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When Life's Purpose, Mission and Future are Gone, Let us Dream!²

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Abstract

What should we do if we are unclear about our own potential, individual and community significance, mission or future? Referring to Pope Francis and Martin Luther King Jr. the author is suggesting that one viable option is to apply the dream-eutopia creation process. Unlike utopias in the ordinary and negative meaning, eutopia hints at a deliberate, critical goal that can be achieved with a high probability using a balance of faith and reason. Three stages are crucial in its development. The first is an analytical description of the current situation; the second is a critical assessment; and the third is the establishment of objectives, methods, and principles for accomplishing it. Following this lead, this paper presents four examples of dreams-eutopias based on missionary, religious, and ecclesial experiences.

Keywords: eutopia, crisis, pandemic, spirituality, missions, Society of the Divine Word, Pope Francis, Martin Luther King Jr.

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Streszczenie

Co powinniśmy zrobić, jeśli nie jesteśmy pewni swojego potencjału, sensu osobistego i zbiorowego życia, misji i przyszłości? Autor powołując się na papieża Franciszka i Martina Lutra Kinga Jr. przyjmuje, że jedną z możliwych dróg jest tworzenie marzeń-eutopii. W przeciwieństwie do utopii, w codziennym i negatywnym znaczeniu, eutopia wskazuje na przemyślany, krytyczny, osiągalny z dużym prawdopodobieństwem cel poprzez połączenie wiary i rozumu. W ich powstawaniu, ważne są trzy etapy. Pierwszy polega na analitycznym opisie obecnej kondycji; drugi na krytycznej jej ocenie; trzeci na określeniu celów, sposobów i zasad ich realizacji. Idąc tym tropem, w artykule przedstawiono zarys czterech przykładowych marzeń-eutopii, w oparciu o doświadczania w pracy misyjnej, życiu zakonnym i eklezjalnym.

Słowa kluczowe: eutopia, kryzys, pandemia, duchowość, misje, Zgromadzenie Słowa Bożego, papież Franciszek, Martin Luter King.

Introduction

A book entitled Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future, written by Pope Francis, was being released in December 2020 (Francis, 2020b). Many years before Martin Luther King Ir. delivered his legendary I Have a Dream address on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, on August 28, 1963, (King Jr., 1968). I recall these two individuals because they served as inspiration for me to approach this period of our history from a similar point of view. In my understanding, the term dream refers to eutopia or a good place (gr. eu - well, good, topos - place). This word is connected to the well-known utopia, a non-place (gr. ou - not), an imaginative and idealistic location, and other similar terms. Classic works such as Thomas More's Utopia, Francis Bacon's New Atlantis, and Henry Neville's The Isle of Pines (More, 1999) all contribute to the popularization of this method of expressing individual and social ideals in a compelling manner. In this context, eutopia is the absolute antithesis of utopia in the conventional, typically negative use of the word.

My goal in writing this essay is to encourage you to think about the eutopian paradigm's utility in modelling our lifestyle along the path of Francis and King, as well as the modern scientific and theological insights. Using this type of method appears to be one of the most effective antidotes to the desolation that we experience during pandemics and huge cultural-civilizational shifts. In any case, whether we are aware of it or not, these elements have an impact on our life and

on the groups and organizations that we shape, including the Society of the Divine Word and the Catholic Church. We are currently living in a period of significant personal, community, local, and global crises, to name a few. Previous crises have occurred, but not with the same intensity, breadth, or force as the current one. It's true what the Pope says: "From this crisis we can come out better or worse. We can slide backward, or we can create something new. For now, what we need is a chance to change, to make space for the new thing we need. It's like God says to Isaiah, «Come, let us talk this over. If you are ready to listen, we will have a great future. But if you refuse to listen, you'll be devoured by the sword» (Isaiah 1:18-20). [...] This is a moment to dream big, to rethink our priorities - what we value, what we want, what we seek - and commit to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of. What I hear at this moment is similar to what Isaiah hears God saying through him: Come, let us talk this over. Let us dare to dream" (Francis, 2020b, p. 7).

The use of the eutopian method has several advantages. Here's a hypothetical list of some of them to get you start. In order to use this procedure, deliberate and critical thought about life and faith, as well as a process of inculturation, are required. Your personal and community life will be highlighted, and you will be required to demonstrate expertise in coping with it. Creating a eutopia includes the establishment of objectives and destinations that we wish to achieve, as well as the adoption of values that we choose to adhere to. It promotes critical thinking as well as awareness of eristic, rhetorical, and ideological manipulations of many kinds. In this way, eutopia is neither a franchise nor a license to a project developed by experts or leaders that has been acquired. Personal and social participation are required for it to come to life, but other individuals (leaders, experts) may also be involved in its creation and growth. In the end, eutopia takes us back to earth (cf. the criteria proposed by Francis in EG, no. 217-237) and leads to conversion on several levels: personal, structural, and pastoral. In a nutshell, it provides significant pathways for personal and community growth and involvement; it forces us to step outside of our comfort zones in order to grow in light of the human ratio, the Divine Word, and its mission; and it motivates us to do more (EG, no. 217-237; Francis, 2021; Boff, 2015; Marty, 2003, p. 51-57; Pietrzak, 2019, p. 281-316).

Furthermore, from a missiological and eschatological standpoint, the eutopian style of reasoning has a great deal to do with the Kingdom of God and the meaning of life in the present moment. We require personal and communal (ecclesial) sensitivity and discernment, rooted in fides et ratio, knowledge, and wisdom, in order to do this from a theological perspective. Everything that the Church has to offer the Pope says must become incarnate in a distinctive way in each part of the world, so that the Bride of Christ can take on a variety of faces that better manifest the inexhaustible riches of God's grace. Preaching must become incarnate, spirituality must become incarnate, ecclesial structures must become incarnate. For this reason, I humbly propose in this brief Exhortation to speak of four great dreams [i.e., social, cultural, ecological, and ecclesial] that the Amazon region inspires in me (QA, no. 6).

I'll detail a few eutopias in the sections below, although there are certainly many more out there. Instead of making endless lists of well-documented ailments, I will urge us to imagine some positive locations, initiatives, and goals that we want to achieve as individuals, communities, and the SVD, among other things. Let us build real, positive, and hopeful eutopias as antidotes to the numerous trials and tribulations of life, as well as improvements in the quality of life and fulfilment of our goal. In my understanding they are a concrete response to Jesus' call: "This is the time of fulfilment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent [gr. μετανοειτε] and believe in the gospel" (Matthew 4:17). Keeping in mind what St. Paul said about not conforming ourselves to this age but being transformed by the renewal of our minds, may we discern what is God's will that which is good and pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:2). Much of what we are doing is an issue of altering the style of thinking, as Ludwig Wittgenstein told us in his day (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 28).

1. A Dream of the Faith and Reason Principles

Let us begin with a commonly acknowledged fact: we live in a myriad world filled with a plethora of beliefs about life and tales about it. It is even possible to assert that every individual, rather than just groups of individuals, represents a fascinating universe of diverse values, patterns of behaviour, symbols, rituals, and distinct tales (myths). Many of these are things that we share with others on a local, regional, and global scale. These aspects, however, are unique to each individual and play an essential part in the formation of one's personal, cultural, and religious identity as well as one's mission in the world. Many of them are a result of the socialization we received in our family, as well as in our local cultural and religious communities. That means that we are somehow compelled to engage in an ongoing battle for identity in this vastly diverse universe.

If, in the past, most of the world's population lived in isolation or had limited contact now, thanks to scientific and technological advancements, the possibilities for human interaction are nearly limitless. Knowledge, which was formerly limited to a small group of people, is now being disseminated to an unprecedented extent in human history. The advancement of communication technology and electronic infrastructure has made data available to everybody. Furthermore, anyone may now become an author and publisher. Everyone now participates in, consumes, contributes to, and creates virtual resources. A new virtual universe has formed, which previously only existed in people's brains, literature, and other works of human creativity. The traditional real world now has a major rival. It is supplemented and co-created by the artificial intelligence with which it extends, competes, and even attempts to replace.

Our moment is characterized by fast social and cultural change, the end of Christendom (but not of Christianity!), which corresponds to the condition described in Matthew 9:16-17. As Christians with a magnificent history, we might often appear to be like the ancient cloak and wineskin, admirable and worthy warriors, experienced in many memorable confrontations yet unyielding. We strive to live and carry out our objectives to the best of our abilities. At the same time, we are engulfed in personal, community, ecclesial, and societal crises that are extremely difficult to address on our own. In such a scenario we are subjected to processes of spiritual disintegration, as well as a diminution in the quality of Christian testimony and mission. Some of us feel that the solution is to reinforce or even fossilize the present system, even if it means suppressing traditional and new alternatives. This trend of defending institutions at whatever cost, even if it means excluding some of their members, is part of this trend. Others, on the other hand, advocate a rebirth in the key to a new evangelistic synthesis that takes interculturation into account. There are other concepts for eclectic and syncretic solutions that obscure Christian identity, scientific achievements, and local traditions (Pietrzak, 2019, p. 285-286; Cimperman & Schroeder, 2020).

What to do at times like these is an annoying but necessary question. We are fortunate in that we have two crucial instruments to assist our life and mission in the aforementioned multiverse: faith and reason. These are significant when discussing our topic because they are analogous to the "two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" (FR, no. 1).

As a result I have a dream that one day we priests, religious, and lay ministers will be refreshed "in agreement with the faith" (Romans 12:6)

and will live and collaborate for the benefit of the Church, our Society, and the society in which we live. We shall check and update our views about our vocation, the Church, and the communities and ecosystems around us based on faith and reason. In my dream, the norms of faith and reason are the light that shines through the shadows and darkness of discussion; they play an essential role in shaping our life, dialogue, and witness. It brings the fruits of the Holy Spirit's gifts to fruition in our relationships, namely the gifts of wisdom, insight, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. The laws of faith and reason are the lights that shine on unhappy people.

2. A Dream of Reinvented Missionary Communities

As missionaries, priests, religious, and lay ministers, we live in and co-create unique environments. We are rooted and present in numerous ecclesial, theological, and spiritual traditions. We have enthralling personal and communal histories and experiences. When we communicate and carry out missionary work, we must remember this value. The cultural and religious traditions that are visible to us are just what they are. They are all in need of improvement and purification, and from the standpoint of faith, they are all invited to grow in Jesus Christ.

However, the environments in which we have lived or currently reside change more quickly and profoundly than, say, our childhood. Some even say that our world (or worlds) exists only in our minds and artefacts, and that we are headed to extinction. Fears and disagreements about personal and community self-realization, the preservation of Christian identity, the missionary charism, and its future in the Society of the Divine Word trouble some of us. What is going on around us impacts everyone, especially the younger generations, the impoverished, the weak, and the excluded (Pietrzak, 2017, p. 87-97).

Regardless of how you feel about the issues raised, it is very clear that we will see significant changes. They will be triggered by scientific and technological advancements, climate change, population migrations, and the growth of world powers (NIC, 2021; OECD, 2012). The social media is keenly observing these profound changes because of our personal and systemic sins.

Given the emerging new order in the post-pandemic world, it is worth considering whether our structures, rules, laws, roles, works, and evangelizing approaches are still viable and will continue to support missions. Perhaps we're simply a comfy, egotistical bunch

struggling for existence, and the missions are merely a pretext to gather money for our upkeep and somewhat decent existence. Perhaps an even more stunning question could be posed: is it time to recreate the SVD community while retaining the integrity of the Church's revelation and traditions, the charism of St. Arnold, and the experiences of our forefathers?

As a response, I have a dream that one day God, who is the communion and participation of the Father-Son-Spirit, in his loving mercy, will shape new missionary communities of priests, religious, and lay ministers. They will arise from the heart of the Church, in the spirit of the finest traditions of the Society of the Divine Word and of all missionaries (both men and women) who have ever given their life to missions. Individual, structural, and institutional limitations that have hampered the inclusion of knowledge, competences, abilities, and people's and groups' talents for mission, in the past and now, will be overcome in these communities. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) will not become a catchphrase for cultural, political, and economic colonization and fundraising operations. The Eutopia of the Kingdom of God will be a meaningful and appreciable project of life that will draw people, families, communities, and all creation to it via God's grace and the dedication of the members of these new communities. Regardless of his disciples' social rank, labels, moral standing, or worldview, Jesus Christ will continue to remain the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He will remain so, regardless of whether future generations live on Earth or on another world. In my dream, Jesus always gathers disciples and missionaries, regardless of how much time individuals spend in either the real or virtual world. Let us dream of a better life, tearing down the barriers that divide us with Pope Francis and Martin Luther King.

3. A Dream of Poiesis

As priests, religious, and lay ministers we are involved in the design of a variety of goods. The Society of the Divine Word and the ecclesial communities provide us with a diverse range of activities grounded in humanity's and Christianity's best traditions. They are embedded in the nature of the Church's mission. What we do and how we live are also the result of personal and communal development, charism, and dedication. We have been relieved of many of the "mundane" chores that most people place a high value on. This "freedom" that we have is

indeed a blessing, a reason to be thankful to God and the people! This thankfulness may be shown via personal and communal testimony, as well as professionalism in action and leadership.

On the other hand, we are subject to imperfection, wickedness, and a variety of human limits. They make life tough and reduce the effectiveness of ministry. Lack of knowledge, competence, skills, and standards in interpersonal relations and daily activities completely or partially stops or obstructs the mission to which we have been called. We priests, religious, and lay ministers are not immune to human flaws like pride, avarice, jealously, carelessness, rage, and spiritual tiredness. We, too, suffer from burnout. The language of hatred, humiliation, manipulation, mobbing, bullying, and so on destroys us. We and our communities are analogous to a coin. They are one yet have two faces, one that sparks admiration and the other that causes tension and difficulty. As we embrace our vocation, we move down as if on the coin's edge, deftly shifting from one side to the other.

What is there that can be done right now? The answer is undoubtedly diverse, as it is our life and mission. In this context I would like to suggest a Christ-centered poiesis, namely, becoming a person, community, or institution in Jesus. Poiesis, in the words of St. Paul, would be the pursuit of plenitude by all of mankind and their creations "for from him and through him and for him" (Romans 11:36), i.e., Christ. It, like metanoia, asserts that we are not merely what we are. We are not rigid and unchangeable. There is undiscovered potential in us, but there are also constraints. Poiesis appears to be a fair prescription for modern individuals, inspired by Scripture and Tradition, as well as the achievements of the Society of the Divine Word. God's light and wisdom are required for many of our goals, experiences, socio-cultural norms, and patterns, including pathologies. Throughout history Christians, both known and unknown to us, have lived in such poiesis, including our parents and missionaries. It is worth noting that today's popular treatments, as well as personal and team development courses, all allude to comparable concepts. I think that a Christ-centered poiesis may assist us in breaking down our personal, communal, and structural barriers (Pietrzak, 2019, p. 274-281, 364-369).

That is why I hope that we will soon return to personal, community, and institutional *poiesis*. We shall eliminate individual and structural barriers to the acquisition of information, competencies, skills, and spiritual development. We shall make excellent use of the Christian tradition's and modern science's best methods and experiences. *Poiesis*, in collaboration with God's grace, will aid in the

dismantling of the barriers that impede our life and missionary activity. We will eliminate the causes of issues such as negligence, lethargy, and ignorance; information bubbles; self-interested social labels; ideology and interpretative loops; and we will defeat the psychology of the grave, which entails disappointment and despair, idly waiting for the end. (EG, no. 82-83).

4. A Dream of Mysticism and Contemplation

We've all heard Karl Rahner say, "the devout Christian of the future will either be a «mystic», one who has «experienced» something, or he will cease to be anything at all", Rahner (1971, p. 15). The 21st century missions will either be led by mystics, priests, religious, and lay ministers who have "experienced something", or they will simply be propaganda or humanitarian actions led by specialized volunteers, and the Society of the Divine Word will become an NGO-type organization.

In our missionary life, the phrases mystic and contemplation remind us of the need for a deeper connection with God that transcends ritualism and formality. They cause us to live, act, and think in the presence of God. They say we are in love with God; we do not abandon God in tough situations, even in petty tasks; we continually and continuously breathe God's presence. Mysticism and contemplation, as God's gift, provide us a simple, profound, and prayerful picture of faith and life; it is a deep personal experience of God via love that captivates us, assisting us in discovering and understanding a previously ignored and ununderstood reality. Such a loving relationship with God transforms, cleanses, sanctifies, and creates deep motivations for life, relationships, decisions, and actions; it speaks of the essence of life and assists us in its understanding; and it says that vocation is not a by-product of standard human profit and loss calculations.

There are various encouragements in the Christian tradition to follow the road of mysticism and contemplation (Tyler, 2011, p. 3-25; Egan, 2010), including the Bible and the Society of the Divine Word. Francis' teaching is, without a doubt, an updated endeavour to call attention to the significance of pursuing this path while seeking a meaningful life and for personal, social, and ecclesial purposes. In his exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, the Pope often mentions the need for mysticism and contemplation in dealing with the problem of holiness today. They are essential in the process of reclaiming our humanity. We have an opportunity for regeneration in Jesus Christ, who died and

rose again, even though our life has been damaged by tough circumstances and devastated by sin. However, Francis emphasizes that this does not imply "fainting" in spiritual ecstasy. Following St. John Paul II he reminds us that the first condition of contemplation is to perceive Jesus Christ in the faces of those with whom he wishes to identify. According to Matthew 25:35-36, staring at Christ "is not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ" (GeE, no. 96). As a result, mysticism, and contemplation pass through identifying Christ with the impoverished and suffering, recognizing Christ's revealed heart, and resolving to follow Him. As a result, "We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission" (GeE, no. 26.).

I have a dream that one day God will provide our priests, monks, and lay ministers with the grace of a mystical-contemplative experience of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the *amor fontalis* from which we all originate, and in which the meaning of creation and history is hidden (AG, no 2). Only then our life and mission will take on an appropriate shape and direction. The participation and community of God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will serve as a model for restoring our relationships as priests, religious, and lay ministers.

Conclusions

Pope Francis' views on the false offers of some ideologies may be useful as we craft our eutopias. "Here I would like – says Pope – to mention two false forms of holiness that can lead us astray: Gnosticism and Pelagianism. They are two heresies from early Christian times, yet they continue to plague us. In our times too, many Christians, perhaps without realizing it, can be seduced by these deceptive ideas, which reflect an anthropocentric immanentism disguised as Catholic truth. Let us look at these two forms of doctrinal or disciplinary security that give rise to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyses and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others" (GeE, no. 35).

Keeping in mind the above remark, I think that the construction and implementation of eutopias will help to enhance our quality of life and ministry, as well as unify us in the purpose of demonstrating the sacramentality of God's love to all people and nations (AG, no. 10).

In the spirit of St. Arnold and generations of missionaries of the Society of the Divine Word, there will be a new quality in missionary communities and teams made up of priests, religious, and lay ministers. After all, Jesus promised that if we had the faith of a mustard seed, we could move mountains: "Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20).

I pray that each of us, especially those who have faced challenges, tensions, and loss of meaning in the pursuit of personal, community, ecclesial, and social eutopias, will be able to say, "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7-8). Whatever happens today and tomorrow, let us dream and commit ourselves to the gracious and all-powerful God rather than human judgments, eristic-erudite narratives, and wishful thinking!

Let us dream and dedicate ourselves to the merciful and allpowerful God rather than human judgements, eristic-erudite tales, and wishful thinking, whatever occurs today and tomorrow!

Abbreviations

AG Ad gentes

EG Evangelii gaudium FR Fides et ratio

GeE Gaudete et exsultate

NIC National Intelligence Council

OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

QA Querida Amazonia

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