

Marcin Nabożny / Marcin Wysocki (eds.)

# The Church in the Face of Crises and Challenges over the Centuries

Selected Issues from the History of the Church



# Lublin Theological Studies

in connection with  
The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

edited by  
Adam Kubiś (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin)

in cooperation with  
Nicholas Adams (University of Birmingham),  
Marek Jagodziński (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin),  
Paweł Mąkosa (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin)

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## Volume 2

Marcin Nabożny / Marcin Wysocki (eds.)

# **The Church in the Face of Crises and Challenges over the Centuries**

Selected Issues from the History of the Church

**VANDENHOECK & RUPRECHT**

The project is funded by the Minister of Education and Science within the program under the name “Regional Initiative of Excellence” in 2019-2022, project number: 028/ ID/2018/19, the amount of funding: 11 742 500 PLN



Ministry of Education and Science  
Republic of Poland

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The book has been reviewed by  
Prof. Marek Ingot (Pontifical Gregorian University) and  
Prof. Tomasz Moskal (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin).

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche  
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: <https://dnb.de>.

© 2023 by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Robert-Bosch-Breite 10, 37079 Göttingen, Germany,  
an imprint of the Brill-Group (Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands;  
Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA; Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH,  
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Typesetting: le-tex publishing services, Leipzig  
Cover design: SchwabScantechnik, Göttingen

**Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | [www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com](http://www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com)**

ISBN 978-3-647-57358-8

## Table of Contents

<i>Marcin Nabożny, Marcin Wysocki</i>	
Introduction .....	7
 <i>Marcin Nabożny</i>	
A Church in Crisis According to Ralph Martin .....	11
 <i>Tomasz Karol Mantyk</i>	
Reading the Psalms in Times of Crisis. Franciscus Titelmans's Relecture of the Psalms in the Context of Humanism and Reformations .....	23
 <i>Vincenzo Rubino</i>	
The Catholic Church Amidst Internationalism. Luigi Maglione's Swiss Mission (1918–1926) .....	35
 <i>Joanna Pyszna</i>	
The Sisters of the Resurrection from the Warsaw District of Żoliborz at the Time of the Warsaw Uprising (1944).....	55
 <i>Mariusz Krzysztofiński</i>	
Bishop Ignacy Tokarczuk in the Face of Attempts to “Reconcile” the Catholic Faith with Communism in the Realities of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) .....	77
 <i>Ryszard Ficek</i>	
Looking the Devil in the Eyes. Totalitarianism and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński’s Humanitarian-Personalist Concept of Socio-Political Life.....	99
 <i>Grzegorz Kamil Szczecina</i>	
Actions of the Repressive Apparatus of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) Against the Chaplain of “Solidarity” – Bl. Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko .....	127
 <i>Robert Zapart</i>	
The Catholic Church and the Threats and Challenges to Poland’s Security in the 20 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> Centuries. Selected Methodological Issues .....	137

*Adam Jaszcz*

The Diocesan Synod and Its Greatest Crisis in the History of the Church ..... 153

*Jacenty Mastej*

Cardinal Stanisław Nagy's Apology of the Catholic Church ..... 169

Author Index..... 185

Notes on Contributors..... 192

Marcin Nabożny, Marcin Wysocki

## Introduction

Challenges, crises and difficult experiences are an integral part of our lives. They are an inherent element of every human being's existence, in addition to being ingrained in the functioning of organisations, institutions and nations. On many occasions humankind has failed to confront them, resulting in the real dramas that we witness on the pages of history. Fortunately, challenges, crises and difficult situations have often been lessons, from which appropriate conclusions have been drawn, thanks to which it was possible to create a better future.

In the history of the Church from its very beginnings, challenges have been an integral part of working towards a better tomorrow, a better version of oneself and the reality around us. From the first moments of their dynamic development, Christians had to face the hostility of the world that did not fully understand the ideas of the new religion. This led to bloody persecutions. Still, the blood of the martyrs became the sowing of new Christians. The crisis of persecutions strengthened the Church and the followers of Christ in their courageous witness to the faith. Paradoxically, what was intended to weaken or even destroy the faith became an impulse for its spread. Crisis became the cause of consolidation and development.

And so, over the centuries, the Church has faced crises caused by schisms, divisions, unsuitable people in ecclesiastical offices, as well as challenges posed by the surrounding world, political systems and conflicts of human origin. These have often led many people to depart from the faith or from its practice. On the other hand, they have become a challenge in the purification of the Church itself.

The reality of the challenges and crises in the Church has repeatedly become the leading theme of literature. This publication, which you are holding in your hands, represents the work of both young and experienced scholars (theologians, historians and lawyers) who look at the reality of the Church and its history with a fresh, innovative, yet professional perspective. The result of their research and work is presented in the multi-author publication of the Church in the face of crises and challenges over the space of centuries.

Since the beginnings of its existence, Christianity has repeatedly experienced various crises and challenges which it has had to face. This book aims to look at the last centuries of Christian history in the context of various challenges, crises and problems. In this publication we touch upon wounds, conflict situations and painful places over the space of centuries and look at them from a historical, theological,



economic and legal perspective. Owing to this publication, the reader will be able to learn about various types of crises and challenges in order to draw conclusions from them, to appreciate the history of the Church through a better knowledge thereof, and all this in order to create a better future.

The book opens with an article discussing the vision of the crisis in the Church as theorized by, Ralph Martin, the author of an exhaustive publication on the crisis. In the article, Marcin Nabożny focuses on the cause-and-effect analysis of the crisis in the Church conducted by Ralph Martin, the author of the publication “A Church in Crisis. Pathways Forward” (Steubenville, Ohio 2020). Apart from providing a historical background, the article evaluates the current actions of the Church leaders and their positive and negative consequences.

Another article, “Reading the Psalms in times of crisis. Franciscus Titelmans’s relecture of the Psalms in the context of humanism and reformations” by Tomasz Karol Mantyk aims to illustrate the way Titelmans interpreted the Scriptures with the help of examples from selected psalms. In the light of this study, the Psalms appear as a remedy for various crises in which returning to God through the reading of the Scriptures, in this case the Psalms, is an effective way to gain spiritual strength in facing challenges. Reclaiming the spiritual, modernising reading of the Scriptures, following Titelmans’s example, can be of considerable help in the face of contemporary crises afflicting the Church.

Vincenzo Rubino, in the article “The Catholic Church amidst internationalism: Luigi Maglione’s Swiss mission (1918–1926)”, undertakes reflection along the lines of historical research aimed at examining the position of the Church in relation to the profound changes brought about by the Great War (1914–1918). The author of the article presents the determination and efforts of the text’s protagonist, Luigi Maglione, in the face of the crisis during which he had to carry out his tasks.

In the article “The Sisters of the Resurrection from the Warsaw District of Żoliborz at the Time of the Warsaw Uprising (1944)”, Joanna Pyszna presents the actions (oriented both towards the congregation and for the benefit of other people) of Mother Teresa Kalkstein (1888–1980) in response to the crisis caused by the Second World War. This period prompted in Mother Teresa the eagerness to help adults and children at a time when the value of human life was of little meaning to many.

In the next article entitled “Bishop Ignacy Tokarczuk in the Face of Attempts to “Reconcile” the Catholic Faith with Communism in the Realities of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL)”, Mariusz Krzysztofiński – a member of the Institute of National Remembrance (Poland) – presents the attitude of Bishop/Archbishop Ignacy Tokarczuk (1918–2012), the ordinary of the Przemyśl diocese (1965–1993), a long-time member of the Polish Episcopal Commission/Main Council, towards the attempts to reconcile the Catholic faith and communism by the faithful and some priests under the conditions of the communist dictatorship. Krzysztofiński, as an expert on the biography of Archbishop Tokarczuk, presents the unwavering

attitude of the bishop towards communism, which aimed to stir up a crisis in the life of the Church.

In the article “Looking the Devil in the Eyes: Totalitarianism and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński’s Humanitarian-Personalist Concept of Socio-Political Life”, the author, Ryszard Ficek, presented the specificity of the theory of totalitarianism in the context of the humanitarian-personalistic concept of social and political life by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. The person of the hero of the article – Blessed Stefan Wyszyński – is a figure who must not be overlooked in relation to the fight against communism in Central and Eastern Europe.

Grzegorz Kamil Szczecina, the author of the article “Actions of the Repressive Apparatus of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) Against the Chaplain of “Solidarity” – Bl. Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko”, presents the martyr of communist times, who seemed to have lost the fight against inhuman communism. The article is an attempt to present the influence of the communist repression apparatus on the chaplain of “Solidarity” as a symbol of post-war communist terror and the times of hardship in the history of the Church in Poland.

Robert Zapart, the author of the study entitled “The Catholic Church and the Threats and Challenges to Poland’s Security in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries: Selected Methodological Issues”, presents the forms and scope of the Catholic Church’s support for Poland’s national security system from the perspective of the threats occurring in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the article “The Diocesan Synod and Its Greatest Crisis in the History of the Church”, Adam Jaszcz points out that the diocesan synod, established in the first centuries of Christianity, is now an integral part of the particular Church. Frequently, synods were a response to the crisis in the Church and worldwide. Adam Jaszcz analyses the reasons behind the greatest crisis in the history of diocesan synods. He also indicates the ways of overcoming the crisis and how it became in consequence a tool of pastoral renewal in many dioceses across the world.

In the last article, entitled “Cardinal Stanisław Nagy’s Apology of the Catholic Church”, Jacenty Mastej presents the apology of the Catholic Church in the scientific work of Cardinal Stanisław Nagy (1921–2013), a professor at the Catholic University of Lublin and a member of the International Theological Commission and the Joint-Catholic-Lutheran Commission.

We hope that this publication will serve scientists, people showing interest in the history of Christianity, researchers of Europe’s past and the relationship between the state and the Church, in addition to enabling them to understand the current and past crises, as well as the ways of resolving them.



Marcin Nabożny

## A Church in Crisis According to Ralph Martin

### *Abstract:*

The Catholic Church has been faced with crises and challenges from its very inception. Many authors have tried to characterize the various crises in the Church. One of them is Ralph Martin, whose analysis of the contemporary crisis was included in the most recent, comprehensive and substantive publication on the topic. According to the author the Church has the responsibility to correct errors, stand for the truth that calls on the world for repentance, and not to neglect its mission for any reason. This article presents the main thoughts of Martin on the causes, course, and ways out of the crisis in the Church.

### *Keywords:*

Crisis | Catholic Church | Papacy | Ralph Martin

### **Introduction**

The Roman Catholic Church has always been faced with crises from its inception until recent times. Crisis is a reality of circumstance that is felt by all concerned. The Catholic Church is a divine entity of believers as one body. When analyzing the history of the Church, one should always remember the divine primacy and at the same time consider human imperfection, which can be overcome by the virtue of God's grace. Many authors try to define crisis, at the same time undertaking reflections on its causes, course and effects on the Church. In their publications, the authors analyze the crisis from a certain perspective, sometimes focusing on a selected aspect, subjecting it to solid logical reflection. The crisis in the Universal Church and local communities has been the subject of many scientific works.

One of the major crises of the last century was the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Prior to the survey conducted by Hughes (2020) on the Church in Crisis, it was revealed that the Second Vatican Council, which was as at then faced with a crisis, was just one of the many crises in the Vatican Council's history. Yet, none were resolved the moment they arose<sup>1</sup>. Like Hughes who had notably recalled

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1 Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils, 325–1870*. Providence: Cluny Media, 2020.

the Church in crisis through his survey of the General Councils, White (2021) also revealed some cultural and social challenges posing a threat to the Church's tradition, and also how to face the crisis in terms of approach<sup>2</sup>.

The need to review Christianity and the stance of modernity is crucial, one which has always been associated with crisis. The challenges faced by the Church many centuries ago are different from those faced a century ago or in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; things change with time, events are modified, more challenges arise, and crises emerge or are reborn. Recognizing these, Rauschenbusch (2008) updated his book published in the twentieth century entitled 'Christianity and the Social Crisis' to a 2008 publication called 'Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', which updates the Church's approach in transforming the world<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, Martin who had written a book entitled 'A crisis of truth: The attack on faith, morality, and mission in the Catholic Church'<sup>4</sup> has represented and published a new book 'A Church in Crisis...' This is due to the need to review the issues and approach unique to crisis in the present day.

Another author, Heschmeyer (2020), reiterates the right approach expected of the faithful when an issue or issues of papal flaws emerge: not to leave the Church, but arrive at the awareness and discernment of what the papacy is. The authority of the Pope is scriptural and historical, dating back from when Jesus made Peter the rock of the Church and Jesus' promise that the gates of hell would not prevail against it; this, Heschmeyer referred to as the Church's most distinctive doctrine to be defended even in times of crisis<sup>5</sup>.

One of the crises the Church has faced for many years is sexual abuse committed by the Church's people, especially the clergy. According to Fortune's essay (2008), she revealed that between ten and twenty percent of the clergy compromise the integrity of the mandate of pastoral work, which places those entrusted to them in a vulnerable state, this increasingly discredits the good pastoral relationship expected of the clergy<sup>6</sup>.

According to Doane (2019), we are all called to go back to the Catholic drawing board and rebuild our tradition and culture that glorifies Christ as the Light of the world – a lost tradition or in the state of being lost completely like in the West and the United States. The Church must take seriously the dimming state of the Light of

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2 James Emery White, *The Church in an Age of Crisis: 25 New Realities Facing*. Ada: Baker Books, 2021.

3 Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Classic that woke up the Church*. San Francisco: HarperOne 2008.

4 Ralph Martin, *A Crisis of Truth: The Attack on Faith, Morality and Mission in the Catholic Church*. Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1982.

5 Joe Heschmeyer, *Pope Peter- Defending the Church's Most Distinctive Doctrine in a Time of Crisis*. San Diego: Catholic Answers Press, 2020.

6 Marie M. Fortune, *Sexual Abuse by Clergy: A Crisis For the Church*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2008.

the world (Jesus) and rekindle her mandate in raising the Light to be encountered by all. The Church must always preach the good news and all revealed to mankind by God in truth. The Church has to go back to her spiritual root and reaffirm what it means to be Catholic<sup>7</sup>.

Different types of crises, long or short, critical or not, can be exchanged endlessly. All through the history of the Church, right from the very beginning, there have always been crises, which both strengthen and weaken her: according to the book of 2 Corinthians 12: 9 “For strength is made perfect in weakness”. One of the newest, in-depth and systematic reflections on the crisis in the Church is Ralph Martin’s publication “A Church in Crisis. Pathways Forward”<sup>8</sup>. The author – Dr. Ralph Martin – a devoted professor in theology and Director of Graduate Programs in the New Evangelization, received his B.A. in Philosophy from the University of Notre Dame. In 2002, he received his M.A. in theology from Sacred Heart Major Seminary. He obtained a degree in S.T.L. from the Dominican House of Studies, and a degree in S.T.D. from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas. He has been in the pontifical arena, been active in Rome, and indeed in Catholic evangelization which prompted the Catholic Leadership Institute to award him for his outstanding Catholic leadership. Pope Benedict XVI appointed him consultant in Catholic evangelization to the Pontifical Council in 2011, and again chose him in 2012 to join the Global Synod of Bishops on New Evangelization, given his expertise. He is widely published. He actively engages in proactive evangelization while presiding over his own organization named Renewal Ministries<sup>9</sup>.

## How the Crisis Started

Having reiterated the historical trait of global confusion and division which has perplexed the Church in particular, the author agrees that disturbing events still plague the Church differently and probably more critically compared to centuries ago. Yes, we have had more righteous and peace-seeking popes in recent times unlike some immoral and complicit popes of centuries and decades ago. Thus, wicked popes are not the crisis now; Martin has identified morality and faith-based matters, including evangelical approach, to be the critical cause of the confusion ranging in the Church. He sourced these problems in the ambiguity of the Church documents,

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7 Peter M. Doane, *Encounter Jesus!: Transforming Catholic Culture in Crisis*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2019.

8 Ralph Martin, *A Church in Crisis. Pathways Forward*. Steubenville: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2020.

9 Dr. Ralph C. Martin, access: August 22, 2022, <https://www.shms.edu/content/dr-ralph-martin>.

comments and events, triggering different reactions and causing disagreement between bishops and cardinals on how to interpret them<sup>10</sup>.

It is itself confusing and troubling that the Pope would not or do not willingly respond to issues concerning him. And even if he does vaguely respond, which is not uncommon, the result is ambiguous and confusing, creating room for various conflicting interpretations. Anyway, the author finds it appealing to venture into the Pope's role in handling, or not handling, the confusion and division under Pope Francis' leadership<sup>11</sup>. However, the problems ranging during his pontificate, as recalled by the author, are not exclusive to him nor his time.

One of the leading problems the Church has historically struggled with is enlightenment, which awakened some controversy in morality. The modernity concept integrates and accommodates the new world culture with the Church tradition. But then the root of enlightenment was never to compliment faith, but instead sought to eliminate the God factor in society. That is why the author described it as a demonic intellectual, a virus that works fervently to destroy the doctrine and tradition of the Church.

The advent of universalism threatens the teaching of traditional Christianity. Sadly, there are people who are proudly Universalists even in the Church of Christ, which has led to conflict and divide. As the author puts it, universalism is a deceptive teaching that favors the devil. In assuming that God is too merciful, He will never condemn souls to hell – that is, if there is anything like hell; God is so sweet that He sent His son to die for all to be saved without necessarily hearing, accepting and following the ways of Christ. Those who rather would love to hear such teaching, countless in number, have wholeheartedly embraced the too easy way, one the scripture refers to as the broad way, which seems right but only leads to destruction (hell)<sup>12</sup>.

With the authority of scripture becoming a cliché since the sixties and the general view of sexual morality being outdated, there is the new culture of a modern approach to the modern lifestyle of modern man who knows so much more about sexual issues than the ancient men who wrote the scripture as a guide to moral acts. More so, the scripture is now seen merely as a single source for general moral laws, therefore making it insufficient and nullifying its absolutes<sup>13</sup>.

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10 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 1, 16.

11 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 2, 18.

12 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 91.

13 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 120.

## How the Crisis is Proceeding

While addressing the troubling and conflicting doctrines, morals, and pastoral approach among the Church leadership, including Pope Francis, Martin attempted to stress his respect for the Pope as the true successor of St. Peter. Therefore, it is safe to say that the author believes the Pope has been sound in many of his words and actions, but contradictory in some. The ripple effect of these troubling events, words and actions caused some extravagant reactions, which in turn pulsate fear and suspicion among the lay faithful. It is the author's view that even if we were to elect a new pope tomorrow the existing disbelief that is embedded in the Church would still lure millions to separate from the Catholic Church<sup>14</sup>.

One of the crises causing confusion and divide is the open and welcoming attitude to the gay community. According to the author, the defining approach Pope Francis has largely given to homosexuality is rather subtle. The implication of his accepting approach to homosexuality makes him an advocate, as though he encourages it. Also, Pope Francis probably has not condemned the practice of homosexuality as a sin so serious that it could potentially deny anyone involved heaven should they die without repentance<sup>15</sup>.

Another problem leading to confusion is the "Amoris Laetitia" document which seem to have passages orchestrated on purpose to justify the act of receiving Holy Communion by those divorced and reunited to another through a civil institution, thereby making the initial judgement of first marriage invalid<sup>16</sup>. Adding to it is the confusion in decentralization, the varying regional interpretation in the Church. This concept, once again an ambiguity, allowed for regional interpretation of Church documents. Instead of interpreting in synchronization with the Church's tradition, some bishops would take the opportunity to fashion their approach to all forms of sexual morality in the name of better understanding<sup>17</sup>. The speech of Pope Francis calling for healthy decentralization was not cited by Martin as sound teaching, claiming that a multiple regional interpretation would lead to regional differences especially on pivotal issues that could divide the Church. He gave an example of two towns sharing a border but with an opposite approach to grave sin and invitation to Holy Communion. Allowing such differences to exist under one umbrella is just a recipe for disaster. Martin recalled the words of Jesus that a house divided against itself cannot stand<sup>18</sup>.

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14 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 20.

15 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 23.

16 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 24.

17 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 25.

18 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 26.



The lack of clarity and lack of firm leadership towards the formal and informal actions and doctrines of the Church, especially in the various interpretation of Church documents, which has brought confusion, conflict and division has forced concerned lovers of the Church like Martin to jump off the fence and publicly identify concerns that are grave – so serious that one can only wonder if it is the book of revelation playing out right before us. The catechism of the Catholic Church contains a lot of teaching that speaks of the last trial the Church must face; a key word therein is ‘religious deception’ which is what we are facing today<sup>19</sup>.

Contradictory actions may, to some degree, be a strategy to keep people unsure, which is common with Pope Francis. But as Martin reveals, we see clearer where the pope’s favor lies when he appoints whom he appoints<sup>20</sup>. It seems there is a conscious change in the basic mission of the Church, which is to evangelize, drifting towards accommodation and acceptance of all sorts of religions, moral standards and changes in doctrine to suit human choices, and Pope Francis keeps eluding clarity on these issues, including if the interpretation of “*Amoris Laetitia*” is in harmony with “*Familiaris Consortio*” and “*Veritatis Splendor*”. Martin is of the opinion that Pope Francis does not consider them in harmony, due to his unwillingness to clearly state so. This is in contrast to how he would have clearly stated so if he actually considered them to be in harmony. Martin further opined that a schism might be provoked should the Pope formally make it clear that he does not consider them to be in harmony<sup>21</sup>.

Another cause of the crisis is the deliberate insubordination to the scripture where the word of God in the bible is being questioned or reinvented and edited to suit human conscience. The author has observed discomfort from people when preaching the truth that is unwanted and uneasy to the ears of those soliciting for the new culture. Now, some parts in the scripture are being opted out, which often are the most relevant and plainly truthful parts. One would think the aim is to shorten lengthy passages, but then Martin revealed the intention seems to aim at clamping down on what discomforts people in the scripture<sup>22</sup>.

The Crisis of Universalism which contradicts the clear revelations made by Christ himself concerning salvation is gaining ground and even being widely accepted. Martin takes the stance that some comments made by Pope Francis seem to support this very new thought of universalism<sup>23</sup>. The acceptance of universalism is spreading like wildfire and the Church has not addressed it squarely; yet it threatens the basic

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19 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 28.

20 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 31.

21 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 35.

22 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 49–50.

23 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 77.

essence of the Church, evangelism. Just to be clear, any teaching that changes the explicit revelation of Christ is antichrist.

The antics to conform the Church to the wave of sexual revolution is increasingly scaling up and out, leading to what Martin describes as people being intimidated not to stand against it, coupled with the fear of not being supported by the Church that is even divided concerning the same issue<sup>24</sup>. In fact there is now too much fear, Martin revealed; fear of the worldly wise men and legality; fear of society's opinion; fear of public scandal; fear of personal discomfort and losses; fear of being called a hater; fear of the revolution fighting back. Martin writes, it all suppresses the Gospel of Christ.

Another tension arising, as revealed by Martin, are the attacks on traditional family and sexual morality that were detected behind the wheels in the Black Lives Matter movement for racial justice. Going beyond racial justice, the movement strongly stands for everything the Church tradition on family, morality and sexuality regards as sinful<sup>25</sup>.

There is also the troubling state of Global Alliance influencing and using the Church to promote its secularist view. The secularist culture seeks for a worldview and global acceptance of all cultures, in a way that promotes environmental religion, accommodates multi religion, the use of contraception to check population growth, the acceptance of abortion for unwanted pregnancy, and sex education for all forms of sexuality<sup>26</sup>. Martin warns of the smuggling of these ideologies into the fabrics of the Church for the sake of progress; they are not a true teaching of Christ, although justified in the new theology.

Martin expressed more concern with the Amazon Synod beyond the considerations vigorously pursued therein – although it is important to address talks on officiating married men as priests as well as officiating women as deacons, there was something more disturbing, in what was a clear identification with idolatry<sup>27</sup>. This refers to a scene where Amazon indigenes paid a cultural visit to the papacy and bowed to statues of naked women venerated in the presence of Pope Francis who condoned the worship of the statues regarded as mother earth, an earth goddess worshiped in South America<sup>28</sup>. It is simply alarming that the Pope seems to be sending the message that Jesus is not the only way to the Father, but there are other valid ways.

Prior to the teaching of Pope Francis in what he terms proselytism, which outrightly dissuades the Church from carrying out spoken evangelization in a bid to

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24 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 100.

25 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 114.

26 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 151.

27 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 170.

28 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 175.

convert or convince non-Christians to become Christians and adopt the lifestyle of Christ for their salvation. Martin brought to clarity the scandalous implication of such teaching from the Pope; the command of Jesus to go into the world and preach the Good News, as well as the teaching of Vatican II are being equated to and labelled as proselytism by the Pope<sup>29</sup>.

Pope Francis' approach to evangelism through silence – preaching nothing until asked to do so – where missionaries and believers are urged to listen to unbelievers instead of preaching to them as witnesses to the truth, is a passive way of evangelizing. If no effort was made to take the Gospel across the world, how did it get to the places it got to so far? It is also important not to forget that evangelism started from the day the Church was born: for tongues of fire fell upon the disciples and they spoke in different languages, bearing witness to the Gospel, hence three thousand people converted that day – the power of preaching and not silence. Citing Martin, the Pope's attempt to persuade Christians from preaching to all manner of people will make unbelievers happy for aiding in keeping the Church and her Gospel under control<sup>30</sup>.

The antichrist, the one who hates God and all His creation, has been active and intensify his campaign in the last days, as foretold and warned in the scripture. Yet there are horrendous ideologies denying the works and existence of the devil as a mere symbol. With such apostasy it is evident that the Church and the true children of God do not fight against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. Martin backed this up with the scripture: stating the nature of the final trial where men are compelled to accept false faith of worldly wisdom that can solve their immediate problems, which places them against the true faith.<sup>31</sup> Fueling that, the Pope appoints lay men and clergymen who lack spiritual understanding to key management positions in the Church, people who would rather be led by absolute contemporary reasoning than the truth in God's word. Therefore, we must seek the face of God for ourselves and for the Church as we actively defend the truth revealed by God.

## How to End the Crisis

Martin proposes that the Church return to the model of Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, where revelation of the truth is not compromised and the light of Jesus is seen in the actions, words and morals of the Church, so that clarity and

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29 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 183.

30 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 187.

31 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 254.

unity will prevail once again<sup>32</sup>. For it is through clarity that confidence is recovered, and by standing for truth one is set in right standing with God.

Quoting Rom. 11:20–22, Martin reminded the Church of the dangers in altering the revelation of God and changing His words in the scripture. We may want to make God look nice or reinvent Him as we want, but the truth about what he wants remains. Not obeying this truth and twisting His will makes one an unbeliever, misleader, a false witness, and such people are cut off – for God is both kind and severe. Therefore, all as revealed by God must be passed on without alteration or omission<sup>33</sup>.

In the book, Martin discusses the difference between development of doctrine and mutilation or distortion of doctrine. To discern both is basically to identify the approach involved in each. When doctrine is developed it should undergo a process for progression of faith, so that it may be improved. But when doctrine is changed or replaced then it has been distorted and has potentially lost its initial cause. To solve the crisis in the Church, doctrine should not be tossed from one side to another, but developed along the same basic teaching<sup>34</sup>.

It is important that we heed to the scripture and pay close attention to the word of God, for therein God reveals Himself; His kind nature and His severe nature, His guidance to salvation and the consequences if not obeyed. As clear as God's word is, one can only wonder how new theology twists even the explicit revelation of God, such like the thought of Universalism<sup>35</sup> and true nature of such falsified thought<sup>36</sup>. The Church has to effectively counter this erroneous thinking and return to evangelization instead of believing in so-called Universalization, which potentially nullifies the need to evangelize<sup>37</sup>. Remember the scripture already warned of a culture that seems right but only leads to doom. Beware of false prophets (wolves) in sheep clothing for by their fruits they shall be known. Jesus is the light and truth; anything beyond that is man-made peril.

More importantly, Martin proposes that the approach of self-control and censorship over what we consume by sight, through reading, what we say and do, is a compelling way to be in a good and sustainable relationship with God and be truly firm in His word, such that we can tell the difference between our willand antics of the devil, in contrast to that of the Lord's.

Noting and recognizing the winning state of what is known as sexual revolution, Martin largely blamed the Church for having been silent and responding in a subtle

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32 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 43.

33 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 56.

34 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 63.

35 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 75.

36 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 79.

37 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 80.

way. He is of the opinion that despite the pressure from the whole antics of all forms of sexual immoralities, including gender confusion, the ungodly culture would not have been charged with the present day power it wields if the Church had not chosen to act in ignorance, or lost her saltiness, or compromised the scripture as well as her tradition<sup>38</sup>.

As a proposal through which to navigate out of the crisis on sexual morality and universal salvation, Martin urges for a truly plain, direct, unrelenting scripture-bound evangelism (preaching) as had always been undertaken, and as radical as how Jesus and His apostles would have done or improved so that the Gospel might reach us today, even if it calls for persecution or martyrdom<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, more voices should be raised against the aggressively growing sexual revolution to avoid Christians giving in to the ultimate loss of their souls<sup>40</sup>.

Martin raised a question accompanied with a solution: how long shall the Vatican keep its silence on the confusion, the crisis, the contemporary demand, the crackdown and persecution of its members and the innocent at large? He urges against allowing the Church's quest to be at peaceful relations with secularists, other religions and governments to hinder our ability and function in speaking against their evil deeds, calling out those who perpetrate crimes, as well as putting to action whatever we say. Otherwise, we will be complicit to and further endanger the people we all have the responsibility to protect.

Martin despairs of the collapsing number of Catholics in faith and other Christians, while the Church herself worries about the present state of the earth. Yes, it is good to be aware of that but not to the extent of replacing the primary commission of Jesus to preach the Gospel for the salvation of all. When the Church wakes up from her slumber and learns that accommodating secularism is to the detriment of our primary instruction as Christians, she will realize that it has been nothing but a catastrophic collapse over and over again<sup>41</sup>. We must go back to preaching clearly without fear or timidity, calling for the salvation of souls through Christ and through the repentance of all sins, including today's highly debated morality which is rebuked in the scripture. The same energy the Church uses to bring environmental degradation to the attention of the world, should be also used to preach Christ. However, Martin admitted that environmental degradation is indeed real and serious<sup>42</sup>.

According to Martin, to effectively deal with the crisis distorting the unity and sanctity of the present day Church is to have the ability to wholesomely realize and

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38 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 122.

39 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 130.

40 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 139.

41 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 197.

42 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 200.

accept that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers in very high places. We must take into account this knowledge in our approach to the crisis we face as a Church and as Christians<sup>43</sup>.

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43 Martin, *A Church in Crisis*, 200.



Tomasz Karol Mantyk

## Reading the Psalms in Times of Crisis

### Franciscus Titelmans's Relecture of the Psalms in the Context of Humanism and Reformations

#### Abstract:

This article analyses Franciscus Titelmans's commentary on the psalms. It seeks to demonstrate how the Franciscan exegete used some psalms to interpret the crisis of the Church resulting from humanism and evangelical reformations. It outlines his argumentation and shows the crucial elements of pre-modern exegetical method to which Titelmans adhered.

#### Keywords:

Franciscus Titelmans | Erasmus | biblical humanism | psalms | history of exegesis

In times of crisis the Church often turned to the Bible, her fundamental text, to find answers for the present state of matters. This is perhaps truer for the 16<sup>th</sup> century than for any other period in history. Not only was the 16<sup>th</sup> century crisis of the Church arguably one of the most profound that the Christian Community has ever faced but it was also the most markedly 'biblical' period in the Church's history. Humanists, Erasmus par excellence, sought in the Bible roots and means for the moral reform of the Church; Evangelical reformers, starting with Martin Luther, inspected the Scriptures to correct the doctrinal errors of the 'Roman harlot', while their Catholic counterparts sought in sacred texts both arguments to defend the Church's teachings and tools to confront the abuses. In this short paper we shall briefly present the *relecture* of the Psalms by Franciscus Titelmans, a pre-Tridentine catholic exegete.

Franciscus Titelmans was born in 1502 in Hasselt, nowadays Belgium, and from 1517 studied at Leuven<sup>1</sup>. He first lived in the Standonckhuis, an offspring of the Parisian College de Montaigu, which cultivated the ideals of *devotio moderna*<sup>2</sup>.

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1 There is only one scholarly biography of Titelmans: Alfons Paquay, *Frans Tittelmans van Hasselt (Franciscus Tittelmannus Hasselensis): Opzoekingen over zijn leven, zijne werken en zijne familie* (Hasselt: Boek-en Steendrukkerij M. Ceysens, 1906).

2 Paolo Sartori, "Frans Titelmans, the Congregation of Montaigu, and Biblical Scholarship", in: *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus*, ed. Erika Rummel (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 215–223.



There he imbibed the spirit of austerity and developed an admiration for the tradition that characterised this institution. His masters included Jacques Masson, a leading conservative theologian from Leuven<sup>3</sup>. However, his education was not without humanist elements, for the Leuven house of Montaigu was more open to the ‘new learning’ than its motherhouse. For a time, Latin was taught there by Adrianus Barlandus, a leading Flemish Latinist of the age<sup>4</sup>. In 1523 Titelmans joined observant Franciscans in Leuven and continued his education at the Franciscan *studium*. There he met Amandus of Zierikzee, a biblical scholar well-versed in ancient languages (Greek, Hebrew and even Aramaic) and an admirer of Erasmus<sup>5</sup>. After his death, Titelmans succeeded him in as a lecturer in the Holy Scriptures, an office he held until 1536 when he completely abandoned intellectual pursuits, walked barefoot to Rome and joined the Capuchin reform of the order. The new life proved too severe for his delicate health and led to an untimely death only 14 months later<sup>6</sup>.

The commentary on the Psalms, which is the subject of this paper, was one of the fruits of Titelmans’s lectures. This sizeable work, of over 900 pages, was published in Antwerp in 1531, with an imperial grace and privilege<sup>7</sup>. It was re-published 22 times in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Antwerp, Paris, Lyon, Cologne and Venice<sup>8</sup>. At the time of the publication, Titelmans was already relatively well known due to his previous polemic concerning new translations of the Bible, directed against Erasmus of Rotterdam and other humanists<sup>9</sup>. This, perhaps somewhat unjustly, located him in the camp of opponents of the ‘new learning’<sup>10</sup>. Unsurprisingly, his commentary on Psalms was derided by Erasmus as well as by Johannes Campensis, who, in a

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3 Gilbert Tournoy, “Jacobus Latomus of Cambron”, in: *Contemporaries of Erasmus. A Biographical Register of The Renaissance and Reformation*, eds. Peter G. Bietenholz, Thomas B. Deutscher, vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 304–306.

4 Henry de Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517–1550*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l’Université, Bureaux du Recueil, 1951), 226–227.

5 Benjamin de Troeyer, “Amandus van Zierikzee”, *Franciscana* 20 (1965): 14–19.

6 Mariano D’Alatri, “Francesco Tittelmans o del lavoro mauale”, in: *Santi e Santità nell’ordine Capucino*, ed. Mariano D’Alatri, vol. 1 (Roma: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1980), 7–19.

7 Franciscus Titelmans, *Elucidatio in omnes psalmos. Elucidatio canticorum ferialium. Annotationes ex hebraeo* (Antwerpen: Martinus de Keyser, 1531).

8 Benjamin de Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia Franciscana Neerlandica saeculi XVI* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1969), 96.

9 Franciscus Titelmans, *Collationes quinque super epistolam ad Romanos Beati Pauli Apostoli* (Antwerpen: Willem Vorsterman, 1529); On the controversy see: Paolo Sartori, “La Controversia Neotestamentaria Tra Frans Titelmans ed Erasmo da Rotterdam (1527–1530 CA.): Linee di Sviluppo e Contenuti”, *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 52 (2003): 77–135.

10 Cf. Jerry H. Bentley, “New Testament Scholarship at Louvain in the Early Sixteenth Century”, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 2 (1979): 78; Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 206–207.

letter to Jan Dantyszek, claimed that the Franciscan was completely ignorant of the biblical languages that he boasted to have studied<sup>11</sup>. Yet this testimony must be read in the light of the heated controversy, all the more given the fact that Campensis blamed Titelmans for the failure to have his own paraphrases of Psalms published.

The commentary covered the entire psalter as well as several biblical canticles used in liturgy, such as *Benedictus* and *Magnificat*. Each psalm was explained in three sections. First Titelmans offered an *argumentum*, that is a brief summary of the content of the Psalm in which he also outlined the main line of interpretation. Then followed the *elucidatio*, that is a paraphrase of the text. The Latin text of the Psalter was given in a column on the left accompanied with Titelmans's explanations on the right. The paraphrase included an element of interpretation and numerous references to other biblical passages. The most interesting part of the commentary were annotations that followed the paraphrase. These explained some grammatical difficulties, clarified rhetorical figures, responded to theological questions arising from the text and proposed alternative interpretations to those offered in the *elucidatio*. Although Titelmans did not follow a typically scholastic pattern of *quaestio*, with a thesis, arguments to the contrary and a response to them, still his annotations have a fairly scholastic air to them. Philological questions were treated rather superficially here, because the Franciscan relegated all such matters to the sizeable appendix, entitled: 'Annotationes ex Hebraeo atque Chaldeo in omnes Psalmos'. In some editions it is missing, while on the other hand it was also occasionally printed as a separate work. It was the most philological part of the commentary, offering an extensive discussion on all verses, where the Vulgate departed significantly from the Hebrew original.

The very description of the nature of the commentary suggests that it contained both scholastic and humanist elements. On the one hand, Titelmans was very conservative and followed in his interpretations the Church Fathers as well as leading medieval authorities. He also used the Liturgy of the Church as an authoritative source for the explanation of some psalms<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, he used some contemporary authors such as Johannes Reuchlin, famous humanist Hebraist, and Felix Pratensis, Jewish convert who published a new Latin translation of the Psalter in 1515<sup>13</sup>.

Despite some philological expertise that he included in his commentary, it differed remarkably from works of contemporary humanists. Titelmans attributed a very limited role to philology in the interpretation of the Bible. According to him,

11 Henry de Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517–1550*, vol. 3 (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, Bureaux du Recueil, 1954), 152.

12 Titelmans, *Elucidatio in omnes psalmos*, fo. 9<sup>r</sup>; fo. 17<sup>r</sup>, fo. 36<sup>v</sup>, fo. 109<sup>v</sup>, fo. 113<sup>r</sup>.

13 Reuchlin's authority is invoked explicitly in Titelmans, *Elucidatio in omnes psalmos*, fo. 17<sup>r</sup>; Felix is cited multiple times, e. g.: fo. 28<sup>r</sup>; fo. 37<sup>r</sup>; fo. 72<sup>r</sup>.