

FAITH

Jesus Christ's great absence in today's Church

ECCLESIA

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**Gianfranco
Amato**



The fact someone of high importance has gone missing from the Church seems to be taking its toll on the institution. This absent figure is none other than Jesus Christ. The Church seems talk about everything except Jesus. In its official speeches, elementary writings, talks, and now even in Church documents all references to the Son of God seem to have disappeared. The idea that there can be Christianity without Christ is

creeping more and more into general acceptance. After all, secular power likes a religion that cares for the least of the these: the poor, the disadvantaged, the disabled, migrants and concerns itself with social justice, respect for the environment, peace: all of which obscures the burdensome figure of Christ as the one and only Truth to follow, along with an entire related arsenal of precepts, dogmas, principles, values and ideals. Thus, we hear authoritative voices from within the Church speak of everything but the *Unicum necessarium*. Yet, isn't the Church's very role "to proclaim the Kingdom of God and Christ and to establish it among all nations", as stated in section 565 of the Catholic Catechism?

It is sad to see such a low degree of awareness of the Church's true task by her pastors, just like we are experiencing today. It is sad especially for those who, like myself, have known a completely different perspective of Christianity and had the grace to be educated according in this way.

I remember very well, for example, Communion and Liberation founder Fr. Luigi Giussani's words when he said: "Those who claim that before announcing the Gospel of Christ we must first resolve political and social problems, in my opinion - consciously or unconsciously - dry up the very heart of Christian evangelisation, because man's salvation is Christ and none other than Christ".

I also remember very well Giussani's accusation against the dangers of "Christian intelligentsia " and within the Church itself when "identifying and facing problems on the basis of 'worldly categories'."

Today, it seems that at all levels only secular considerations are worthwhile today. Even so, this does end up withering the heart of man, to the point where he loses the sense of the exact dimension of reality. I have always been struck, in this regard, by another of Giussani's profound intuitions: "Whoever works to improve man's life - without the clear or confused, explicit or implicit perception of that transcendent nexus constituting the substantial tension of human conscience - remains fatally the victim of befuddlement and monstrous distortions of reality. Small things end up looking big and big things end up looking small, until everything takes on deformed and grotesque contours."

Although Giusanni's words were uttered almost forty years ago, they manage to describe the situation we are experiencing today in a dramatically effective way. How can one fail to notice the "deformed and grotesque" dimension assumed by today's Christianity which, by censoring Christ, ends up making some things seem much more

than they really are and others things less important than should be.

A Church that loses the awareness of mandates entrusted to it by Jesus Christ risks falling into irrelevance, futility and ultimately extinction. It would be reminiscent of the so-called "tasteless salt" described in the Gospel. Christianity would end up being diluted, as just one among of many other secular philosophies, visions, ideologies already popular in the world.

Today the pastors and God's faithful must return to giving the proper order of priority to reality. It must begin, first and foremost, by shouting from the rooftops the top priority: Jesus Christ's Incarnation. It is necessary to return to having an authentic and concrete perception that this Word Made Flesh, namely that Jesus has something to do with the "here and now", something to do with our present day, because He has something to do with every man on earth, whatever his status, rich or poor, in the here and now. Giussani recalled: "If He had nothing to do with our present day, Christ would immediately vanish into the air. He would become the center of a philosophy, of a vision, of an ideology". Exactly what, unfortunately, is happening now.

We are witnessing a reversal of the order of priorities: some would have us to believe that first we need to solve social problems (migration, poverty, social justice, pollution, etc.) and then announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, as we have seen, it is exactly the opposite.

Reversing the order of priorities means tackling these problems on the basis of a mere ethical "impulse." Once again, from this point of view, Giussani was prophetic: "One can reduce the influence of faith and of the Church to one's own socio-political action, to an extrinsic impulse, to a simple inspiration, as if the Church only pushed man to take an interest in social problems. If so, it would mean inculcating an ethical impulse towards them, but without being able to have an impact on the way of facing the problems themselves." Giussani went on to give an example: "It is said that the Gospel urges me to take an interest in the poor, and this is certainly true. Yet, if one stops here, then the Gospel tends to be only an ethical, moralistic impulse. Instead the Gospel also has something to say about the way, the structure of judgment and behavior with which one faces the problem of poverty." Today no one within the Church speaks anymore about the "ways", the "structure of judgment" and the "behavior" with which one faces social problems, also because to do so would necessarily imply the prior recognition of Christ as the One Truth from which everything else follows. And since this is very uncomfortable, it seems better to deal with problems exactly as the world that does not know and love Christ does.

Romano Amerio was also right in his book *Iota Unum*. Here he complained that for many pastors, the Christian faith is no longer a principle but an interpretation and language. He wrote this in the early 1980s, fearing back then that it posed a real threat to our faith. Today, unfortunately, the idea seems to have spread far and wide, even within important sectors of the Church which claim the Christian Word is no longer a principle or authority, but an interpretation destined to be reconciled with other interpretations in a confusing era that, at times, seems to be reconciled by social justice, while at other times, by an abstract idea of solidarity.

Christianity's traditional eschatological principle of faith (i.e. the earth is made for heaven and man's destiny can only find meaning in an "other-worldly" perspective) has gone completely silent. It seems, instead, to have been replaced, for some years, by an old South American "theological" vision according to which the Church's supernatural purpose must be put off in order to concentrate on the earthly struggle for social justice. The idea becomes heretical when it claims that God's plan is simply about this world, that it should be just, brotherly, and happy. Amerio recalled that "in this way the perfection of the world becomes the end of the world, the subordination of everything to God falls apart, and the Church's role and identity is confused with the governing of the human race," Yet only by eclipsing the transcendent order, by eliminating Christ, can one think of a sort of "right to happiness" in the world, in an

utopian construction of paradise on earth.

These spectres of South American theology today come to haunt us not only through the increasingly explicit censorship of the figure of Christ, but also through the dangerous idea that the social work of Christianity must prevail over its social doctrine.

To the supporters of this idea, however, it is sufficient to recall Christ's very own words of wisdom when speaking about those who tended to censor. He said: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and do His will. Everything else will come later."