

## **The Use and Abuse of Narrative: Restoring Empathy through the Homily**

### ***El uso y abuso de la narrativa: Restaurar la empatía a través de la homilía***

**Stuart Patrick Chalmers**

Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca  
spchalmers@upsa.es  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8698-3519>

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*Abstract:* Recent atrocities perpetrated in Ukraine have been declared both a "liberation" and a "genocide". As well as narrative being used in politics as a call to action, religious narrative can either challenge or support injustice. This article aims to explore the misuse of narrative in the homily to justify violence or aggression against an 'Other'. This will then allow us to examine the question of empathy in preaching so that we feel with the heart of Christ.

*Keywords:* Bernard of Clairvaux, Empathy, Homily, Jozef Tiso, Narrative, Patriarch Kirill, Vladimir Putin, War in Ukraine.

*Resumen:* Las recientes atrocidades perpetradas en Ucrania han sido declaradas tanto una «liberación» como un «genocidio». Al igual de la narrativa que se usa en política como una apelación a la acción, la narrativa religiosa puede, a su vez, tanto desafiar como apoyar la injusticia. Este artículo tiene como objetivo explorar el mal uso de la narrativa en las homilías para justificar la violencia o la agresión contra el "Otro". Esto nos permitirá a renglón seguido examinar la cuestión de la empatía en la predicación, para mover-nos a sentir con el corazón de Cristo.

*Palabras clave:* Bernardo de Clairaval, empatía, guerra en Ucrania, homilía, Jozef Tiso, narrativa, Patriarca Kirill, Vladimir Putin..

## 1. Introduction

In recent times we have been shocked and appalled at the atrocities perpetrated in Ukraine, as Russian forces at the command of President Vladimir Putin have invaded neighbouring sovereign territory and laid it waste, leaving thousands dead and millions displaced and homeless. The world has looked on in horror as footage from mobile phones or the cameras of journalists have clearly shown missiles striking civilian targets, such as hospitals, apartments, and children's playgrounds, all in the name of liberation.

It is hard to see how indiscriminate killing and destruction on such a massive scale can be understood as "liberating" people from the threat of "genocide", or that the "special military operation" has the purpose of "helping and saving people", as well as "taking measures to ensure the security of Russia itself"<sup>2</sup>. And yet, for a significant proportion of the Russian population, this is exactly what it is perceived to be, owing to repeated message they have received from state media, and the restriction of other dissenting sources of news<sup>3</sup>.

Putin used extreme rhetoric to justify an extreme and outrageous action: the invasion of foreign territory and the killing of innocent lives. Many individuals and institutions have condemned the war —a term deliberately avoided by Putin, and banned in Russia<sup>4</sup>— with 141 of the 193 member states of the United Nations voting against it<sup>5</sup>. Pope Francis described the "massacre" of the innocent as an unacceptable "barbarity"<sup>6</sup>. Upon seeing the devastation first-hand, António Guterres, the UN Secretary General, described the "war on Ukraine" as "senseless in its scope, ruthless in its dimensions and limitless in its potential for global harm"<sup>7</sup>. The mass graves of executed civilians discovered in Bucha and other cities have been condemned by the world as war crimes on

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<sup>1</sup> P. Kirby, "Donbas: Why Russia is trying to encircle Ukraine's East", 4 May 2022. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60938544>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>2</sup> BBC Report, "Ukraine war: Putin vows to continue invasion until 'noble' aims met", 12 April 2022. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61077648>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>3</sup> V. Shevchenko, "Media in Russia: How do Russians get news about the war in Ukraine?", 30 March 2022. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60932542>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>4</sup> A. Roth, "'Don't Call it war': propaganda filters the truth about Ukraine on Russian media", 26 February 2022. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/26/propaganda-filters-truth-ukraine-war-russian-media>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>5</sup> J. Borger, "UN votes to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and calls for withdrawal", 2 March 2022. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/02/united-nations-russia-ukraine-vote>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Angelus Speech*, 13 March 2022. <<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2022/documents/20220313-angelus.html>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>7</sup> A. Guterres, "Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council on Ukraine", 5 May 2022. <<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2022-05-05/remarks-the-security-council-ukraine%C2%A0>>. [accessed 9 May 2022].

a vast scale, while the Kremlin has declared them to be "staged"<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile, Putin awarded medals to Russian troops who had fought in Bucha<sup>9</sup>, and Patriarch Kirill, by his preaching and blessing of generals, lent his support to the conflict<sup>10</sup>.

Guterres, when negotiating humanitarian corridors for the safe evacuation of starving civilians from Mariupol, stated that there were "two positions" of the conflict<sup>11</sup>. The language was carefully chosen to avoid being inflammatory. Clearly the events of the invasion are being perceived in different ways, but underneath there remains the question of objective truth, however the actions might be interpreted. Truth can be revealed or obscured by an overarching narrative which is presented to encapsulate the nature of what is happening. For the Ukrainians, the narrative is that it is "a war that we didn't start, and we didn't want"<sup>12</sup>. For Putin and his followers, whatever the real motive, the narrative being presented is that the fighting in Ukraine is a "liberation of Donetsk and Luhansk" from "Nazi leadership" and for the purposes of "defending the Motherland"<sup>13</sup>. Narrative is hugely powerful; coupled with nationalist language it can be explosive.

Narrative can whip up a crowd into a frenzy or carry people along with an ideology whose excesses end in fearful atrocities. Narrative can also draw out the best in people, as they respond to reports of people's self-sacrifice or stories of those in need. Thus, narrative is a powerful tool to be wielded with prudence and skill. While it is used greatly in the political arena, it is also used extensively in the context of the Church, particularly in the homily, as fundamentally the homily is a narrative by form, as the message is shared with the congregation<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, "the liturgical proclamation of the word of God,

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<sup>8</sup> BBC Reality Check Team, "Bucha killings: Satellite image of bodies site contradicts Russian claims", 11 April 2022. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/60981238>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>9</sup> T. Kingsley, "Putin awards medals to soldiers accused of Bucha massacre as victims buried in mass graves", 19 April 2022. <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-war-putin-medals-bucha-b2060568.html>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>10</sup> J. Whalen, "Russian Orthodox leader backs war, divides faith", 18 April 2022. <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/18/russian-orthodox-church-ukraine-war/>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>11</sup> A. Guterres, "Secretary-General's opening remarks at press encounter with Russian Foreign Minister", 26 April 2022. <<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/sp/peeches/2022-04-26/remarks-press-encounter-russian-foreign-minister>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>12</sup> PA Media, "Thirteen days of struggle: Zelenskiy's speech to UK Parliament - transcript," 8 March 2022. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/thirteen-days-of-struggle-volodymyr-zelenskiys-speech-to-uk-parliament-transcript>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>13</sup> H. Ellyatt, "Putin blames the West for Ukraine war in 'Victory Day' speech," 9 May 2022. <<https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/09/putin-blames-the-west-for-ukraine-war-in-victory-day-speech.html>>. [accessed 13 May 2022].

<sup>14</sup> E. L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Beat: Why All Sermons Are Narrative*, Nashville 2012, 1, 16.

especially in the eucharistic assembly, is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as a dialogue between God and his people, a dialogue in which the great deeds of salvation are proclaimed and the demands of the Covenant are continually restated"<sup>15</sup>. Thus, the homily is not simply an occasion of dogmatic teaching (*fides quae*), but of encouraging our living out that faith in our union with Christ (*fides qua*) through carrying out "the demands of the Covenant" into which we have been incorporated through our Baptism. These demands have far-reaching social implications, as Pope Francis emphasizes:

Reading the Scriptures also makes it clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of "charity à la carte", or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4,43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society (EG 180).

The preacher should have an eye on the "signs of the times" (GS 4), and an "ear to the people [...] to discover what it is that the faithful need to hear" (EG 154). This is a "spiritual sensitivity for reading God's message in events" (EN 76) and communicating that message so that the People of God responds. It is clear that "the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics" (DCE 28a). However, while "the Church cannot and must not replace the State" (DCE 28a), this does not mean that the Church has no role to play in the challenges of society. Far from it. Indeed, the Church "cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice" (DCE 28a). The homily can play an important part in animating solidarity with those in need. However, while the tool of narrative in a homily can be used to great effect, it can also cause much damage, and the history of the Church presents us with examples of both. Religion can be instrumentalized as a political weapon by using it to provide a narrative which justifies injustice,<sup>16</sup> and the key context for this is the homily, along with speeches and pastoral letters. George Demacopoulos, of Fordham University, is recently quoted as saying that Putin is an "instrumentalizer of religion", in that, "rather than looking to religion as a guide to action, [...] he attacked Ukraine and then invoked Christianity to justify the invasion as an act

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<sup>15</sup> St John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, (31 May 1998), 41. <[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1998/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_05071998\\_dies-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_05071998_dies-domini.html)>. [accessed 14 May 2022].

<sup>16</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World - Assessment and Forecast*, trans. B. McNeil, San Francisco 1994, 169-170.

of holy war"<sup>17</sup>. Much to the concern of many in Russia and around the world, this rhetoric has also found a home in preaching.

Clearly, there are marked differences in the nature of preaching in different locations, as well as in different historical periods of the Church, and this should be taken into account. However, while acknowledging the differences and influences of historical context and rhetorical form, one can nonetheless identify the threads of misuse of preaching to promote violence in certain cases. With this in mind, let us explore some examples of the use or misuse of narrative in the homily to justify violence. This analysis will then allow us to examine the question of empathy in preaching so that we feel with the heart of Christ.

## 2. Preaching War: Narrative Supporting Military Action

### 2.1. Bernard of Clairvaux and the Second Crusade

In the Western Church of the Middle Ages, preaching formed "the principal means of mass communication [...] for the doctrinal and moral catechesis of the clergy and the laity"<sup>18</sup>. It then also became the "principle means by which the Church recruited and organized people for each major crusading expedition"<sup>19</sup>. Although Pope Urban II's own sermon at the Council of Clermont was highly effective in recruiting troops to the first crusade in 1095<sup>20</sup>, many of the subsequent popes delegated crusade preaching to the religious, primarily Cistercians in the Second Crusade, as most secular priests in parishes lacked both the education and the time to be able to accomplish the task<sup>21</sup>. Moreover,

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<sup>17</sup> P. Elie, "Long Holy War Behind Putin's Political War in Ukraine", (21 April 2022). <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-long-holy-war-behind-putins-political-war-in-ukraine>>. [accessed 14 May 2022]. Cf. C. Belton, *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took on the West*, London 2021, 442: "Most of this newfound religious zeal was in fact no more than cover. Inside Russia, the joining of Church and state was just another element of the erosion of any remnants of democracy".

<sup>18</sup> C. Georgiou, *Preaching the Crusades to the Eastern Mediterranean: Propaganda, Liturgy and Diplomacy, 1305-1352*, London 2018, 1.

<sup>19</sup> P. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades to the Holy Land, 1095-1270*, Cambridge, MS 1991, ix.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-36.

<sup>21</sup> C. Georgiou, *Preaching the Crusades...*, 2. This was later resolved by providing *exempla* or model crusader sermons using Scripture, folk tales, legends, miracles and other illustrations, so that "those who are not so well trained in sacred writings may consult these, as may those who, because they are prevented by other business or pressed by time, cannot find free time to think about and arrange that which they have to preach to others". See C.T. Maier. *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology: Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross*, Cambridge 2000, Kindle ed., locs. 199-203; C. Georgiou, *Preaching the Crusades...*, 6.

much of the preaching fell to a few charismatic and rhetorically gifted preachers, such that the personality of key figures had a huge influence on the success of the preaching<sup>22</sup>. The most prominent preacher during the Second Crusade was St Bernard of Clairvaux, as "Pope Eugene entrusted the business of preaching the Second Crusade almost entirely to the Cistercian" [...] when, in March 1146, the pope commissioned Bernard to preach the new crusade throughout France and Central Europe<sup>23</sup>.

What kind of narrative was used to spur people to recruit to take the cross and fight? Indeed, what kind of narrative would convince a saint of the Church to encourage others to fight and even to kill? Firstly, St Bernard only accepts violence in the case of defence of self or of the people, following the just war teaching of St Augustine<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, any passion for fighting should be controlled, and any unjust action avoided, since it is not only injurious to others, but damaging to the soul of the perpetrator<sup>25</sup>. Thus, Bernard says unjust warfare is a grave offence against God and against justice, and is an action which adds "sin to sin"<sup>26</sup>. In the light of the news of the Muslim invasion and fall of the County of Edessa, St Bernard sees the Second Crusade as "a war of self-defense [*sic*], and therefore a war to be conducted in the cause of justice"<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, these reports of the "evil times" were joined to the command to preach from Pope Eugene, and so he sees his preaching (and hence the Crusade itself) not as a rash venture, but as following God's command given through the pope<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, for Bernard, the cause is just, and so he calls for people to fight against the aggressors. His argumentation can be seen clearly in his *De Laude Novae Militiae*, an extended sermon written for the Knights Templar to exhort them to take up the just cause to fight against injustice, and to combat those associated (*ipsorum satellites*) with the princes of darkness (*tenebrarum principes*), whom Christ first came to the Holy Land to defeat. Quoting John 1,5, the Knights Templar are described as servants of the Light, likening them also, as heralds of the Light of salvation, to John the Baptist, through allusion to the Benedictus (Lk 1,68-79). They are *milites Christi*, a *militia*, and not a *malitia*.

<sup>22</sup> C. Georgiou, *Preaching the Crusades...*, 2; P. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades...*, 78.

<sup>23</sup> J. R. Sommerfeldt, "The Bernardine Reform and the Crusading Spirit", *The Catholic Historical Review* 86 (2000) 567-578, at 567; C. Georgiou, *Preaching the Crusades...*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> On waging war according to divine command, see St Augustine, *City of God*, I, 21.

<sup>25</sup> J. R. Sommerfeldt, "The Bernardine Reform...", 571-572; St Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood [De Laude Novae Militiae]*, trans. M. C. Greenia, Collegeville, MN 2008, 2.

<sup>26</sup> J. R. Sommerfeldt, "The Bernardine Reform...", 572, quoting Bernard's Letter to Louis VII, (Letter 220.2).

<sup>27</sup> J. R. Sommerfeldt, "The Bernardine Reform...", 573.

<sup>28</sup> St Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, trans. G. Lewis, Oxford 1908, II, 1.1.

Thus, the good Knight is not killing man, but evil. Indeed, "[f]or Bernard to kill without reason is *homicidium*; to kill for good reason is *malicidium*, the killing of evil"<sup>29</sup>. We can see, therefore, that the crusader narrative of Bernard is steeped in biblical allusion and patristic references, and "unrivalled" in "his skill and delicacy" in their use, his crusade writing provides an example of how down through the ages Scripture has been eloquently used to promote a cause<sup>30</sup>.

Sommerfeldt is careful to point out, however, that Bernard's main justification for accepting the killing is not because the invaders are Muslims, but because they have invaded, and hence threatened peace and justice, since the restoration of peace and justice is a "good work"<sup>31</sup>. Hence, Bernard writes:

I do not mean to say that the pagans are to be slaughtered if there is any other way to prevent them from harassing and persecuting the faithful. I mean only that it now seems better to strike them down than that the staff of sinners be lifted over the lot of the just [Ps 124,3]<sup>32</sup>.

And so, Bernard argues in favour of military action against *this* particular Muslim invasion<sup>33</sup>. This careful distinction is not found in later crusader preaching, which would stoke the excesses which Bernard sought to curb. We can see this in the prominent fourteenth century Dominican preacher Pierre de la Palud's admonition to all *crucesignatos* and *crucesignandos* (crusaders and would-be crusaders):

But against the enemies of the cross of Christ, who are above all infidels and most of all and particularly the Saracens, they [the crusaders] must be like a ferocious and wild bull brandishing its horns at Syria and Egypt and destroying the treacherous Mohammed and entirely extirpating his abominable people<sup>34</sup>.

Bernard's secondary motive was his concern for the plight of the Eastern Church facing the threat of the Saracens, and so the act of defence includes defending the Church<sup>35</sup>. Thus, he writes: "The Eastern Church now cries out in misery, so that whoever does not have complete compassion for her cannot be judged a true child of the Church"<sup>36</sup>. Later, Humbert of Romans in one of his

<sup>29</sup> J. R. Sommerfeldt, 'The Bernardine Reform...', 571.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. H. Wansbrough, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible: A Brief History of Biblical Interpretation*, London 2010.

<sup>31</sup> J. R. Sommerfeldt, 'The Bernardine Reform...', 575, quoting Bernard's Letter 350.

<sup>32</sup> St Bernard, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, 3, quoting Sommerfeldt's translation in 'The Bernardine Reform...', 574.

<sup>33</sup> J. R. Sommerfeldt, 'The Bernardine Reform...', 574.

<sup>34</sup> C. Georgiou, *Preaching the Crusades...*, 143.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> J. R. Sommerfeldt, 'The Bernardine Reform...', 575, quoting Bernard's Letter 380.

*exempla* (model sermons for use by other clergy to preach the crusade) similarly highlights this defence of the Church as an act of the common good:

Everybody who has zeal for the faith, who loves the common good of Christianity, who bothers about divine honour, who wants to have this great indulgence, shall come and take the sign of the cross and join the militia of the Crucified!<sup>37</sup>.

Later preaching shifted its emphasis to "a personal spiritual pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem"<sup>38</sup>, and focused more heavily upon self-interested motives, namely the "infinite reward"<sup>39</sup> of a pardon of sins and a glorious place in heaven for those who took the cross:

Because of this, those crusaders who prepare themselves for the service of God, truly confessed and contrite, are considered true martyrs while they are in the service of Christ, freed from venial and also mortal sins, from all the penitence enjoined upon them, absolved from the punishment for their sins in this world and the punishment of purgatory in the next, safe from the tortures of hell, in the glory and honour of being crowned in eternal beatitude. The spouses and children are included in these benefits in as much as they contribute to expenses<sup>40</sup>.

As well as the carrot, preachers also used the metaphorical stick, chastising the crowds and appealing to their pride by calling the people "fearful, impious and voluptuous"<sup>41</sup>, or "weak and rotten" if they refused to allow the cloth symbol of the cross to be sewn onto their clothes<sup>42</sup>. Moreover, "to inflame anti-gentile sentiment", John XXII commanded the clergy to include each week in the celebration of the Mass a traditional prayer made against the Church's persecutors and in time of war: "We beseech you Lord to suppress the pride of our enemies, and prostrate their insolence by the power of your right hand, through Christ our Lord"<sup>43</sup>. This, along with regular crusade liturgies (for example the *Missa contra Paganos* of Clement V)<sup>44</sup> and financial collections being ordered by popes, meant that the crusading cause was kept to the fore

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<sup>37</sup> Humbert of Romans, *Sermon* III, 14, in C. T. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology...*, locs. 2604-2605.

<sup>38</sup> P. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades*, 218.

<sup>39</sup> James of Vitry, *Sermon* II, 22, in C. T. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology...*, loc. 1390. Cf. S. Shepkaru, "To Die for God: Martyrs' Heaven in Hebrew and Latin Crusade Narratives", *Speculum* 77 (2002) 311-341.

<sup>40</sup> James of Vitry, *Sermon* II, 18-19, in C. T. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology...*, loc. 1390.

<sup>41</sup> C. Georgiou, *Preaching the Crusades...*, 138.

<sup>42</sup> James of Vitry, *Sermon* II, 42, in C. T. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology...*, loc. 1505.

<sup>43</sup> C. Georgiou, *Preaching the Crusades...*, 106.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.



in people's minds. Although this did cause a waning of interest at points, leaving the later crusades as primarily a matter of the nobles in *passagia particularia*<sup>45</sup>, the heavy emphasis in preaching and the liturgy led at times to an overspill of aggressive fervour, as can be seen in the "People's Crusade" of 1309, where the success of the preaching generated such an "enormous number" of people, that it "made their control impossible and created fertile conditions for violence"<sup>46</sup>. The chronicler of St Florian in Upper Austria "also blamed the priests who joined the crowd in 1309" and "who were preaching such ridiculous and erroneous things that were not consonant with the Catholic faith that they brought horror to prudent ears"<sup>47</sup>.

In contrast to this, Pope St John Paul II used a homily in Jubilee Year of the Millennium to seek pardon for the evils which "disfigure the face of the Church". He sought pardon not only for Christians' involvement in the "evils of today", but also for "the sins of yesterday's Christians"<sup>48</sup>, pointing to the work of the International Theological Commission in identifying key issues, such as the Crusades, the use of force in evangelization and antisemitism<sup>49</sup>.

## 2.2. Preaching *in the Shadow of Nazi Power*

While saints such as Maximilian Kolbe or Titus Brandsma used their writing and homilies to fight evil and promote love in response to Nazi invasion<sup>50</sup>, others sought to use their speeches and homilies to bolster their own position and to sow distrust and self-interest<sup>51</sup>. One such example of grave misuse of

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>48</sup> Pope St John Paul II, *Homily for the Day of Pardon*, (12 March 2000). <[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_2000\\_0312\\_pardon.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_2000_0312_pardon.html)>. [accessed 16 May 2020].

<sup>49</sup> International Theological Commission, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, (December 1999), 1.4; 5.4. <[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000307\\_memory-reconc-itc\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html)>. [accessed 16 May 2022].

<sup>50</sup> St Maximilian Kolbe, *The Writings of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, Vol. II, Various Writings*, Lugano 2016, Kindle ed., Document KW1281, loc. 4679: "To fight evil in the spirit of MI [Militia of the Immaculata], of the Immaculata, with love toward all, including the worst. To highlight and praise good more intensely, so that people may be drawn by example, rather than to publicize evil everywhere". Cf. M. Arribas, *The Price of Truth: Titus Brandsma, Carmelite*, Darien, IL 2021), 137, 156; E. Hense - J. Chalmers (eds.), *St Titus Brandsma: Mysticism in Action*, Rome 2021, 228-229.

<sup>51</sup> For commentary on Catholic and Protestant clergy who were Nazi sympathizers, see C. Tatz, "Noughts and Crosses: The Silence of the Churches in the Holocaust Years", in C. Tatz (ed.), *Genocide Perspectives IV: Essays on Holocaust and Genocide*, UTS ePress 2012, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1w36pg8>>. [accessed 17 May 2022], 166-198 at 172-177, 181-189. Cf.

narrative in the context of religion is the case of Monsignor Jozef Tiso<sup>52</sup>, who, much to the distress of the Vatican<sup>53</sup>, became president of Slovakia in its time as a puppet state under Nazi control (1939-1945), and who was hanged in 1947 for his crimes. Although I have found it difficult to trace many homilies by Jozef Tiso, one reported homily indicates a distortion of theological narrative which fed into his justification of the deportation of 70,000 Jews in 1942, an act which was condemned both by the Slovak hierarchy and by the Vatican<sup>54</sup>.

Tiso's seminary education led him to follow a form of political Catholicism which was aligned with the Christian socialism of Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* and its concern for workers' rights<sup>55</sup>. However, this Christian social concern was deformed by two factors: nationalism and antisemitism. Nationalist sentiment was rife at the turn of the century in Europe and across the globe<sup>56</sup>, with "a mythical exaltation of one's own nation" above others taking hold among peoples<sup>57</sup>. Ratzinger describes nationalism as nothing but "the modern radicalization of tribalism, one of mankind's primal vices"<sup>58</sup>. Tiso promoted this vice, since, "for twenty years, Tiso [...] preached that a combination of political Catholicism and Slovak nationalism could purify public life in Slovakia"<sup>59</sup>. Further conflict came from the "national antisemitism"<sup>60</sup> which had intensified due to a number of factors, particularly a fear of Bolshevism and a close association of the Jews with it, given that key figures in the movement were

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A. D. Hancock, *Karl Barth's Emergency Homiletic, 1932-1933: A Summons to Prophetic Witness at the Dawn of the Third Reich*, Grand Rapids, MI 2013, 74, 129, 134-136.

<sup>52</sup> Tiso continued to use the title Monsignor, even though only two months after having received it in 1921, the honour was invalidated upon the death of Benedict XV. Later, this made it difficult for the Vatican to stop him using the title since they could not strip him of what he did not possess. See J. M. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia*, Ithaca 2013, 74, 226.

<sup>53</sup> R. J. Wolff, "The Catholic Church and the Dictatorships in Slovakia and Croatia, 1939-1945", *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 88 (1977) 3-30, at 9-10.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13. The response of the Slovak hierarchy was not unanimous, as some strongly supported the actions of Tiso. For example, Bishop Vojtaššák said that "the Jews were the greatest enemies of Slovakia and things should be allowed to run their course". See P. O' Shea, "The Vatican, the Holocaust and the Archives", in C. Tatz (ed.), *Genocide Perspectives IV: Essays on Holocaust and Genocide*, UTS ePress 2012, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1w36pg8>>. [accessed 17 May 2022], 199-233, at 222.

<sup>55</sup> J. M. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator...*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> E. Hobsbawn, *On Nationalism*, London 2021, 34-54; 145; J. Ratzinger, *Turning Point for Europe?...*, 120.

<sup>57</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Turning Point for Europe?...*, 122.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>59</sup> J. M. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator...*, 200.

<sup>60</sup> M. Szabó, "The Jews are the misfortune of Slovakia: Czechoslovakism and antisemitism at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century", in A. Hudek - M. Kopeček - J. Mervart (eds.), *Czechoslovakism*, London 2022, 126-127.

nominally from a Jewish background<sup>61</sup>; anger at the percentage of Jews in professional roles<sup>62</sup>; and a perception of Jews as being "troublesome foreigners"<sup>63</sup>, either associating them with Germans or as a separate, "anti-national" race<sup>64</sup>.

Although Tiso felt indebted to Hitler for the political and economic support which propped up Slovakia as an independent republic<sup>65</sup>, his management of the state did not follow Nazi expectations, as his model followed a distorted Catholic conservatism rather than Nazi ideology. As a result, the German Foreign Office expressed grave dissatisfaction at Tiso's domestic policy regarding the Jews, saying:

The Jewish question has in no sense been brought nearer to a solution, consequently these worst enemies of Germany are still looked upon in Slovakia as valuable and indispensable citizens. Thus on the arbitral board of the Bratislava stock exchange newly appointed last June, fourteen of the forty-one members, or thirty-four percent, are Jews<sup>66</sup>.

The fact that the Jews are reported as still being considered valuable citizens, shows that the national anti-Jewish sentiment in Slovakia had not yet reached its peak, even though already by 1929 in Slovakia a *numerus clausus* (limited number) policy was applied to exclude Jews from university studies, to prevent them taking up future professional posts, such as in law or medicine<sup>67</sup>. Therefore, in addition to Tiso's Catholic principles giving way to pressure from Hitler<sup>68</sup>, his conscience must have become severely clouded when he, too, shifted to a stance of seeing the Jews as a burden to the economy. We can see this in the Ronkay Memorandum (a note of the meeting between Tiso and Ferenc Ronkay<sup>69</sup>, a member of the Hungarian parliament) in which Tiso is reported as saying "they [the Jews] sabotage the economy so much that it is my most sacred conviction that I must liberate the country of them as soon as possible"<sup>70</sup>. He is also recorded as saying, "It is a Christian action to expel the

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-133.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>65</sup> R. J. Wolff, "The Catholic Church and the Dictatorships...", 7.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> M. Szabó, "The Jews...", 136.

<sup>68</sup> R. J. Wolff, "The Catholic Church and the Dictatorships...", 13.

<sup>69</sup> J. M. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator...*, 236.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 237. Ward observes that Tiso swung from being strongly antisemitic to being indifferent to the issue from 1918 onwards, only later to return to being strongly antisemitic once again. See *Ibid.*, 87.

Jews, because it is for the good of the people, which is thus getting rid of pests"<sup>71</sup>.

Did Tiso's theology, writing and preaching also shift to match this change in attitude towards the Jews? It certainly seems to be the case. Indeed, it appears that he became more radicalized as his contact with the Nazis intensified<sup>72</sup>, culminating on 9 September 1941 with the Jewish Code coming into force by decree, a form of enactment used by Tiso so that he did not have to physically sign the law into existence<sup>73</sup>. Speaking to Catholic students, he justified his actions in spiritual terms:

We need to understand our age and to love it, not only for the ways that it has gone astray, but indeed in these very ways.... There is no question that we find ourselves at the painful beginning of a new world era, and therefore we cannot judge it only according to the past. We must have our eyes fixed on the newborn. The tragic fate of the Church...is that yesterday's Christians judge today according to yesterday's standards. ...Therefore, the Church has to abandon the present, which has already become the past. And it's strange that people [today do not] notice that God's Providence directs the spirit of the Church.... It's useless to worry..., because everything is guided by God's will<sup>74</sup>.

Here Tiso appears to be likening the social transformation by painful (and immoral) means to the birth pangs of new creation described in Romans 8,19-23. In addition to this, Tiso's central theology of love also radically changed. Ward points out:

During normal time, [Tiso] argued that if "love of self" was not balanced with the commandment to "love your neighbour," it produced an abomination: fascism. During revolutionary time, he insisted instead that "love your neighbour" meant "above all, love yourself". There is nothing unusual or even necessarily immoral about focusing on self-preservation during dangerous times. But for Tiso, "love of self" justified aggression<sup>75</sup>.

This is why Tiso can say that the expulsion of the Jews was a "Christian action ... for the good of the people", since he had brutally distorted the notion of self-defence in relation to the theological concept of the Church as Mystical Body. However, "expulsion" was a euphemism, since, in reality, the passing of the Jewish Code in Slovakia led to over 70,000 Jews being sent by train to

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<sup>71</sup> C. Tatz, "Noughts and Crosses...", 168.

<sup>72</sup> J. M. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator...*, 227.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-228 (parenthesis in original).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

Auschwitz-Birkenau<sup>76</sup>. The Vatican sought to stop the trains throughout 1942, though in vain, but it did manage to prevent the remaining 20,000 Jews of Slovakia being sent the following year<sup>77</sup>. Thus, love of self, a message Tiso preached in an imbalance to love of neighbour<sup>78</sup>, became the justificatory narrative for dreadful violence<sup>79</sup>.

Tiso's logic of violence to one's neighbour<sup>80</sup> is in stark contrast to the teaching of many others like St Maximilian Kolbe<sup>81</sup>, who advocated love of neighbour rather than love of self, encouraging those who were part of the *Militia Immaculata* to go on a crusade of love:

Finally, love for one's neighbour. Loving one's neighbour not because he is 'nice,' worthwhile, wealthy, influential, or just because he is grateful. For such would be very petty reasons, unworthy of a male or female Knight of the Immaculata. Genuine love rises above the creature and plunges into God. In Him, for Him and through Him it loves everyone, be they good or bad, friends or foes. It offers a helping hand, full of love to everyone; it prays for all, suffers for all, wishes good to all, wishes happiness to all, because that is God's Will!<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> R. J. Wolff, "The Catholic Church and the Dictatorships...", 11; O' Shea, "The Vatican, the Holocaust and the Archives," 232.

<sup>77</sup> P. O' Shea, "The Vatican, the Holocaust and the Archives...", 217.

<sup>78</sup> J. M. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator...*, 170: "Above all,' he preached, 'love yourself...!'"

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-228. This is evident in Tiso's trial during which the Chief Justice Daxner and Tiso debated at length the nature of love of self. Daxner considered Tiso's view as "perversity". *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>80</sup> It should be noted that the use of Scripture passages which contain violent language to justify violence can only be so made if they are used out of context. Moreover, to use a text such as Lk 12,49 as an argument for violence, to bring fire and division to the earth like Jesus, would be to disregard the biblical development of outreach and welcome of one's neighbour, of hospitality to the stranger in one's midst, and of the commandment to love (e.g., Lev 19,18.33-34; Is 58,7; Mk 12,31; Rom 12,13). And yet, prominent Scripture scholars during both the rise and rule of National Socialism in Germany argued for such a misreading and promoted it in preaching and catechesis. For example, pointing to texts in Luke's Gospel, Walter Grundmann denied that Jesus was Jewish, stating "Jesus was a fighter, engaged in a prolonged struggle against Judaism, and fell as victim to the Jews' wrathful violence". See S. Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*, Princeton 2008, 157, 157, n.210.

<sup>81</sup> One could also single out Alfred Delp, Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Karl Barth in their opposition through their preaching. See A. Delp, *The Prison Meditations of Father Alfred Delp*, New York 1963; D. G. Stroud (ed.), *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow: Sermons of Resistance in the Third Reich*, Grand Rapids, MI 2013, 54-61, 65-74.

<sup>82</sup> St Maximilian Kolbe, *The Writings*, vol. II..., Document KW1075, loc. 9039.

### 2.3. Justifying Injustice: Patriarch Kirill and the Invasion of Ukraine

It has been widely noted that, in addition to the use of the "hard power" of military conflict, Vladimir Putin has primarily used "soft power" methods during his years in office to change attitudes and maintain control, particularly through the media, but also through the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, both in Russia and throughout the world<sup>83</sup>. Putin "entered the highest office of the state as a self-confessed Orthodox Christian"<sup>84</sup>. In response, over the years, instead of challenging the Kremlin, Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev) has either thrown a "veil of silence over the areas of shame for Russian society"<sup>85</sup>, or used his prominent Church position to openly praise Putin. Indeed, after the 2012 re-election, Kirill hailed Putin's presidency as "a miracle of God"<sup>86</sup>. This approach might reflect the desire by some Orthodox bishops to return to the Byzantine notion of *symphonia*, "in which the Church sees itself as a partner of the state, working with it for the material and spiritual good the nation rather than as a critical voice over and against the state"<sup>87</sup>. But is this *symphonia* a healthy stance, and is it being misused?

Politically and ecclesiastically Ukraine has sought greater independence from Russia, as has been shown by the country's desire to become part of the European Union and by the establishment of an autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine on 6 January 2019. To the latter, Vladimir Putin objected, saying that the primary aim of autocephaly was to "divide the people of Russia and Ukraine, to sow national and religious divisions"<sup>88</sup>. Patriarch Kirill said, "it is impossible for us to separate Kiev from our country, as this is where our history began. The Russian Orthodox Church preserves the national consciousness of both Russians and Ukrainians"<sup>89</sup>. Here we arrive at the narrative which has underpinned Kirill's support for Putin's invasion into Crimea, and now, after eight long years of conflict, which lies behind his additional vocal support for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine since February 2022. It is the doctrine of *Russkiy mir* or "Russian world", which Kirill sums up thus:

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<sup>83</sup> A. Cohen, "Ideology and Soft Power in Contemporary Russia", in S. J. Blank (ed.), *Perspectives on Russian Foreign Policy*, Strategic Studies Institute 2012, 195-214, at 195, 198, 205.

<sup>84</sup> K. Holm, "Staat und Furcht: Putin, die Kirche und die Kunst kunstfreier Kunst", *Osteuropa* 62 (2012) 208-18, at 214.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>87</sup> J. P. Burgess, "Retrieving the Martyrs in Order to Rethink the Political Order: The Russian Orthodox Case", *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 34 (2014) 177-197, at 177.

<sup>88</sup> K. Liik - M. Metodiev - N. Popescu, "Defender of the Faith? How Ukraine's Orthodox Split Threatens Russia," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, n. 286 (1 May 2019) 34 pages, at 2.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Russia belongs to a civilization that is wider than the Russian Federation. We call this civilization the Russian world. This is not the world of the Russian Federation, nor Russian Empire. The Russian world starts at the Kievan baptismal font. Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians belong to it.<sup>90</sup>

The doctrine of *Russkiy mir*, which has been "a constant theme in the patriarch's sermons", claims that the people of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are "one united civilization flowing from the 10th-century baptism of the Slavic tribes in Kyiv, which was then the centre of lands known as Rus"<sup>91</sup>. The language may sound inclusive and peaceful, "but critics say Russia is using it to reassert dominance over territory it controlled during the Russian Empire and Soviet Union"<sup>92</sup>. Indeed, Putin has also used the doctrine in his own speeches, claiming that Ukraine has never been a separate state and that it belongs to Russia<sup>93</sup>. Kirill in his homilies has also united *Russkiy mir* rhetoric with an attack against Western culture, which he describes as decadent. This "battle of civilizations"<sup>94</sup> provides the foundation for presenting military invasion into Ukraine as an act of saving people from the dangers of the West. Thus, at the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Kirill preached "we should do everything to preserve peace between our peoples while protecting our common historical Motherland against every outside action that can destroy this unity"<sup>95</sup>. Kirill clearly sees the granting of autocephalous status to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine as a threat to a united *Russkiy mir*, and so, as a last-ditch attempt before it was granted, he met personally with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to plead with him not to grant the *Tomos*. In the tense exchange, Patriarch Kirill said, "Your All-Holiness, if you give autocephaly to Ukraine, blood will be poured out". To this, the Ecumenical Patriarch replied, "Your Beatitude, we neither have an army at our disposal nor any weapons. If blood is to be poured out, it will not be spilled by us, but by you!"<sup>96</sup>. Patriarch Bartholomew did not agree with Kirill's reading of history, and so granted autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine<sup>97</sup>.

Thus, the use of *Russkiy mir* ideology by the Moscow Patriarch has not gone without objection throughout the Orthodox Church and it has caused deep rifts by its application as a justification for war in Ukraine. Dozens of lower-ranking

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>91</sup> J. Whalen, "Russian Orthodox leader backs war..."

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> C. Belton, *Putin's People...*, 442.

<sup>95</sup> Patriarch Kirill, *Primate's Homily*, 27 February 2022. <<http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5904398.html>>. [accessed 17 May 2022].

<sup>96</sup> K. Liik - M. Metodiev - N. Popescu, "Defender of the Faith?...", 14.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

clergy have broken with Patriarch Kirill, decrying the invasion into Ukraine through the publication of an open letter<sup>98</sup>. Moreover, Pope Francis, in a video conference with the Moscow Patriarch, challenged his use of language, saying "The Church must not use the language of politics, but the language of Jesus"<sup>99</sup>. He continued,

There was a time, even in our Churches, when people spoke of a holy war or a just war. Today we cannot speak in this manner. A Christian awareness of the importance of peace has developed<sup>100</sup>.

### 3. Sharing in Christ's Empathy

Christ expressed concern for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the people. He said, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days, and have nothing to eat" (Mk 8,2, NRSV). To their spiritual plight "he had compassion [...], because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9,36, NRSV). Christ's feelings run deep; they are not simply mild concern, but a true, loving solidarity which feels the pain of others and desires to help. This is the "tender mercy of God" or the *viscera misericordia* as the Vulgate describes it (Lk 1,78). Indeed, this is more accurate to the Greek word used to describe Christ's feelings, namely, "σπλαγχνίζομαι". It is no mere pity, but a sorrow, a love that hurts, that comes from deep within, from the gut ("σπλάγχνα"). Christ is intimately united to humanity and to its joys and sorrows in every age. It is the task of the Church, the Body of Christ, united to the Head (Col 1,18), also to make their own the "griefs and anxieties" of all people, "especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted" (GS 1). However, as Pope Francis notes, the prevailing culture of indifference can deaden the empathy and compassion of the followers of Christ. He writes,

Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are

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<sup>98</sup> J. Whalen, "Russian Orthodox leader backs war..."

<sup>99</sup> Vatican News Report, "Video Conference between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill", 16 March 2022. <<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-03/pope-francis-calls-patriarch-kirill-orthodox-patriarch-ukraine.html>>. [accessed 20 May 2022].

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*



thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime, all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us (EG 54).

The Holy Father has also pointed to modern forms of Pharisaism or "spiritual materialism" as another cause of a loss of empathy and compassion, as they are a misuse of religion "not [to] the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being" (EG 93), and because of this focus on self (Phil 2,21), the person remains "imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings" (EG 94). But we are called to love as Christ has loved us, and so we must fight against self-centredness and indifference, so that we can love with the heart of Christ and reach out to others like the Good Samaritan<sup>101</sup>. A life lived prayerfully in union with Christ transforms us:

Amid a culture of indifference which not infrequently turns ruthless, our style of life should instead be devout, filled with empathy, compassion and mercy, drawn daily from the wellspring of prayer<sup>102</sup>.

The liturgy also has a significant part to play in this deepening of love and solidarity. If we, both priests and people<sup>103</sup>, "let ourselves nourished by God's Word", rather than taking it for granted, our relationship with Christ and with our brothers and sisters will truly come alive<sup>104</sup>. In this way, the "prophetic function" of the Word of God also becomes possible for the prayerful listener, as the one nourished by this Word sees it as being fulfilled "today" (Lk 4,21), and so he or she recognizes how God's Word sheds light on the challenges of today<sup>105</sup>.

This prayerful listening is essential if we are not to be distracted by other passionate voices which draw us away from God's ways and from his service. We are to be wary that, having overcome indifference, an unrefined enthusiasm will fail to discern that which is not truly a good cause. St Titus

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<sup>101</sup> Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, (3 October 2020), 56-86. <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html)>. [accessed 21 May 2022].

<sup>102</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily for Midnight Mass*, (24 December 2015). <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151224\\_omelia-natale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20151224_omelia-natale.html)>. [accessed 19 May 2022].

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Pope St John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, (25 March 1992), 26. <[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031992\\_pastores-dabo-vobis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html)>. [accessed 19 May 2022]: "The preacher [...] needs to approach the word with a docile and prayerful heart so that it may deeply penetrate his thoughts and feelings and bring about a new outlook in him".

<sup>104</sup> Pope Francis, *Aperuit Illis*' (30 September 2019), 12. <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190930\\_aperuit-illis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190930_aperuit-illis.html)>. [accessed 19 May 2022], (hereafter AI).

<sup>105</sup> AI 12.

Brandsma, who was canonized only recently on 15 May 2022, distinguished the hero from the fanatic, by referring to the maxim "*Bonum ex integra causa*" [the good comes from an honourable cause]<sup>106</sup>. He warns us that we can be easily misled in our desire for a hero to emulate and follow:

The human being can easily be misled through outward appearances: passions prove infectious, love inflames others through its ardour, although it might be disordered. And courage compels respect although one might not agree with the aims that are fought for. So, in our times more than in other times, we are in danger of being deceived through appearances. While longing for strong personalities and expecting powerful deeds, we are in danger of joining the choir of those of less insight who are overawed by people whom we consider heroes because of their conduct without asking whether the ideals they are fighting for would justify such veneration<sup>107</sup>.

Thus, on the part of the listener, prayerful discernment is needed to identify that which is not of God, even though it has been said with much "pathos"<sup>108</sup>. "Christians, with the help of their pastors, are called to hear the cry of the poor" (EG 191). And so, the preacher should make sure that he does not turn a deaf ear to the plea of those who suffer<sup>109</sup>, remaining silent to their need for justice through his lack of awareness or concern. Similarly, he should ensure that he does not misuse the language of rights to present "an inordinate defence of individual rights or the rights of richer peoples" (EG 190) to the detriment of those who are more in need. This would be an example of preaching "a narrative that uses God for its own socio-political gains"<sup>110</sup>. Rather, the preacher should help to broaden the horizon of his listeners<sup>111</sup> and encourage a real and lasting spirit of solidarity and mercy, in response to God's Word and to the cry of the poor<sup>112</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> E. Hense - J. Chalmers, *St Titus Brandsma: Mysticism in Action*, 135.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Karl Barth warned of the "triumphant" use of religion in connection with science, art, ethics, the State or race, and of the power of emotions in rhetoric. He uses the word "pathos" in this context. See A. D. Hancock, *Karl Barth's Emergency Homiletic*, 121.

<sup>109</sup> EG 187.

<sup>110</sup> E. Foley, *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching: Developed under the auspices of The Catholic Academy of Liturgy*, Collegeville 2016, Kindle ed., loc. 4401.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 3552.

<sup>112</sup> Al 13. Cf. Pope St John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, (30 December 1987), 38. <[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html)>. [accessed 19 May 2022]; Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, (24 May 2015), 49. <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)>. [accessed 22 May 2022].

It has been suggested that genocides and atrocities presuppose a failure of narrative imagination<sup>113</sup>, whereby in fear of difference, and in an absence of empathy, a person or a group fails to (or chooses not to) make the bridge to the 'other'. Foley and Kearney point out that "if [...] we possess narrative empathy—enabling us to see the world from the other's point of view—killing another is more difficult"<sup>114</sup>. Preaching can be a "noncoercive" means to help people to bridge the gap and to open the door to the 'other', so that he or she is seen as brother or sister rather than enemy, "foreign", "unworthy", or "less than" us<sup>115</sup>, which Tatz has identified as motives for indifference to their plight, or for passive, or even active, collusion in their oppression<sup>116</sup>. In listening to a positive narrative, prompted by the empathy of the preacher speaking from the heart<sup>117</sup>, we move from antipathy and hatred to empathy and compassion. Motivated by "God's pathos"<sup>118</sup>, we take an "interest" in their story, an interest which, following the word's etymology, "lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together" (*inter-est*)<sup>119</sup>. Thus, if we can "imagine the suffering of others and recognize the other as oneself, such an empathic imagination may reverse our apprehension of difference and open us to new ways of seeing and being in which God's narrative of justice and equality triumphs over narratives of bigotry and injustice"<sup>120</sup>.

And so, the homily should not whip up the passions to sow division, but rather help to enkindle the living flame of love. Following the language of St John of the Cross, St Titus Brandsma, encourages us to "let the divine within [us] be stirred up as a flame", so that we will reach out in love and serve others without judging, without hesitation<sup>121</sup>. May those who are called to preach recognize the important role they have in proclaiming a life-giving message which invites people to love with the heart of Christ; a message of solidarity that is truly "a summons to mission" for the whole Church<sup>122</sup>.

<sup>113</sup> E. Foley, *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching...*, loc. 3545. Cf. R. Kearney, *On Stories*, London 2002, 139-140.

<sup>114</sup> E. Foley, *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching...*, loc. 3546.

<sup>115</sup> C. Tatz, "Noughts and Crosses...", 168.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>117</sup> AI 5; Pope Francis, *Meeting with Clergy at Caserta*, (26 July 2014). <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140726\\_clero-caserta.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/july/documents/papa-francesco_20140726_clero-caserta.html)>. [accessed 21 May 2022].

<sup>118</sup> E. Foley, *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching...*, locs. 4228, 4237, 4294, 4399. Cf. A. Heschel, *The Prophets*, New York 1962, 26.

<sup>119</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, 1988, 2 ed., 182.

<sup>120</sup> E. Foley, *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching...*, loc. 3549.

<sup>121</sup> E. Hense - J. Chalmers, *St Titus Brandsma: Mysticism in Action*, 146.

<sup>122</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, (30 September 2010), 59. <[https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html)>. [accessed 21 May 2022].

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