gospel back into everyday social life and particularly into new forms of the socio-cultural Areopagus. It implies re-launching the process of inculturation that brings the Gospel into the depth of people’s lives as well as of society. This means that the Church, in carrying out its mission, should be more open and more sensitive to people and their needs. Fulfilling this condition, it would recognize their deep existential thirst for meaning, harmony, peace ... and would offer the Gospel, the Word of God in response to their search.¹²

2. Faith Formation in Croatia

Concerning religious practice, the situation in Europe is very complex and difficult to analyze precisely. It is apparently marked by epochal changes, technological and any other progresses that are, as already

⁹ The original text in the Italian language “... l’uomo ha delegato la tecnica a produrgli ogni cosa da non riuscire più ad accorgersi del grave pericolo in cui è caduto. La tecnica, infatti, è giunta ad assumere il ruolo di dominazione non solo della natura, ma dell’uomo stesso, riducendolo a un oggetto della sua sperimentazione, senza più curarsi delle sue ragioni.” R. Fisichella, *Identità dissolta. Il cristianesimo lingua madre dell’Europa*, Mondadori, Milano, 2009, p. 29.

¹⁰ Sergio Lanza, a famous Italian pastoral theologian, writing about this phenomenon, i. e. the weak (non-argumentative) thought, points out that it is a matter of a soft but latently harmful version of those nihilistic trends that, unprotected by shouting of crazy persons and the false prophets of the death of God, represent an important feature of contemporary culture. Cf. S. Lanza, *Convertire Giona. Pastorale come progetto*, Edizioni OCD, Roma Morena, 2008, p. 164.

¹¹ A book of reference: R. Koch and C. Smith: *Samoubojstvo Zapada (Suicide of the West)*, Naklada Ljevak, Zagreb, 2007.

¹² Cf. M. Menin, *La missione oggi nell’orizzonte del mondo, delle religioni e delle culture*, Credere oggi, 5 (2010), p. 9.

stated, contradictory (dichotomous) in their nature. The number of the faithful who attend Holy Mass and receive particularly the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Matrimony is decreasing constantly. Secularization affects almost all aspects of social life that deliberately faces a growing religion and cultural diversity. Taking into account various circumstances that influenced our way of life, these trends are likely to be observed in our Croatian context. Some aspects of pluralism and relativism gradually affect even the Catholic families that have been the guardians of the Church tradition and the authentic transmitters of the faith in Croatia for centuries. They permeate the entire family primarily through modern media not inclined to Christian faith. The transmission of faith in the form of cultural socialization is no longer presupposed; since we live in the age of pluralism stressing the role of liberty and pragmatism. Parents are increasingly reluctant to raise their children responsibly, especially to raise them in faith. Moreover, it seems that they are no longer enthusiastic about sharing their witness of faith to their children in their daily lives. Unfortunately, their strong religious beliefs remain hidden, and their witness of faith is often weak. They often feel the burden of strong suspicions that lead them to active disbelief. In this way they neglect their parental and missionary responsibilities unaware of the consequences for their children who, as grownups, are free to decide on their involvement in the life of faith and in the Christian community.

In addition to this, the phenomenon of religious indifference associated with overwhelming apathy, seems to pose a particular threat to Christian faith. The problem of the youth indifference in the parish community is likely to cause spiritual apathy, frustration and fatigue. Thus, this is a particular challenge for the Church that considers a school as an institution of a great importance. Since the communist regime severely restricted religious education and practice, following the democratic changes, the Church invested considerable effort into material, spiritual and intellectual renewals. In carrying out its mission (bringing up children in the faith), the Church has truly relied on this fundamental educational institution for the last twenty years, in mediating information and faith formation. It especially refers to some passive parish communities than to the parish catechesis, which is often reduced to immediate preparation for the sacraments of Christian initiation. It seems, however, that the school becomes place where the promotion of cultural and religious pluralisms leads to the relativization of religion and weakening of the religious socialization in the family.¹³ There is a significant number of people who think that religious education should not be taught in schools and they seek more openly to exclude it from the school curriculum, even though it is the elective course.

¹³ Cf. M. Šimunović, *Pastoralna teologija u misionarskoj situaciji*, in: P. Aračić, *Novi izazovi pastoralnoj teologiji*, Biblioteka Diacovensia, Đakovo, 2005, p. 44.

Unfortunately, many parents are unaware of co-responsibility for the transmission of faith, not only regarding the proclamation of the Gospel to other people (unbaptized), but also to their own children. It seems that parents are more reluctant to familiarize their children with the basic knowledge of faith due to their irresponsibility and doubt concerning the true values for the upbringing of their children, so they let them decide on their own. These are negative effects of postmodernism, a period marked by religious pluralism which has undermined the traditional Christianity (the time known as *societas cristiana*) and led to the primacy of individual choice, even that of the children. Briefly, to be a Christian today and to raise up children in the faith are no longer logical and self-evident requirements, as they have been until recently.¹⁴

2.1. Recent Researches on Christian Education and Religious Practice?

Despite the aforementioned negative tendencies, the theological and pastoral researches on the practice of religion that have been carried out in Croatia in recent years, show that a great majority of parents seek the sacraments of initiation for their children. Thus, according to the research results, infant Baptism was sought by more than 90% of Croatian citizens; First Confession and First Communion were administered for 90% of children and the sacrament of Confirmation was received by 75% of children.¹⁵ Certainly, this high percentage of parents seeking the sacraments of Christian initiation for their children indicates to an open question of motivation that leads them to do the same.

In any case, my own pastoral experience as well as the above research results indicate to a lack of commitment and readiness of parents to witness Christian life and educate their children in faith. One of the reasons is probably parental indifference and ignorance concerning the Christian education of their children or even a fear of taking responsibility that implies spiritual and intellectual efforts. The other reason is that most

¹⁴ It is to point out that the Church considers the freedom of public involvement in social life as its legitimate right, which contributes to strengthening of Christian values in our society. According to recent research, Catholics make up 87.8% of total population. If we add to it 7.2% of citizens who belong to other Christian denominations, we reach 95% of Croatian citizens who adhere to a dominant Christian community. The research data are cited in *Modernizacija i identitet hrvatskog društva*; the research was conducted at the end of November until the beginning of December in 2010. Cf. K. Nikodem, *Religija i Crkva. Pitanja institucionalne religioznosti u suvremenom hrvatskom društvu*, Socijalna ekologija, 20 (2011) 1, p. 25.

¹⁵ Cf. P. Aračić - G. Črpić - K. Nikodem, *Postkomunistički horizonti*, Biblioteka Diacovensia, Đakovo, 2003, p. 178-179; Concerning the Sacrament of Matrimony, the results of the same research conducted at the end of the nineties in Croatia, show that 90% of citizens were married in the Church, and 95% of citizens asked for the Sacrament to the dying family member, i. e. a Catholic funeral.

parents of that generation were not fully initiated into the Christian faith, during their primary and secondary education. The research data shows that only half (49%) of participants attended catechetical sessions at the parish through their childhood and adolescence (at that time religious education was not included in the school program), whereas 21% of participants attended catechetical sessions only a few years.¹⁶ Further, 5.9% of participants were involved in religious instruction (courses) for a few months, 1.3% of them attended for a few weeks and 4.9% of participants reported irregular attendance. A relatively high percentage of participants (17.6%) stated that they have never received any religious instruction.¹⁷

Another research shows that despite a high proportion of Catholics 87.83%¹⁸ in the total population of Croatia, only 36.8% of them believe in a personal God,¹⁹ whereas 48.9% of them believe in a higher power. However, it is surprising that 38.4% of those who go to church often or every week – believe more in god spirit-like or higher power than in the personal God.²⁰ If the faith lacks a personal relationship with God it finally leads to a sterile ideology. The belief in a personal God is a key determinant of the Christian faith. It is prerequisite for the Church's existence as the People of God. It is also important for the successful mission of the Church as the sacrament of Salvation, as a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and the unity of the entire human race.²¹ As already stated, the research results are the fruits of defective education in the faith during the communist regime (1945–1990) and they clearly indicate to the urgent need for the new evangelization that is meant to permeate all segments of society.

2.2. The Need for the New Evangelization

The fundamental task of the Church at all times, especially in our time, is to direct man's gaze to the mystery of Christ. In other words, His life, words and deeds hide the response to our longing and search. Certainly, this very brief analysis highlights the need for the new evangelization as the primary service which the Church can and should render to each individual and to all people in the modern world. Indeed, the Church still has something to offer despite the greatest achievements of mankind that

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 179.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 157.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 157.

¹⁹ Cf. Državni zavod za statistiku, *Stanovništvo prema vjeri, po gradovima/općinama, popis 2001*, in: http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/censuses/Census2001/Popis/H01_02_04/H01_02_04.html (14 February 2017.)

²⁰ Cf. S. Zrinščak - G. Črpić, *Vjerovanje i religioznost*, *Bogoslovska smotra*, 70 (2000) 2, p. 242.

²¹ Cf. LG, 1, 48.

seemingly lost a sense of reality, and the meaning of human existence.²² Since we are facing a completely new situation, some minor adjustments (merely cosmetic changes) are not enough to cope with the pastoral challenges efficiently, but a radical review and renewal of all models (forms) and carriers of pastoral activities are required. More precisely, it includes the inherited mentality (clericalism, unfruitful pastoral work *ad extra* etc.), the awareness of co-responsibility of all the baptized for the mission of the Church, to the importance of developing synodality, to different structures and forms of fostering pastoral activity, redefining the field of pastoral action etc.

The increasing individualization of society as well as other social phenomena that characterize the postmodern age imposed the pastoral *metanoia* and the restructuring of the traditional pastoral approaches. On the one hand, we are called to be attentive and to critically observe social events, and on the other hand, to be open to new approaches/capacities to carry out the Church's mission.²³ In this regard, it is important to understand and if it is possible to gain control over the social processes,²⁴ that, from a pastoral-theological view, are not only a threat, but also a *kairos* for the proclamation and witness to the Gospel in modern society. In this context, we are called to identify a renewed interest in Christianity experienced by majority of people and the emergence and spread of ecclesial movements and new communities that can be providential pastoral response to the challenges of modern society. Accordingly, the Croatian Conference of Bishops issued a document offering/recommending the pastoral *metanoia*- transformation of the inherited mentality in the parish communities and raising awareness on the joint participation of all the baptized in the Church's mission – right through the living believers circles,²⁵ or through dynamic groups of lay persons (e.g. community youth, community of elder people, family community, liturgical community, biblical community, charity, choir, altar servants, scouts, etc.).

It is important to point out that religion did not disappear with post-modernism, but simply changed. It has become a kind of product and a matter of individual choice.²⁶ Affected by major social and cultural changes, this transformation of religion offers a room for the new pastoral efforts that can be carried out by the movements and new communi-

²² Cf. Ivan Pavao II., Enciklika o trajnoj vrijednosti misijske naredbe *Redemptoris missio* (25. 3. 1987), KS, Zagreb, 1991, 2.

²³ Cf. Benedetto XVI, *Luce del mondo, Il Papa, la Chiesa e i segni dei tempi*. Una conversazione con Peter Seewald, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2010, 71; W. Kasper, *Il Vangelo di Gesù*, p. 225.

²⁴ Cf. EG, 222-225.

²⁵ Cf. Hrvatska Biskupska Konferencija - Nacionalni katehetski ured, *Župna kateheza u obnovi župne zajednice, Plan i program, HILP, Zagreb-Zadar, 2000.*

²⁶ A. Borrás, *La parrocchia, casa di tutti*, Rivista di clero italiano, 94 (2013) 3, p. 178.

ties in the Church. Certainly, their place and role in the Church pastoral have always been regarded as an integral rather than a parallel part of the regular pastoral work in parishes. According to some researches, they form and effectively safeguard the Christian identity against the growing secularization (which gradually transforms into secularism), individualism and fragmentation of society.²⁷

A detailed analysis of all characteristics of many new ecclesial movements and new communities in the Church is beyond the scope of this paper, since it focuses on those which constitute adequate instruments/vehicles of the new evangelization. In this context, it is to highlight that it is a matter of the gift and task: the gift from above for the building of the Church and society, and the task of the church pastors that with a lot of patience and pastoral prudence manage the “gift” by integrating it into a regular mission of the local Church.²⁸ In other words, the ecclesial movements and new communities are invited to involve in the parish and diocese voluntarily and humbly being at the service of common mission. Also, the pastors of the Church (bishops and priests) are called to accept them wholeheartedly and through complementary relationship and in synergy to respect the gift (charisms) of each individual, in order to carry out the mission entrusted to them by Christ the Savior, harmoniously.²⁹

Emphasizing the role of movements and new communities in the service of the new evangelization, we contemplate about authentic evangelization in the particular socio-cultural environment. Although the Gospel always remains the same, but the new approaches to understanding and testifying to it are required in a given socio-cultural context. It should always renew the social fabric and permeate it focusing on the future. These movements and new communities can make the existing pastoral care less clericalized and more real, meeting the needs of concrete people, and becoming more open to the competences of all the baptized. These instruments of the new evangelization are in the focus of this paper which aims to clarify their role as the main instruments of the new evangelization in the Croatian context.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 180.

²⁸ Cf. EG, 29.

²⁹ For a more comprehensive insight into the complementarity of the charismatic and hierarchical gifts in the Church as well as the criteria for judgment (discernment) of charismatic gifts see the most recent document of the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith, *Pismo biskupima Katoličke crkve o odnosu između hijerarhijskih i karizmatičkih darova za život i poslanje Crkve *Iuvenescit ecclesia** (15. 5. 2016.), KS, Zagreb, 2017.

3. The Movements and New Communities as Instruments of Formation and Evangelization

The movements and new communities are mainly considered to be an expression of a deep desire for authentic Christian life. They are the paths that lead the faithful to the origins of Christianity and hence to a re-discovery of the joy and power of the Church. Sprang out of the bosom of the Church, on the one hand, they present the fruit of its mission, and on the other hand, a source that specifically enriches and strengthens its mission. Moreover, due to their diverse activities, they not only enrich the Church with a new original testimony, strength and zeal, but society as a whole. A good observer will perceive that the movements and communities keep talking about the Church nowadays, revealing its face, presenting it as the place of communion, cooperation, instruction, celebration and living the faith. Nevertheless, many movements and new communities are places of Christian formation. Being aware that evangelizing the family, unfortunately, affects fewer children, especially in strongly secularized area, their role in faith formation is growing. Through their membership and various activities in the ecclesial movements and communities, the faithful gain a new experience of the Church, i.e. the new experience of communion which deepens their ecclesial dimension of faith and reveals new possibilities for its proclamation.

Certainly, children are product of their own time and society: living from the impulses of society, they promptly provide answers for today's problems and ambivalence. This is reflected through their insisting on a personal decision, conversion, a baptism in the Spirit, and a personal relationship with Christ as a personal God.³⁰ It is a matter of personal conviction/experience that one can live in the community that gathers voluntarily and where all members know each other well. In addition to one's own vocation and the quality of performing/transmitting it through new technologies/communication channels, this existential (personal) adherence to Christ is one of the most important features of the movements and new communities in the Church.

God always has the first initiative. Although the Christian formation requires an arduous effort on our part, it should not be exclusively considered as our personal task or merit. Regardless of their form, both formation and evangelization basically come from God. It is above all His work. Jesus is the first and greatest evangelizer.³¹ He is always the same: ever young, genuine and a constant source of newness. As such, He is always able to renew our lives and our communities. In his programmatic

³⁰ Cf. D. Gruđen, *Pokreti su djeca svoga vremena i odgovor na vrijeme*, Interview with dr. Fr. Ante Vučković, Glas Koncila, 27 January 2008.

³¹ Cf. Pavao VI., Apostolska pobudnica *Evangelii Nuntiandi – Naviještanje evanđelja* (8. 8. 1975.), KS, Zagreb, 2000, 7.

document *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis argues that Jesus Christ can break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. He precedes us, gives us strength and inspiration in proclaiming of the Good News.³²

Besides, the Pope claims that: "Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world."³³ Indeed, everything comes from Him, from the very essence of our faith – Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man.

In this crisis of the Church's authenticity, the movements and new communities especially show their great availability and generosity when they are called to respond to their missionary mandate. Moreover, due to their flexibility, they promote the Church and its mission (values) carrying out their regular pastoral work at inaccessible places (areas), that have been neglected so far due to objective or subjective reasons. Indeed, they present a great potential of the local Church in fulfilling its evangelizing mission. Unfortunately, this potential has not been fully recognized / evaluated, thus remaining on the periphery of the Church life and its activities.³⁴ There are many reasons that affirm the movements and new communities as instruments of the new evangelization, but taking into account Croatian context, we focus on their specific feature that seems to allow faithful a personal relationship with God.

3.1. A Personal Relationship with Christ is the Foundation of Faith

Christianity is not merely science, wisdom, a set of moral rules or tradition. Its core, its very essence is in Jesus of Nazareth and His reality, His historical existence, work and fate. We believe that Christ is present in the Church and that faith is actually a true relationship with Him. Referring to this in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas est*, Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a Person who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. [...] Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 John 4:10), love is now no longer a mere "command"; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.³⁵ Being a Christian means primarily being in a friendship with God. In the Apostolic Exhor-

³² Cf. EG, 11.

³³ *Ibidem*, 11.

³⁴ Cf. N. A. Ančić, *Razvitak i teološko mjesto duhovnih pokreta u Crkvi*, Bogoslovska smotra, 78 (2008) 2, p. 265; T. Ivančić, *Duhovni pokreti u Crkvi u Hrvata*, Crkva u svijetu, 16 (1981) 3, p. 247-252.

³⁵ Benedikt XVI., Enciklika *Deus caritas est – Bog je ljubav* (25. 12. 2005), KS, Zagreb, 2006, 1.

tation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis also emphasizes the importance of a personal relationship with God for the life of every believer.³⁶

It is to conclude that transmitting the faith to others, especially to young people, means to create such favorable conditions/circumstances to achieve a personal encounter with Christ in every time and space (environment). The goal of evangelization is in fact the fulfillment of this relationship which changes man, his world and his fate.³⁷ Jesus Christ is the heart and the essence of Christianity: in His historical uniqueness and His eternal glory. Christ Himself is a criterion that defines what it means to be and act as a Christian.

In other words, instead of universal norm, the essence of Christianity is a Person – Jesus Christ. We are Christians only if we truly know Christ. In addition to an external approach to the New Evangelization that would refer to the strategy shift in preaching the Gospel and its interpretation through proposed new approaches, the recent Church documents highlight the indispensability of relationship with God. So, evangelizer is the only one who is open to evangelization i.e. the one who is spiritually reborn through a relationship with Jesus Christ.³⁸ The New Evangelization is not only a reaction to the widespread secularization, but primarily a true conversion and the obvious necessity of wholehearted Christian commitment. Namely, the new evangelization primarily refers to a spiritual renewal and is not merely a matter of a change in methodology, technology and communication. Undoubtedly, a possibility to experience a personal relationship with Christ, within the ecclesial movements and new communities, is their greatest contribution to the Church's mission. They offer exactly what the new evangelization wishes to achieve: an active faith in all areas of life based on a personal relationship with God. According to the most recent theological-pastoral research, the possibility for a personal relationship with God motivated young people to involve in a church movement and not merely their formal membership.³⁹

³⁶ Cf. EG, 3, 266.

³⁷ Cf. Sinodo dei vescovi, *XII Assemblea generale ordinaria, La Nuova Evangelizzazione per la trasmissione della Fede Cristiana, Instrumentum laboris*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2012, 18, 31.

³⁸ Cf. Sinodo dei vescovi, *Xiv assemblea generale ordinaria, La vocazione e la missione della famiglia nella Chiesa e nel mondo contemporaneo*, Lineamenta, Città del Vaticano, 2014, 5; *Instrumentum laboris*, 158.

³⁹ Cf. K. Peračković – V. Mihaljević, *Analiza strukture članstva i temeljna obilježja pokreta "Franjevačka mladež" – Jedan primjer postmodernoga crkvenog pokreta*, Društvena istraživanja, 14 (2005) 1-2 (75-76), p. 56.

3.2. The Movements and New Communities as Places of Communion in Action

According to Bauman's liquid modernity, everything in society is dynamic and changeable i.e. everything is in constant motion. Life has become a constant struggle for identity and self-affirmation. The age of globalization negatively affects man lowering his inherent worthiness. Freedom is rather understood as the lack of rules and all pre-conditions. Briefly, a lack of humanity is becoming increasingly evident, i.e. the lack of true human relationships, even within the families. The prevailing behavior of younger generations is particularly characterized by excessive consumerism, openness to novelty without critical thinking, superficial relationships and the quest to fulfill every desire regardless of the cost.⁴⁰ At the same time, despite the overall social networking trends, modern man desperately longs for unity, for belonging; for the concrete community in which he will feel free, creative and valuable. History and social changes have negatively affected a significant number of people who feel disoriented; neglected by all social institutions, including the Church. In such circumstances, many people live on the "existential peripheries" of misery, of our time, hence the movements and new communities can be a way out of insecurity. Challenged by increasing individualism which has destroyed personal identity, they can be a place of Christian formation and living ecclesial communion.

3.3. Accessibility Based on the Benefits of Smallness and Flexibility

We can rightly claim that the impact of almost all large institutions, including the Church, has been weakening over time, due to external and inner reasons. Unlike other institutions that are large in number, bureaucratic and unfavorable environments for common people (and often to their problems), the movements and new communities are more accessible to people. So, people show more trust and can easily approach them in seeking true values.⁴¹ They perceive them as a group of people who live and openly defend their own convictions.

Another advantage to highlight is the flexibility of ecclesial movements and new communities due to their flexible structure. Moreover, unlike a closed circle of people who gather only in a certain place and time, some movements and new communities are structured as social networks. Due to these characteristics, they are more dynamic, more movable and more accessible to young people, in particular. It is sometimes hard to determine the actual start and end date of some of their activities. Also,

⁴⁰ Cf. Z. Bauman, *La libertà*, Città Aperta, Troina (Enna), 2002, p. 72-85.

⁴¹ Cf. M. Hochschild, *Neue Geistliche Gemeinschaften und Bewegungen – Prototypen einer Kirche als sozialem Netzwerk*, Sociologia Internationalis, 38 (2000) 1, p. 115-139.

they use different forms of communication which is especially important if we bear in mind a fast paced-life in cities, and regular parish activities. Two examples of such a flexible, diverse and fruitful pastoral activity for the Church and for society as a whole are: the Catholic Student Center (SKAC) and the Franciscan Youth (Frama).⁴²

Conclusion

One needs not to be too wise to note that the present Christian education in the family and the very family are in deep crisis. It is evident that fewer young people are getting married, and if they opt for a sacramental or civil marriage, they do it later and later in life. Demographic consequences are obvious to everyone. The lack of vocations is also a logical consequence of this way of life. Unable to find some “good” paying jobs and in order to meet their materialistic and social demands, a great majority of parents take side jobs leaving their children to grow up alone. Due to the accelerating pace of life and the growing expectations of the environment (sometimes unrealistic), both parents and children are less concerned about Christian formation. These facts and phenomena pose a real challenge for the Church’s mission referring to education in faith. They are signs of the times that should be recognized and that require adequate response.

What is the path Pope Francis proposed to the Church to follow in order to cope with difficulties of the present time efficiently, and to carry out its mission in the family and in all areas of social life? This is the way of mercy, the way out to the “existential periphery” where there are so many lost, ignored, and socially excluded people. In order to follow this path the Church itself should be less self-referential and closed in on itself and its needs and should go out of its own safety and passivity.⁴³ Individualistic culture has created selfish mentality closed in its microcosm and indifference towards others. The way out of this life-style is in the fullness of life, in our turning to God and in the right values only He can supply.

How and where to adopt true life values? A significant number of practical lay faithful in Europe and in Croatia do not find their “spiritual nourishment” in what we provide in the parish community and the parish pastoral.

⁴² More about the Catholic Student Center (Skac Palma and Skac_St) and Frama and their activities see on: www.skac.hr, www.skac.st, www.frama-portal.com

⁴³ Cf. B. Forte, *Francesco parla alle periferie dell'uomo*, in: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/commenti-e-idee/2015-03-22/francesco-parla-periferie-uomo-141136.shtml?uuid=ABZLCRDD> (2 March 2017).

Evidently, some of them can find what they seek for in the various ecclesial movements,⁴⁴ associations and new communities, which are not and should not be any parallel or “rival” church, but well integrated pastoral subjects that enrich and build parish community. As such, they represent, for many believers, the way of Christian formation that leads them to the sources of Christianity and reveals new joy and strength of the Church. The faithful seek to live their faith in a more personal way, with a missionary zeal and communion, having influence on the wider social context. It seems they experience it through the aforementioned realities. Due to their emergence and spread and despite a constant decline of religious practice, the Church is growing along with the new pastoral subjects full of vitality, unity and joy of their being Christians. From this fact flows a specific quality that opens up a new perspective for the re-evangelization of the Church.

Undoubtedly, speaking about these relatively new realities in the Church, especially if we take into account their number and variety, we can say that they are signs of the times. They are the gift and in spite of some of their deficiencies which were not discussed in the article, they can significantly contribute to the Church through faith formation and evangelization either of the faithful in the periphery of society or unbaptized persons. In Croatia, they can basically contribute to the new evangelization of the faithful who have been sacramentalized but not evangelized yet, and thus, they often live their everyday life far from the Church and its activities.

⁴⁴ Here we need to provide a fact supporting the relevance of the above realities in the Church concerning its mission. The latest data on the movements and new communities in the Church indicate to 123 different organizations that count almost 200 million believers (Catholics) in total and they are most numerous in: the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the Legion of Mary, the work of Mary (also known as the Focolare), the Cursillo, the Militia of the Immaculate, the Neocatechumenal Way, etc. Cf. P. Coda, *Con Benedetto e con Francesco, La lettera Iuvenescit Ecclesia e la “co-essenzialità” di carisma e istituzione*, Il Regno attualità e documenti, 61 (2016) 14, p. 395.