

THE CATEGORY OF TESTIMONY AS AN AXIS  
OF FUNDAMENTAL ECCLESIOLOGY:  
THE CREDIBILITY OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORK  
OF SALVADOR PIÉ-NINOT

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DAVID BOUMA

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the fundamental ecclesiology of the contemporary Catholic theologian Salvador Pié-Ninot (\*1941). The text shows the way in which he solves the question of the credibility of the Church and the attitudes of private Christianity with its negative attitude towards the Church (*believing without belonging*). Pié-Ninot underlines that the credibility of the Church is dependent on revelation and that the character of faith is ecclesial. He interconnects the last two councils: the concept of the Church, whose divine character is approachable by man (*via empirica*, the way of experience) as it is taught by the First Vatican Council, with the ecclesial stances of the Second Vatican Council, which reduces the emphasis on the attributes of the Church in favour of revelation, the person of Jesus Christ and a personal relationship to him. Pié-Ninot then offers the way of testimony, which includes the outer (for example, apostolic tradition) and inner form of churchly reality (personal life according to the demands of the Gospel) and perceives the Church as a privileged space of God's revelation and salvation.

**Keywords**

Catholic Theology; Salvador Pié-Ninot (1941); Fundamental Theology; Ecclesiology; New Via Empirica

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The following text<sup>1</sup> is devoted to the question of the credibility of the Church as presented in the work of the famous theologian Salvador Pié-Ninot.<sup>2</sup> Its aim is to sketch his way of solving the dilemma

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<sup>1</sup> The article reflects a completely revised chapter concerning the credibility of the church by David Bouma. *Zjevení, víra, církev. Teologické skici k úvodu do křesťanství*. Ostrava: Moravapress 2013, pp. 49–55.

<sup>2</sup> Salvador Pié-Ninot (\*22 June 1941) is a Spanish Catholic theologian and diocesan priest. Having finished his doctorate studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University

still topical in our time: ‘Jesus yes, Church no’; as a theologian, he reacts to the apparent tendency towards private Christianity, which could be described by the catchphrase *believing without belonging*.<sup>5</sup> Although the private and professional life of the author is connected to a Spanish and Italian Catholic background, I think that he can contribute to a reflection of the questions regarding the credibility and role of the Church in the wider setting of contemporary Europe.

The objective of this article is to introduce the kernel of Pie-Ninot’s fundamental ecclesiology, i.e., his approach towards the questions touching on the theme of the credibility of the Church. His competence in fundamental theology paved his way to Gregorian University, where he has lectured for many years since doing so similarly in his native Catalonia; he has become a distinguished face of ‘the Gregorian school’.

### 1. The Question of the Credibility of the Church in the Last Centuries According to Salvador Pié-Ninot

With regard to this question, the Catalonian theologian usually introduces the history of the problem and, in this way, prepares the ground for his own proposal, which we are going to introduce later. Our author does not neglect the classical introductory note that, as regards the question and its historical theological background, there is a crucial *difference* between believing in the Trinity and believing in the Church. This is indicated also by the grammatical formulations of the Apostles’ and Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creeds. The Latin version

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in 1971, he became a professor of fundamental theology and ecclesiology. Now he lectures at the Gregorian University in Rome and the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia in Barcelona. His specialisation within the area of fundamental theology is its basic terminology, Holy Scripture, and regarding ecclesiological themes, he focuses on, for example, theology of the laity and synodality. His latest monographs are Salvador Pié-Ninot. *La teologia fondamentale. Rendere ragione della speranza (1 Pt 3,15)*. Brescia: Queriniana 2002 (second edition 2014); Salvador Pié-Ninot. *Ecclesiologia. La sacramentalità della comunità cristiana*. Brescia: Queriniana 2008; and Salvador Pié-Ninot. *Che cos’è la Chiesa. Breve sintesi*. Brescia: Queriniana 2009. Apart from his research, he also acts as a counsellor during significant Church events – for example, in 2008 during the Ordinary Episcopal Synod with the theme of Word of God. See María del Carmen Aparicio Valls and Salvador Pié-Ninot (eds.). *Commento alla Verbum Domini*. Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press 2012.

<sup>5</sup> With reference to the catchphrase, see Grace Davie. *Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?* *Social Compass* 4 (1990), pp. 455–469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003776890037004004>.

of the Apostles' Creed says: *Credo in Deum ... et in Iesum Christum ... in Spiritum Sanctum ... sanctam Ecclesiam catholicam...* As can be noticed, there is no preposition *in* as concerns the Church in order to highlight the qualitative difference between the faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and the faith in the Church, which is the secondary subject of the consent of faith.<sup>4</sup>

Then the author mentions some important personalities and events of modern times related to the theme. It was already at the time of second scholasticism, from Cajetan (1469–1534) to Suárez (1548–1617), when the role of the Church regarding faith in Christ became the subject of intensive discussions. The authors of the period came to the conclusion that the testimony of the Church is the cause (*causa*) but not the reason (*argumentum*) of faith. The ecclesial mediation conditions the possibility of the act of faith, but it is not its final motive. According to Pié-Ninot, the fact that the role of the Church is the subject of theological reflection shows that her credibility is (and should be) dependent on what we call *revelatio* today and what comes to its climax in the story and person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is said that the faith is essentially of churchly character; however, it is anchored in the redemptive initiative of the Triune God, who ontologically and chronologically precedes the Church.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. The Credibility of the Church and the First Vatican Council in the View of Salvador Pié-Ninot

As will be shown later, the Catalan theologian is deeply interested in the approach of the First Vatican Council, which he does not want to critically neglect as time-conditioned and triumphalist. Within fundamental ecclesiology, Pié-Ninot uses and complements the idea of the council based on the view of Cardinal Dechamps<sup>6</sup> that each man can recognise the divine character of the Catholic Church by his or her experience (the so called *via empirica*). He summarises Dechamps' argumentation, which the council reflected in the constitution *Dei*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Pié-Ninot. *Credere la Chiesa*. Milano: Edizioni San Paolo 2002, pp. 9–11.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Victor-Auguste-Isidore Cardinal Dechamps (1810–1883) was a Belgian Catholic Theologian and a member of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, archbishop of Mechelen and the Primate of Belgium.

Filius (1870), accenting the notion of the Church as a moral miracle and as a proof of Jesus' divinity:

- the Church should be understood as concrete revelation;
- for everyone without exception, the Church is a constant reason for faith since it is a sign elevated among the nations;<sup>7</sup>
- the credibility of the Church is evident.

In the notion of the First Vatican Council, the Church is not primarily a mystery, which would be a subject of faith, but it is a reality approachable for those with an open mind offering a fascinating and naturally explainable positive experience leading to its divine Founder (DS 3015). The main features of the experience are 'admirabilis propagatio' (admirable growth), 'eximia sanctitas' (outstanding sanctity), 'inexhausta in omnibus bonis foecunditas' (unfailing fruitfulness in good deeds), 'catholica unitas' (catholic unity) and 'invincta stabilitas' (unwavering stability). Salvador Pié-Ninot reminds us that, for the Fathers of the First Vatican Council, the Church is a sign of the veracity of revelation and a motive for faith in Christ (DS 3012–3014).<sup>8</sup>

Salvador Pié-Ninot is right to note that it follows the direction of a 'descending route', which begins at the Church and 'regressively' (or 'analytically') continues towards Christ. The *today* of the Church is the starting point and the aim is the recognition of its transcendent origin. As compared to *via notarum* and *via historica*, which begin at Jesus and aim towards the identification of the true Church, the way of experience is the example of an inverted approach. Our author often quotes Saint Augustine, who said: 'The power of God is no longer manifested to us in the life of Christ, which we see no more; now it is shown in the living Church, which is present to our eyes. We see the Body and believe in the Head.'<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Salvador Pié-Ninot and the Credibility of the Church According to the Contemporary Magisterium

Salvador Pié-Ninot pays attention to the changes in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council as well as to the fact that it does not

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<sup>7</sup> DS 3013; *Ecclesia, signum levatum in nationes*

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Pié-Ninot. *La teologia fondamentale*, pp. 542–553.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Pié-Ninot. Church (subentry IV. Via Empirica). In René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella. *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*. New York: Crossroad 1994, pp. 170–172. Augustine. *Sermo CXVI* (PL 38, p. 659–660).

continue in line with the pathos of *via empirica*. The last ecumenical council suppresses the ecclesiocentrism of the previous decades so that revelation and faith are Christocentric while the sign of credibility is testimony, which becomes a paradigm of fundamental ecclesiology. The new orientation of fundamental ecclesiology, our author comments, is determined by a personalised view on the economy of salvation and by the usage of the category of testimony in the context where we could find references to miraculous attributes of the Church before.<sup>10</sup>

Pié-Ninot points out that LG 8 suggests the analogy of the Church with the mystery of the Incarnation. God comes to the world through the Church as he has done so through his Incarnation with all of its imaginable radicality. That is why complex Christology should form the background of comprehensible ecclesiology, and the role of the Church in faith should be subordinately analogous to the role of Christ as ‘the mediator and the fullness of all revelation’ (DV 2). In other words, the Church is the way upon which Christ wants to walk through history as the truth and the life. Also DV 8 hints at the sense of ecclesial mediation in relation to revelation saying that ‘the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church – and through her in the world’. In the reading of Salvador Pié-Ninot, according to the last council, the Church is a prolongation of Christ’s revelational and redemptive mission. It is very significant for the reflection of the Catalan theologian that the documents of the last council confirm the sacramentality of the Church as representing its deepest identity. In his opinion, the accent on the sacramental character of the Church ties her more transparently to Christ and to the task of being ‘a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race’ (LG 1). Nevertheless, the sacramental dignity can be blemished by the anti-testimony of some Church members, Pié-Ninot reminds us. Instead of mirroring Christ, alive through their authentic Christian existence, they are like curved mirrors caricaturing the face of the Lord (cf. GS 19).<sup>11</sup> That is why the last council as well as later magisterial documents comment on the experiences which might mislead those who observe the Church. The Catalan ecclesiology uses this

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<sup>10</sup> Pié-Ninot notes that the documents of the Second Vatican council mention the term ‘testimony’ 133 times. Cf. Pié-Ninot. Church (subentry IV. Via Empirica), pp. 143–145.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Pié-Ninot. *La teologia fondamentale*, p. 553n.

paradoxical experience as a starting point and works with the empirical aspect of Church community in a modest way. He assumes that the deepest reality of the Church can be understood and accepted only as a mystery. All over again, he emphasises the category of paradox, the fact that we deal with ‘one complex reality’ (LG 8) in which the human and the divine meet to form a structurally paradoxical form of the Church. The category of paradox is then characterised by dialectical binomials: the Church as a community of people – the Church of God, the visible Church – invisible Church, the Church in history – the eschatological Church. It is ‘at the same time holy and always in need of being purified’ (LG 8). In this line, the document *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (TMA), published on the occasion of the year 2000, talks about the necessity for the Church to purify its memory and asks for forgiveness (TMA 33–36). The appeal for forgiveness by John Paul II pronounced on 12 March 2000 should be a telling expression of this critical and penitent ecclesiology.<sup>12</sup>

Our author asks how it is possible that the Church presents itself as a sign of salvation, on the one hand, while admitting ‘past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and slowness to act’ (TMA 33) on the other. He knows that it is the historical phenomenon of the Church which causes concerns. Observing the sociological, legal, organisational, institutional, cultural and moral reality of the Church, he asks: How is it possible to show the credibility of the Church as a sacrament of Jesus Christ or as God’s sign and an instrument for the redemption of mankind? How is it possible to help the seekers to understand and experience the mystery of the Church, which is hidden in the paradox of its historical form and humanly fragile Church institution? Is it still possible to talk about *via empirica*?<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. The Way of Testimony: the *New Via Empirica*

Having briefly summarised several chosen elements of the fundamental ecclesiology of the last two councils with regard to the proposal of the Catalonian ecclesiologist Salvador Pié-Ninot, we can proceed to describe the proposal as such. Our author talks about the *way of testimony* and suggests approaching the theme as a new way of experience;

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Pié-Ninot. *La teologia fondamentale*, p. 555n.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Pié-Ninot. *Credere la Chiesa*, pp. 57–59.

he is persuaded that a man can experience the Holy Spirit even in the Church of sinners. Experiencing the action of the Holy Spirit can be traced on two distinguishable but connected lines.<sup>14</sup>

The first kind of churchly reality, which has been entering the world since the times of Acts, has a so-called *outer* form. We can experience it on the following axis: Apostolic preaching – New Testament – Apostolic Tradition – Magisterial teaching – preaching of the Church. The pneumatological bases of this line can be characterised by the terms: Pentecost – inspiration – *sensus fidei* – negative assistance – charisma.<sup>15</sup> The second dimension of the churchly reality is referred to as *inner*. Meeting an unselfish, self-sacrificing, modest and generous person living according to the Gospel provides a Church member and an observer with an extraordinary experience. The uncommonness and radicality of a life style based on the Gospel as reflected both in individuals and in communities makes a perceptive man feel the pneumatological basis of this experience. Something from the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the superhuman principle of the Church, flashes through the axis: good life – service – sacrifice – martyrdom – canonisation.<sup>16</sup>

Pié-Ninot thus assumes that the way of testimony – the new way of experience – is an appropriate approach towards the theme of the credibility of the Church since it is a meeting point of three classical attitudes towards the Church: *via notarum* (which tries to show that, according to the will of Jesus, the Catholic Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic); *via historica* (based on the research of historical sources, it tries to demonstrate the continuity of Palestinian Christianity with the so called Great Church); and *via empirica* (grounded in the experience with the presence of the Church, see above).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Pié-Ninot. *La teologia fondamentale*, pp. 569–575.

<sup>15</sup> A brief illustration of this last may be when a man with an open mind carefully listens to the television broadcast of Pope's Christmas or Easter speech and the benediction *Urbi et Orbi* before assembled crowds of believers of many nations at the St. Peter's Square in Rome, he can experience a very appealing testimony...

<sup>16</sup> These impulses have stood in the beginning of the journey of converts since the Middle Ages up to the present.

<sup>17</sup> Ecclesiological treatises used mostly *via notarum* although the differentiation of this 'way' from the other two was not clear. The nature, style and logic of *via notarum* presupposes historical grounds of realising the 'marks' (the *via historica* is a premise) and everything is connected to *via empirica* since the 'marks' are seen as constituting a miracle in the moral level. Cf. Pié-Ninot, Church (subentry I. Fundamental Ecclesiology), p. 144.

Pié-Ninot thus poses the following question: What kind of testimony (and corresponding experience of people) can support the credibility of the Church and, simultaneously, demonstrate the basic fact characterising the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council<sup>18</sup> that the credibility of the church cannot be isolated from the credibility of Christ and his life-giving Spirit? Pié-Ninot complements the two described lines with a third moment and distinguishes three kinds of testimony: outer testimony, inner testimony and interiorising testimony of the Spirit present in both former kinds.<sup>19</sup> Let us consider the author's idea more closely.

A. First of all, it concerns *apostolic testimony*. It is via the Apostolic Church – the witness of the resurrection of Christ – that we learn about the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. The testimony of the Apostles preserved by Scripture and Tradition is the invitation to faith for everybody. During its journey in history, the Church anchors and passes on this outer apostolic testimony as it can be observed in the process of the formation of the New Testament canon. *And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning*' (John 15:27), says Jesus to the disciples during the Last Supper. For the Church, the testimony of the original Christian community will always be the principal source of information concerning the redemptive initiative of God in the person of Jesus Christ. The apostolic testimony recorded in early Christian literature, especially the canonical, and preached in

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<sup>18</sup> 'Lumen gentium cum sit Christus, haec Sacrosancta Synodus, in Spiritu Sancto congregata, omnes homines claritate Eius, super faciem Ecclesiae resplendente, illuminare vehementer exoptat, omni creaturae Evangelium annuntiando (cf. Mc 16:15). Cum autem Ecclesia sit in Christo veluti sacramentum seu signum et instrumentum intimae cum Deo unionis totiusque generis humani unitatis, naturam missionemque suam universalem, praecedentium Conciliorum argumento instans, pressius fidelibus suis et mundo universo declarare intendit. Condiciones huius temporis huic Ecclesiae officio urgentiorem vim addunt, ut nempe homines cuncti, variis hodie vinculis socialibus, technicis, culturalibus arctius coniuncti, plenam etiam unitatem in Christo consequantur?' LG 1.

<sup>19</sup> But it would be a misunderstanding to perceive the classification of the testimony in the sense that the bishops, priests, theologians and catechists should preach and teach while the others should demonstrate this in practice. The following quotation of Pope Gregory the Great from his commentary on the Book of Job shows that the servant of the outer testimony should also ideally serve the inner kind as well: 'But in that which the Apostle Paul says to his disciple, *These things exhort and teach with all authority* [1 Tim 4: 11], he does not recommend the tyranny of power, but the authority of his life [Tit 2:15]. For that is enjoined with authority which is practised before it is advised. For when conscience makes the tongue falter, it detracts from the authority of one's talking. He did not recommend him therefore the authority of haughty words, but the confidence of good conduct' Gregory the Great. *Moralium Lib. XXIII in caput XXXIII B. Job* (PL 76, p. 265–266).



written or spoken form calls one generation of people after another to the community of the Church and she becomes a mother assembling her children – *mater congregans* (cf. LG 26). The experience with the Church as a mother, who addresses a man, encourages him and searches for him is, according to Pié-Ninot, the result of the monumental testimony of the Church. Unfortunately, this experience can also be seen as a form of ideological pressure, attempted indoctrination, and manipulation, especially if it is not complemented by the experience which is described in the following paragraph.

B. If the apostolic testimony is accepted in faith, it becomes the *testimony of life* – a testimony which attracts (and provokes) others. The authentic Christian life of both individuals and communities is engraved in their surroundings by their testimony. The testimony of life is the interiorised apostolic testimony; it is a gospel in the authentic life of a concrete man and community. As Pié-Ninot points out, the Church lives like a family of the children of God, united in faith and community – *fraternitas congregata* (cf. LG 8,9; UR 6). This vital testimony is not a privilege of canonised saints, but it concerns all Christians who, in spite of their weaknesses, are trying to live their faith honestly and to be brothers and sisters of all. This vital testimony is crucial to be perceived in relation to the testimony of the life and martyrdom of Christ's Apostles and their Master: *'In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth'* (John 18:37). Various forms of testimony for the credibility of the Church are then interconnected and support each other. The relation of the (outer) apostolic testimony (A) and (inner) lived testimony (B) plays a key role in the fundamental ecclesiology sketched here.

C. Pié-Ninot asks how we can receive the message about God coming from 'outside' to 'inside', i.e., to human life and heart. How does a listener become a believer – an authentic member of the Church? A spark of grace coming from the Holy Spirit is necessary; the existential acceptance of the apostolic testimony is thus possible only thanks to the testimony of the Holy Spirit: *'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me'* (John 15:26). It is this inner and interiorising testimony of the Holy Spirit which enables understanding and accepting the testimony about Christ. *Spiritus in Ecclesia* – the Spirit in the Church (cf. LG 4) catalyses this mysterious process during which Christian preaching is transformed from the letter to life. In the view

of Pié-Ninot, the testimony of the Holy Spirit creates a bridge between the testimony of the Apostles and its vital interiorisation; he creates a connection between Christ and the Church. The work of the Paraclete is thus the main reason of the credibility of Christ's Church, the principle of its growth and the experience of many.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

Analysing Pié-Ninot's answer to the question why, in which, and to what extent a Christian should rely on the Church, we find out that it is dependent on the introductory sentences of the constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which include a principal statement for fundamental ecclesiology, that the great sign of the credibility of the church is twofold in unity: Christ in the Church (cf. above quoted LG 1). In line with the constitution, our author assumes that drawing a clear dividing line between Jesus Christ and the Church does not make sense as well as the other way round. If we pay attention to the principal relativity, i.e., that the Church is dependent on and related to Christ, it is not necessary to be anxious of this strong ecclesial concept. Such a strong concept is grounded in the fact that the Church was founded by Jesus and, especially, on its sacramental nature. The adjective 'strong' is not intended to problematise the processual character of the foundation of the Church by Jesus and 'sacramental nature' does not refer to the excessive amplification of ecclesiology in the style of overusing (and misusing) the dynamics *ex opere operato*. Also in the approach of the Catalonian professor, ecclesiology is dependent on Christology and our author successfully uses the benefits of a complete Christology for his ecclesiological proposal. The full Christology of Pié-Ninot can 'endure' an ecclesiology, for which the Church is a privileged space of God's revelation and salvation. However, Pié-Ninot clearly understands that believing in Christ *is not the same* as believing in the Church. The proper understanding of sacramentality is vital for faith and theology in order to maintain the necessary difference between the mystery of Christ and the Church. According to our author, the Church is not banal in any way because of the reason that it is not absolute. On

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<sup>20</sup> As concerns points A, B and C, cf. Pié-Ninot. *La teologia fondamentale*, pp. 646–648.

the contrary, her meaning is based on her relation to Christ, in her dependence, derived nature, and on her existence as a sign and an instrument.<sup>21</sup>

In our opinion, Pié-Ninot's accent on the category of testimony with its experiential and ethical dimensions can serve as a mirror for local churches. It can prevent a self-deceiving notion of *societas perfecta*, which does not need to be sensitive and modest as concerns civil society and does not need to cooperate with it. I think that Pié-Ninot's elaboration of the category of testimony as a threefold invitation to conversion and faith can also encourage local churches in their prophetic distance from civil society. The reflection on the quality of apostolic (outer) and vital (inner) testimony helps to search for the ways to authentic Christian service and life and prevents a false comparison of missionary results and pastoral sterility with Jesus' dismissal of the crowds after the Eucharistic speech (John 6). If the category of faith will be properly reflected as a sign of ecclesial credibility, the situations when unsuitable people are irresponsibly chosen for Church ministry and service, or when the sacramental character of the church is reduced to offering divine service and, as often happens, to a shallow providing of Sacraments, will be less frequent. These occasional tendencies stand in contradiction to the Tradition of the Church including its charter – the constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which, especially with regard to the service of bishops, emphasises the duty to evangelise and teach, to serve as shepherds of their people and (only) then introduce them to the highest liturgical mysteries of the Church.

Let us summarise what has been said above. In line with the Second Vatican Council, the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that 'the Church has no other light than Christ's'.<sup>22</sup> It is Jesus and his Spirit who make a sacrament from the Church – God's sign and an instrument of salvation. In this context, we have tried to sketch *the new way of experience*, and, together with the Spanish theologian Salvador Pié-Ninot, we have pointed out that the experience with the threefold

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<sup>21</sup> Now, it is appropriate to mention a significant work of our author with is thematic outreach to dogmatic ecclesiology as regards the sacramentality of Christian community: Salvador Pié-Ninot. *Ecclesiologia. La sacramentalità della comunità cristiana*. Brescia: Queriniana 2008.

<sup>22</sup> The text of the paragraph briefly elaborates the introductory sentences of the constitution *Lumen gentium*. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1994, par. 748.

testimony can be a stimulating approach to the complex reality of the Church. It includes a) the apostolic testimony, which is objective and the historical reason for the credibility of the Church and which is approachable in the New Testament and in the living Tradition of the Church; b) the life testimony of Christ's followers, which makes the mystery of the Church attractive, persuasive and, in spite of all paradoxes, credible even today; c) the testimony of Christ's Spirit, who is the 'soul' of the Church, enhances both of the previous kinds of testimony and makes people able to recognise and accept it.

The sensitive outer testimony connected with the experience of the testimony of Christ's disciples can certainly be a reason for experiencing the credibility of the Church in this difficult time. It is not a new observation that the contemporary spirituality in the previously Christian areas of the West is directed outside the Church, outside Christianity, and it is even often unrelated to the personal God. Nevertheless, if the Church will understand and live through her relativity and derivativeness, i.e., her sacramental character, she will gain from the apostolic testimony and testify by her life (*martyria* means testimony in Greek); thanks to the strength of the Spirit, she will help the people of these atomised and, to a great degree, impersonalised times to return to Christ and thus to the Church.

*Catholic Theological Faculty, Charles University  
Katolická teologická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy  
Thákurova 3  
160 00 Praha 6 – Dejvice  
e-mail: bouma@ktf.cuni.cz*