

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Bishop László Varga, Vác, 30 June 2023,
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"We need someone who will shout a loud cry over the whole body of the Church - loud enough to wake up her children who sleep in her" (St Catherine of Siena)

1. To recognise the signs of the times

In this reflection I try to diagnose the signs of the times, without claiming to be exhaustive, and I invite you to conversion, to a change of perspective. And from the only true perspective, which is the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. As long as we do not look at our world, our Church, from this perspective, history is just a series of events, or „chronos”. However, if we approach it from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, then it becomes clear that what we are living in is „kairos”, that is, the history of salvation, which has purpose and meaning in every respect.

1.1 There is a spiritual warfare

The real enemy, of whom the world is unaware, is the Evil One („diabolos” means the one who scatters), whose identity is to create chaos, to create and maintain division. Against this, only the spiritual weapons, which St. Paul describes in detail in his letter to the Ephesians, are effective (cf. Ephesians 6, 10-18).

1.1.1.1 The Diabolos created chaos against the moral order

The first step was to eliminate God from history, constitution, education and culture. But a human-centred world without God becomes inhuman. A prime example of this is the transformation of the slogans of the French Revolution: freedom into licentiousness, equality into unequal market competition, fraternity into brutality! The second step was to impose on us, almost unnoticed, from below, through the media, the dictatorship of relativism. There is no longer any absolute truth above us, because everything is relative. Instead of a moral order, there is a moral "board game" in which everyone is right and must be respected.

1.1.2 The Diabolos has created chaos in all areas of life

Pope John Paul II called our age the civilisation of death, because we attack life from conception to old age. Meanwhile, from young children to adults, we question the identity and gender of man and woman.

The sexual revolution, too, has served this; its consequences have been the spread of pornography, violence, drugs, AIDS, and the legalisation of abortion and euthanasia. The aim is to turn young people into a mass driven by their needs and instincts, so that they can be manipulated.

In the meantime, gender propaganda is using every possible means to institutionally influence the sexual orientation of children and to sensitise them to same-sex partnerships. I would very much like to emphasise that, while I am talking about this, I am not condemning any of those who are affected in these areas! I do not want to evaluate individuals or young people, but I want to evaluate the situation, the social symptoms!

"You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:13). This statement of Jesus is an invitation to solidarity, to unity, to joining hands of Christians and the religions, because only together, in unity, can we help effectively.

1.2 There is a worldwide emergency

Ecological emergency: the alteration and destruction of nature. Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si*, which is not a 'green' encyclical, but a social encyclical based on a 'green' reality, the protection of the created world, speaks prophetically about this.

A pandemic: the pandemic which, according to WHO data, has resulted in nearly 7 million deaths as of June 2023.

A flood of refugees: according to UN data, the number of our fellow human beings who were forced to leave their homes because their lives were in danger was 108.4 million (and the number is rising), of which 21.8 million refugees arrived in the EU, by the end of 2022.

It's easy to feel fear and dread when we see and hear this. Yet Jesus says, "Do not be afraid" (Mt 10,28). Every crisis is an invitation to seek and witness to the kingdom of God and its truth (cf. Mt 6,33).

1.3 Europe is also in crisis

When King Belshazzar desecrated the sacred vessels of the temple in Jerusalem, a text appeared on the wall during a feast: "Mené tekel parsin", meaning "you have been weighed and found light", the Bishop of Prague Petr Pit'Ha quotes the words of the Book of Daniel.

He says that the EU has not learned from its own history and has been tested and found light. It obeys to "faceless titans" who give instructions from behind the scenes! To people who only care about money and power. And those who stand in the way of this, Christians and nation-states, are openly persecuted.

The Jesuit Henry Boulad also argues that the EU has been left without a compass because it has denied its Judeo-Christian roots and questioned its own identity.

Pope Francis also says Europe needs help, it needs to be saved. This requires dialogue: each country has its own identity, its own richness, cultural, national, historical, artistic wealth, but it must be integrated through dialogue.

1.4 The Church is also in a difficult situation

1.4.1 There is both a hidden and an open persecution of Christians

The mildest, most attractive but worst manifestation of the persecution of Christians coming from below is the new global ethic. Dangerous because it does not appear to be persecution, and even uses Christian terms but it gives them a different meaning. This ethic is what Pope Benedict XVI calls the ethic of the wolf in sheep's clothing.

The most fundamental point of global ethics is that there is no objective truth! The highest value is the individual's freedom of choice, which is above all laws, including natural law, and above all authority, even divine revelation. Hence the personalized "private and mixed religion", with a little Buddhism, a little yoga, and a little of the gospel in it. Hence, everyone is free to choose their own gender. They also have the right to abortion, homosexuality, 'free love', euthanasia, rejection of authority and hierarchy. The most important value is the freedom of the individual. Everything else is relative.

It would be naïve to think that all this is not present in the Church, because we breathe the same spiritual air through the media, the kids who learn religion, the church-going faithful, and the priests and religious alike.

Christianity today is the first among the persecuted religions. In the Western world, religious freedom is more or less guaranteed, but barely a quarter of Christians live in a developed democracy. Meanwhile, totalitarian regimes and extremist religious ideologies make all efforts at eliminating the teachings of the Bible and persecuting its followers.

There is no bloody persecution of Christians in the West. In Europe, it is manifested in the culture war, which means that the law is being used as a tool for religious persecution and the oppression of Christians. Without the use of physical violence, Christians are being forced into behaviours that are incompatible with the moral principles of their religion.

According to Prof. Thomas Schirrmacher, certain movements are still trying to bring the churches to their knees. They do not target Islam, which is clearly seeking political power, nor the Islamic minority who openly resort to violence to achieve their goals, but Christians. While in Europe, we are spending millions to combat Islamophobia.

Since the Constantinian turn in the 4th century, all political powers have tried to make the churches their allies, or, if that did not work, to persecute them. A few decades ago, the 3 principles of the communist power were in force in our country: support – tolerate - forbid. In the dictatorship, the clerical peace movement and the practice of displacements and executions were all present. The state supported the priests of the peace movement. It tolerated those priests who were willing to go to peace meetings. It attacked and persecuted those who did not go or did not cooperate.

After the fall of Communism, the tanks were replaced by banks! Another persecution, only in a different form, which does not seem destructive at all. We are now in danger of being seen by the state as a business: supporting churches seems like good investment, but an investments always ha a "price"! We may be expected to support, implicitly or explicitly, the policies of those in power. And it is difficult to influence the conscience of creditors!

The most important instrument of open persecution is gender mainstreaming. It is a new global ideology aimed at creating a new type of man. Older people still remember the "Übermensch", the socialist type of man, and the new man of the new age. Now there is the new gender-man, whose essential characteristic is that the individual, freed from all moral norms, is 'free' to define and live out his or her gender identity and sexual behaviour from childhood onwards. And no one has the right to interfere in this, least of all the churches.

There is open persecution of the church by gay pride, by Pride, in which homosexuality is presented as a normal alternative, and which is increasingly being pushed in various forms and with violence around the world. An example of this is the statement by the Archbishop of Ghana, who said: 'Europe is betraying Africa which has become Christian! - Either we accept and legalise same-sex marriage, or the UN and the World Bank will not give money for development and healing. They are demanding women's right to abortion, therefore many young people are being attracted to Boko Haram because it is the guardian of our morality.'

Also according to Prof. Thomas Schirrmacher, another accepted form of the open persecution of the church is the criminalisation of resistance. A new buzzword is becoming a legal fact in order to criminalise resistance, and that word is: homophobia. 'Homophobes' (i.e. Christians) should be criminalised just as much as racists, anti-Semites and xenophobes. This is the purpose of anti-discrimination laws and hate speech laws, which already exist in many countries and are being fought for to be enacted everywhere.

The list goes on and on, with new events occurring almost daily and escalating in an ever stronger way. There is a spiritual battle and the evil one always wants a "carnival", something spectacular, something impressive.

This is the message of the Lord: 'Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed at this great multitude, for it is not you who must fight against them, but God' (2 Chronicles 20:15). Elsewhere we read that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against him' (Matthew 16:18). Fear not - Jesus has promised so and will keep his promises.

1.4.2. The signs of the times include the internal crisis of the Church

We are unable to believe the promises of Jesus, "I am with you always" (Mt 28,20) and "without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15,5), and to believe in them in the midst of our failures and troubles. It seems impossible for us to connect the kingdom of God that has come, to connect our life in Jesus Christ and his being in us, with what we are experiencing or going through.

God asks us to have faith. The Church is suffering from a crisis of faith. In every Holy Mass, we say: 'Behold, the holy mystery of our faith'. After the transsubstantiation we do not rely on our experiences, our feelings, our knowledge, but on our faith. But in our everyday life we believe in what we see, what we feel, what we know. We want to control the reality of faith, of revelation, with science, with the reality of the psyche, and not vice versa, to control the reality of the psyche through the reality of the Holy Spirit. This crisis of faith is also at the bottom of most cases of leaving the priesthood or the vocation.

The other great crisis of the Church is the crisis of hope, expressed by the Emmaus disciples in this little phrase: "while we hoped that" (Lk 24,21). We are so exhausted by our daily lives, so preoccupied with our psycho-physical condition, that we fail to see the true hope of salvation and eternal life. We are not looking to Heaven. Neither in our preaching, nor in our teaching, nor in our own thoughts is the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven a factor.

It is hardly ever heard of. But we do hear a lot about the things of the world. We feverishly guard our dreams, illusions and ideologies. We get caught up in making our plans come true, and when things don't turn out as we had hoped, even in the smallest way, we become hysterical, depressed or aggressive.

The crisis of love is also present in the Church "If you had been here... then..." (John 11:21), say Martha and Mary to Jesus, who had allowed their brother to die. It is easy for us too to imagine that God must do what we think, what we want for ourselves, for our families, our Church, our society, because if He does not, He is not loving and He is not Love. When this suspicion seems to be confirmed, we argue, we complain, and the first thing we do is stop praying.

Among the sufferings of the Church is the struggle of the traditionalists against the implementation of the Synod (2nd Vatican). The synod, according to them, has plunged the Church into a deep crisis under the pretext of "aggiornamento", or opening. The most condemned texts are the *Lumen Gentium*, about the Church, which proclaims episcopal collegiality, as well as the declarations on non-Christian religions and religious freedom.

Their condemnations do not spare the present Pope. The traditionalists are quite open in their criticism and opposition to the Pope, to the point of having called for Pope Francis to resign.

Pope Francis's definite intention is to clean up the Vatican Bank's finances (to stop money laundering, to stop money meant for charity from disappearing). He did not start this, his predecessors did. St John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Pope Francis took a very strong stand against the power of mammon (the idolisation of money), which provoked unprecedented opposition in the Vatican.

This includes the paedophile scandals that rocked the whole Church. Pope Francis continued the work begun by his predecessors, but in a much more radical and consistent way. He wants to eradicate the culture of abuse, the culture of silence and the system of covering up whose hotbed he thinks is clericalism, the distorted notion of authority. According to this view, the priestly figure is indisputable and unquestionable. In the teaching of Vatican II, the priesthood's task is to serve the sanctification of the members of the body. Its mission is not to rule, but to serve! "We note with shame that by our way of life we have refuted and we still refute what we have spoken with our lips."

The sign of the crisis is the "dream" of a prosperous Church. A theology of prosperity, the essence of which is that God wants his followers to live in material abundance, to be physically healthy and to be happy all the time! This theology is in direct opposition to the mystery of the cross, to Jesus' teaching on the dangers of wealth, and also to his own death, to the taking up of the cross daily.

A particular difficulty for our Church is the delay of evangelisation, both outwardly and inwardly. According to Pope Francis, every baptised Catholic is a missionary. They must be disciples of Jesus and they have a mission. We cannot shift this responsibility to priests, religious, or to teachers of the faith.

The internal difficulty of the Church is the neglect of the prophetic mission. Only those who open themselves to the surprises of God can become prophets. An obstacle of this is individualistic Christianity and the practice of the church as a service provider. What we need today are true prophets: not those who promise the impossible, but those who bear witness by their lives that living the gospel is possible today.

1.5 Wake up!

Despite the fact that weeds and wheat are together, we Christians have not been sent to weed, but to be "the salt of the earth, the light of the world" (cf. Mt 5,13)!

Time to wake up! The attack is directed against the very foundations of Christianity, against the identity of man as created by God to his own image. If gender becomes mainstream, it will do everything in its power to make Christianity disappear. The process is at an advanced stage.

We have spent too much time "putting out fires", succumbing for too long to the falsified phrases of freedom, tolerance and anti-discrimination. Everywhere, these slogans serve to prepare the ground for slavery, to abolish freedom of expression and religion, and to exclude all opposition.

We must take up the spiritual fight alongside the resistance, with spiritual weapons. Jesus says: "The hireling flees because he is a hireling, but the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep if necessary! The current situation in the Church, in Europe and in the world, is very suitable for this.

The spiritual battle today is a battle of loyalty. Fidelity to God, fidelity to our humanity, to the Church and to one another.

2. OPEN SPEECH ON SATAN

Jesus Christ came to awaken faith in the Father's love for us and to defeat Satan, who regularly questions the Giver and His gifts. Because we dare not believe that God's love is a free, unconditional, irrevocable, priceless and unpayable gift, we are like leaves blown to and fro by the wind. As fatherless orphaned children, we can do no more than constantly quarrel, hate and hurt each other.

With the development of scientific thinking, Satan has also managed to make Christians believe that he does not exist, or if he does, that he is in fact a mythological figure. And that those who are clearly suffering the consequences of his work need only be sent for psychiatric treatment, but certainly not deliverance or exorcism.

2.1 Silence about Satan

What happened? The enlightened man is less vigilant and even less humble as he is not willing to examine anything except through the lenses of his knowledge and science, even that which is clearly a secret of faith. Also in the thinking of Christians, rationality, knowledge

and science have been placed above all else, even above divine revelation. That which is not rational, that is, which cannot be explained by reason, has been relegated to the irrational realm, which is meaningless and incomprehensible. Yet medieval man knew that knowledge, science, was only the handmaiden of faith. He was able to admit with humility that he could not grasp everything in the world through science. He accepted that beyond the rational there was not the irrational, but the mystery of faith, the supernatural.

Related to this thinking is the separation of the supernatural and the natural order of being. In other words, the kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, is a distant, remote reality and only after death, in the afterlife, is it a factor - here in this world, there are different rules of the game.

Rational theology has banished demons into mythology. As the science of psychology and psychiatry has developed, we Christians have also tended to explain demonic activity in terms of neurological and mental confusion. However, the reality of demons does not bother if we say goodbye to them as figments of the brain. In fact, by doing so we do them the greatest service.

Even today, many in the church are allergic to the subject of Satan because they have accepted a convenient explanation: that Satan is merely the total sum of human evil. Pope St Paul VI dared to warn us that Satan exists - but his warning caused outrage even in church circles - "what medieval thinking!", - even the faithful and theologians were embarrassed and explaining: the Pope meant the existence of Satan "only symbolically..."

Our faith has become pathological. We pretend that something does not exist, when we just don't have the stomach to face reality and accept the consequences. The victory of Christ on the cross and the power he gave us over Satan has lost its power in us. Christianity has become a religion of mediocrity, both Christ himself and the gospel have been 'domesticated', tamed, made manageable for ourselves.

And yet, already at the moment of baptism, the Church asks us to make a choice: will we say no to Satan, to all his works and to all his temptations, so that we may live in the freedom of the children of God? It is only after we have said no, that the Church asks us if we believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The two questions are complementary and closely related.

Since our baptism, we have to decide daily between the two dominions, the kingdom of God and the dominion of Satan. Because we do not decide, we do not choose, and therefore we give ourselves over to a much greater fear. The result here is the same as in psychology, if we suppress something in the subconscious: it causes neurosis and all kinds of psychological disturbances. So too the devil, rejected by reason, creates all kinds of spiritual neuroses in the modern psyche: fear, anxiety and guilt.

Having been banished from theology and religion, Satan has returned through superstition. Perhaps never before has humanity been so superstitious as in the modern, scientific, technologically advanced, industrialized world. There are so many enlightened intellectuals who seek contact with witches, spiritualists, horoscopes, amulets and even satanic cults.

Something similar happened in our time to what St Paul wrote to the Romans: While they claimed to be wise, in fact they were growing so stupid ²³ that they exchanged the [glory](#) of the immortal [God](#) for an imitation, for the image of a mortal human being, or of birds, or

animals, or crawling things. ... Since they would not consent to acknowledge God, [God](#) abandoned them to their unacceptable thoughts and indecent behaviour. " (Rom 1:22-23, 28). The situation does not seem to have changed much.

2.2.

The Capuchin Father Rainero Cantalamessa, who is the orator of the Pontifical House, gave a talk with the title "The Royal Unction". He begins by quoting St Catherine of Siena: "We need someone to make a great cry over the whole body of the Church - great enough to wake up her children who sleep in her."

"The hour has come for us to awake from sleep" (Rom 13:11). The devil exists, and more than ever, he is "full of wrath" against the saints. He is using all his power, but he feels he has little time, so he reacts violently when he hears the cry, "The day of the marriage of the Lamb has come. His bride is prepared." (Rev 19:7)

Satan uses as his argument, certain trends in modern theology, studies that fill volumes. They are a waste of the Church's time and energy, while the real war is much deeper, with the same aim from the beginning: to separate man from God.

Why are so few people aware of this great battle that is being waged against the Church? Why do so few hear "the roaring of the lion that prowls around" (cf. 1Pet 5:8)? Because our scholars and theologians look for the devil in books – while the devil is only interested in souls, especially souls who take the Gospel seriously.

The main evidence of Satan's existence, says Father Cantalamessa, is not to be found among sinners, but in the saints, for in them the devil's work is seen in contrast, like black on white. An atheist and secularised culture cannot be expected to believe in the existence of evil, since it knows only the cultural, religious and ethnographic tradition about him, and regards it as a medieval, obscure, dark and confused thing. Only by leaving the academic world and entering the world of souls and the heart of God's kingdom can we change our view of evil!

2.2.1 Spirit in the air, the atmosphere of evil

St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "when you were living by the principles of this world, obeying the ruler who dominates the air, the [spirit](#) who is at work in those who rebel." (Eph 2,2). What is this spirit that rules in the air that St Paul is talking about? According to Father Cantalamessa, it is the atmosphere of evil in our time.

Satan's most effective spiritual atmosphere in which he lives and works, in which he exerts his influence on people, is the spirit of the age. Something that everyone takes for granted. People generally dare not defy what the zeitgeist dictates. The hidden lord of Evil is hiding in this spiritual air, which he controls, and presents the world and existence from his own point of view.

2.5 Discernment of souls

"My dear friends, not every [spirit](#) is to be trusted, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). To discern the spirits, Cantalamessa recommends the following.

Is it necessary to discern whether all that is considered good is of God (for example, the theology of the priestly peace movement in the previous (communist) regime, or the theology of gaining, in our days.

Is it also necessary to distinguish whether what appears to be evil (suffering, cross, sacrifice) comes from the evil one.

Is it also necessary to distinguish whether what we experience comes from God, from the human psyche or from evil? It is a great difference if I am terribly angry because I have not had enough rest and just need to sleep, or because the demon of anger is playing tricks on me.

It's easy to fall into the trap of blaming all our faults on the devil, without taking seriously the evil that has taken root in all of us, and not fighting it hard enough.

It is also disturbing in Catholic Christian circles to look for Satan everywhere and to discover his workings in everything.

"Be sober and watch out!" (1Pet 5,8)

We need to discern things, because healthy discernment also prevents us from painting a false and harsh picture of Satan, which is then too easily swept aside by today's demythologized society

Satan is not a person in the sense that man or the Logos is a person, but it is a spiritual being with intelligence and will.

He is the accuser, the father of lies, and the murderer! Where accusation is present, we have given room to Satan. Wherever lying is present in our lives, even hidden lying, we have given room to Satan. Where we destroy life in any form, Satan is free to run around.

Just as the Holy Spirit expresses himself through feelings, intelligence, and will, so does Satan. Outside of his own world, Satan has a parasitic existence, he must be connected to something or someone in order to express his activity. He can connect with the spiritual capabilities of people without touching the inside of our souls, as we see in the lives of the saints. It can also operate in the physical world, and it can also connect with objects, even to sacred objects that are considered divine.

Something we rarely think about. St. John makes it clear in the book of Revelation that Satan can also relate to the world of politics. He can infuse the circles, holders and ways of political power with his own lust for power because he puts his own soul into them. Can we look at today's political reality with this prophetic eye? Many things we have got used to would show their true, satanic face.

Father Cantalamessa draws our attention to two more important aspects of the distinction. First, Christ and Satan are not equally important, so it is not correct to say that we believe in the devil. We believe in God, in Jesus, in whom we entrust ourselves. We believe in the existence of the devil, but he is only an object of our belief, like hell or sin, but not its cause or purpose, and we do not cultivate a personal relationship with him as we do with Jesus when we say we believe in Jesus.

The second point is that God and the devil are not two parallel, eternal, independent beings, as we see in dualistic religions. We know from the Bible that the devil is God's creation turned evil. Everything he has, in a positive sense, comes from God: his power, which he then used for evil, his free will, which he used to become independent of God. He also wants to separate us from the Holy One through our free will.

2.6 Spiritual warfare

What was Jesus' spiritual warfare? His constant dependence on the Father, while breaking the power of the enemy. He won where man lost: in the area of free will!

The spiritual warfare of God's children, following Jesus' example, is to be free to cooperate with God in every situation. And this requires us to make a constant choice between light and darkness, life or death, dependence on the Father or independence from him. The struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual powers of the heavenly heights.

It all began with our baptism. God our Father " He has rescued us from the ruling force of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son that he loves, " (Col 1:13). Through our baptism we have been given the royal, priestly and prophetic dignity of Christ. Hence the need to proclaim boldly that the Christian life is a choice between two kingdoms.

Let us proclaim with the Spirit and with power that Jesus Christ was victorious on the cross, and therefore he is the only Lord, and that we need not fear demons: "you have overcome them, for greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

As the struggle continues and Satan seems to be winning, the Church announces the victory: 'Salvation and power and empire for ever have been won by our God, and all authority for his Christ, now that the accuser, who accused our brothers day and night before our God, has been brought down. They have triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb.' (Rev 12:10-11).

Thank you for listening!