

# *Spirituality for These Critical Times*

An Exposition of the theme  
for the new UCCP Quadrennium

**Rev. Dr. Noriel C. Capulong**

## **I. Introduction: Initial laying down of the context**

Our theme for this quadrennium speaks of two major elements, that of spirituality and that of critical times. We speak of our times as critical times, times full of crisis. In fact, I believe that crisis is now what defines our context as a people. We have this ecological-environmental crisis, a crisis of leadership among our national leaders as the pork barrel controversy threatens to implode with more names of senators and congressmen and others about to be implicated in the biggest scandal to hit our government institutions, a political-diplomatic crisis in our stand off with China over our competing territorial claims in the West Philippine sea, and of course, there is the worsening violent crisis in various countries, whether in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and more recently, in Ukraine, all characterized by struggles of peoples wanting to be free from their autocratic rulers with the involvement also of super power countries like the US and Russia.

However, what has become the most immediate and the most traumatic of these crises for many of our people is the ecological-environmental crisis. For they have become victims of these manifestations of more destructive climate change patterns, with more powerful super typhoons, unprecedented floods and landslides, more intense summer heat, and in other countries in the temperate zones, much colder winter, melting ice caps in the polar regions, more unpredictable weather patterns. But as we can see, environmental crisis is just one among many other crises that we are facing in this quadrennium.

## **II. The Crisis of the Spirit**

The greater crisis we have to deal with as a church is the crisis of the spirit. It refers to a loss of the dimension of the spirit and becomes manifested in far more insidious forms as in the worsening of the culture of corruption in both government and outside of government, in the apparent moral depravity of so many those who rule over us, in the seeming lack of any sense of moral accountability, in the disappearance of any sense of decency and moral integrity among so many of our leaders today, in the seeming gap and contradiction between the faith that we profess and confess and the values and way of life and mode of relationships that we carry out with each other and our basic attitude towards our environment.

This is a crisis far more potentially destructive because it is the one that renders us incapable of responding adequately to all the other crises we face in these times. This results in a loss of perspective, loss of direction, loss of meaning and purpose, loss of any spiritual-moral mooring and most importantly, the loss of that kind of spirituality that we need in facing and responding relevantly to the challenge of the various crises we face in these times.

But crisis, no matter how serious it may be, also offers new opportunities, to rebuild anew, to learn lessons from, to recover what has been lost and restore it on a new and stronger foundation. We therefore, as a church have to go back to the basics of our faith as we try to review the fundamental roots of our faith and in our basic understanding of a true, authentic spirituality for these critical times.

### **III. Spirituality from the Scriptures**

#### **A. Spirituality as defined by Law**

Spirituality in the Scriptures may be defined on various levels. The first is that spirituality as defined by Law (Ex. Luke 18:9-12). Spirituality as understood by the experts in the law (the Pharisees) is equated with righteousness (being right in the eyes of God and of people). But it is a righteousness that is defined by the prescriptions of the Law. This involves faithfulness, diligence in carrying out the prescribed rituals of the community such as, praying at regular times, fasting, tithing, circumcision, not associating with the “unrighteous, sinful” sectors of the society, e.g., thieves, rogues, adulterers, tax collectors (corrupt officials).

This also involves observance of other prescriptions of the Law like regular temple visits to pray and to offer sacrifices especially on especial festival days (Passover, Feast of Weeks, Tabernacles and Day of Atonement, Deut. 16:1-16; Lev. 16. ); Observance of Sabbath Law (Ex. 31:12-17); Observance of dietary laws (Lev. 11); Observance of the “purity” laws, separating the ritually clean from the unclean and the like.

In summary, the kind of spirituality, life of holiness or spiritual righteousness prescribed in the Law has been defined more by the faithful observance of the prescribed practices and rituals of the community.

Thus, it is a spirituality or righteousness defined more by rituals or traditional forms of religious practices that are believed to secure and ensure the right standing of the person before God. Thus, with the proper and faithful observance of such practices the person may then be declared as righteous and has the correct and socially approved mode of spirituality. This is precisely what the Pharisee was so happy and thankful for in Luke 18:9-12. “...O God I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of all my income...” This Pharisee believes that he has arrived at a spirituality and life of righteousness that may be considered pleasing and acceptable already before God.

## B. Spirituality as defined by the Prophets

This ritual-based understanding of spirituality has been seriously challenged, questioned and undermined by the prophets. Instead of a spirituality and righteousness defined by the rituals of the law they proclaimed a new spirituality shaped and defined by the ethical and social demands of the law.

### 1. The tension between Ritual and Ethics – Based on Micah 6:1-8.

As exemplified by Micah from the rural village of Moresheth, the prophet responds to the age-old question of “*With what shall I come before the LORD and bow myself before the God on high?*” (Micah 6:6). This is actually raising the most fundamental question of faith.<sup>1</sup> How do we restore our relationship with God especially if it has been broken and tainted by our sinful life? How can we be able to please God? What can we do in order to remain right or righteous before God? How can we attain a life of spirituality that is acceptable before God? What do we need to do?

The initial answers offered were all coming from the tradition of rituals prescribed by the Law:

- a. Burnt offerings of calves even just a year old. In this case a precious possession is willingly offered.
- b. Offerings of thousands of rams reminding us of the sacrifices offered during the coronation of Solomon as recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:21, burnt offerings of a thousand bulls, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs, with their libations and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel. In this case, only a king can afford such a kind of sacrifice to the Lord.<sup>2</sup>
- c. Countless streams of expensive, export quality olive oil which in ancient times has varied, multiple uses for health, good diet and the even basic beauty care. In this case only those who own large olive plantations can afford to make this kind of very generous offering. 4. If the Lord will still not be pleased with these expensive collections of various sacrificial offerings, there is still the ultimate, most valuable offering that can be offered by a worshipper in order to please God. This is the offering of one’s first born child. This practice, actually is not prescribed in the Law, but has been a popular practice in the ancient Canaanite religious culture.

This practice is shaped more by the popular Baal sacrificial practices in the period intended to appease an angry, demanding god. Apparently, many Israelites has been seduced by the seeming simplistic faith implied in this practice and adopted it in a rather

---

<sup>1</sup> James Luther Mays, *Micah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 136.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, trans. from German By Ralph D. Gehrke (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 104.

syncretistic manner in the belief that Yahweh, just like Baal, will be pleased with the offering of what is considered the ultimate, most precious and most valuable possession a worshipper can offer, a piece of one's own self, one's own first born child who is supposed to be the insurance to a more secure future for the parent.

This list of what is being planned as offerings to God cannot be easily dismissed. They are expressions of complete, no less sincere, total submission and surrender to God in which practically nothing is left to the offerer. The worshipper is willing to offer as sacrifice to God, everything that is considered most precious possession just so he can be considered righteous or in a right relationship with his God and therefore endowed with what could be the most sublime expression of spirituality, being declared as living a life approved by God and pleasing to God.

2. What really is *good* in the eyes of the Lord?

For the prophet however all these attempts to please God, to be in a right relationship with God still fall short of what is really required by God. Micah tells his apparently well endowed audience: "*He has told you O mortal what is good...*" Apparently, all those offers of the most expensive, most precious sacrifices before the altar of the Lord do not constitute the good that the Lord is referring to. All those sacrifices, all those renunciations for the sake of God, in the name of God do not really amount to what is good for humanity, nor what is good for the community.<sup>3</sup> They are not actually good nor pleasing in the eyes of God.

This will then compel us to follow the rest of Micah's declarations in this chapter of his book. This actually represents the summary, and the heart and soul of prophetic teaching in the whole Old Testament. If those offers of sacrifices, renunciations are not good enough what then does the Lord require of us?

Micah proceeds to mention just three things in 6:8. God requires nothing but, to do justice (*mishphat*), to love kindness (*chesedh*) and to walk humbly (*tsanah*) with your God. These are the three things that will serve as the answer to the basic question raised earlier by the worshipper. It is not the rituals of sacrifices involving the most expensive, most precious, and even the greatest number of animals to be sacrificed. It is not the rituals adopted from other religions such as that of child sacrifice. It is not money nor riches that will determine whether we can please God and be in a right relationship with him.

This is very significant since this oracle of the prophet is deliberately addressed not just to everyone but to those who are economically and politically more endowed than others. This oracle of the prophet is actually intended for the rich, the famous and the

---

<sup>3</sup> Wolff, *ibid.*

powerful in the society of Judah. Now, let's take a look at each of these three things mentioned by Micah as the only requirement being asked by God.

*First*, justice (mishpat) unlike our usual understanding of the term refers primarily, from the perspective of the prophets and even from the *Torah*, to the rights of the poor.<sup>4</sup> That is, it refers to the upholding, protection and preservation of the rights of those who have no means and no power and capacity to protect themselves and their rights in the community. That is why this oracle is primarily addressed to those who have the power and the capacity to carry out this mandate in behalf of those who are powerless in their community. It is addressed to the kings and the ruling class of the society of Micah. They are the ones who have the power to uphold justice and prevent and correct an injustice.

In the eyes of the scripture writers, this is the primary duty of a king. Listen to what is declared in the prayer recited during the coronation of the king in Psalm 72 as to the basic duty of the king:<sup>5</sup>

*Give the king your justice O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.  
May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.  
May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,  
And the hills in righteousness.  
May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,  
give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.*

This means the task of the king in doing justice is imbued with an initial subjective perspective and commitment. It is imbued with a partisan political option, taking the side of the weak and the poor against the strong and the oppressive forces in the society.

In fact, in Deuteronomy 16:20, the requirement to do justice stands all alone as the only requirement: "*Justice and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*" Here it is the sole requirement for life that is abundant and long in the land that the Lord is giving them. For prophet Micah however, it is just one of the three, but the number one requirement that should be pursued first and foremost.

The kings' failure to work for justice for the poor has been pointed to by the prophets of the 8<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries as the very reason for the destruction that came to Judah in the hands of the Babylonian conquerors. (Isaiah 1:21-24; Micah 3:9-12; Amos 5:11-15,

---

<sup>4</sup> Eleazar S. Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 51-52.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. N. Capulong, *Reading and Hearing the Old Testament in Philippine context*, vol. 2 (Quezon City: New Day Publishers and United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 2009), 235-236.

21-24; Jeremiah 7:5-15; 22:13-19). The experiment with monarchy has failed because of the failure of justice.

*Second* is kindness or *chesedh*. This is translatable in many other ways as you can see in various Bible versions: Steadfast love, loving kindness, loving mercy, loyalty, covenant loyalty. Actually, this refers to loyalty in a relationship. It means being steadfast, the ability to hold on and hang on to a relationship of love and trust in spite and despite the odds.

It is, in fact, putting the task of justice into practice in the context of a community. It is having the passion to remain loyal and committed to the people who are the objects of God's justice and covenant love, to do what is "good", loving and liberating for the least members of the community. It is pursuing what is just and righteous with steadfast loyalty and kindness, with great compassion for the poor, powerless and insignificant members of the community. This becomes an imperative demand mainly because this is precisely what God has also demonstrated to Israel in their history.

Israel has encountered YHWH when they were yet slaves in Egypt as a God who took a partisan stand and chose to take the side of powerless Israel over against the powerful Pharaoh of Egypt. God's call for steadfast love, loving kindness and covenant loyalty on his people is simply an invitation to make a fitting response to the one who had been the first to love them so steadfastly, who had remained a constant and loyal covenant partner throughout their history even if it was Israel who was so inconsistent in her historical attempts to be loyal to Yahweh as their only God in the midst of a highly dominant and tempting polytheistic Canaanite culture.

This is to acknowledge that the covenant relationship has been maintained and sustained not by any merit achieved by Israel. It is to confess that this relationship with God has been initiated and maintained all by God's love and grace and not by anything else on the part of Israel. That is why Israel has nothing to boast of even in light of their covenant relationship with God. This naturally slides into the next requirement of God.

The next demand, to walk humbly with God, may then be considered as a natural consequence of a full apprehension of the first and second demands. The call to do justice, as carried out in the spirit of love and covenant loyalty would then have to be tempered always by the spirit of humility. For pride and arrogance has always been the temptation of those gifted and entrusted with power to rule over their own people. Once in positions of power and authority it is so easy to forget and lose one's original set of values, perspectives and sensitivity.

The call to humility is simply to confess who we are before our creator and redeemer. The creature simply cannot rise above his/her own creator. The creature can only

remain in the spirit of great awe, wonder and humility before the great mystery of God as the creator and sustainer of all. At the same time, for those placed in positions of power and authority, such as the audience of Micah, this is a call for accountability before the only decisive power that must be acknowledged by all creatures.

All rulers, all kings, presidents and dictators, all those vested with power even in the *barangay*, in the companies and corporations, even in the homes and families and even in the church must be made aware always that they have a higher accountability to reckon with, lest they forget and their minds and hearts become corrupted and their values become distorted and become dominated by the spirit of arrogance and pride. The British political philosopher Lord Acton reminds us so emphatically, "*Power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely.*"<sup>6</sup> Yes, and those who are in power appear to be last ones to be convinced of this truth.

So far, between the rituals of the law and the ethics of the prophets we can see the development of a new mode of how spirituality is to be defined and understood in its more substantive, essential dimension. More than the demand for right rituals, it is the ethical demand to be just in all your dealings especially with the ones who have lesser stature than yours, with the ones who have lesser power and authority than yours, to be more compassionate and steadfast in our dealings and concern for them, and most of all to be humble always in our practice of what is just and what is loving, mindful always of our limitations and of our accountability before our creator God. This, for the prophets represents the very essence of the kind of spirituality being required by God at all times but more so, in very critical times such as ours.

### **C. Spirituality as defined by Jesus**

The spirituality of Jesus brings to a new level the tension between rituals of the law and the ethics of the prophets. Certainly, Jesus has not rejected the rituals of his Jewish faith. He also has carried out some of these rituals as prescribed by the law. He himself had been nurtured in the practice of prayer, and he even taught his followers how to pray. He grew up in the practice of going regularly to the temple in Jerusalem to join in the celebration of festivals like the Passover in Luke 2:41-42 and the feast of Tabernacles in John 7:2, 14. He observed the Passover meal with his disciples. He fasted for 40 days and forty nights (Matt. 4:1-2; Luke 4:1-2).

Indeed, Jesus is a person imbued with deep spirituality as expressed initially in his faithfulness to the traditions and rituals of his faith. Remember Jesus grew up as a Jew and died as a Jew. But his spirituality certainly goes beyond the mere practice of Jewish rituals. He reinterpreted these rituals in what he believes was the true spirit of the law from where they came. These he did so

---

<sup>6</sup> Cited in N. Capulong, *Reading and Hearing the Old Testament in Philippine Context*, vol. 2 (Quezon City: New Day Publishers and United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 2009), 329.

radically that this became one of those things that earned him the ire and the wrath of those in power in his society.

He reinterpreted so radically the law of the Sabbath rest so as to feed those who are hungry and heal the sick and those in need of rescue and relief from their victimized condition as he declares in Mark 2:27-28: *“The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”* In Matt. 12:6, he even announces that, *“...something greater than the temple is here”* as he proceeds to emphasize the primacy of the ethical dimension of the law in the following passage: *“Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”* (Matt. 12:11-12)

That something greater or more valuable than the temple is the human being himself, people, ordinary people, those who could easily fall into the trap laid by the scheming loan sharks or usurer, those who had fallen into slavery because of deep indebtedness, those who have lost their homes and their ancestral farmlands due to foreclosures. For Jesus, the life, welfare, security, safety and future of these ordinary, powerless people who are more greatly affected by their own critical times are far more important than the temple duties and the rituals required by law. The welfare of the people and the preservation of their life, regardless of race, gentile or not, or religion, Jewish or not, or gender is the “good” that can always be pursued even on a Sabbath, even if it may violate the letter of the law.

In the same vein, Jesus strongly criticized the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, calling them in Matt. 23:23, *“...hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, which is justice, mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.”* He decries the attempts of these religious leaders to major in minor concerns such as in tithing even the small garden vegetables used for seasoning while forgetting and ignoring the major and substantial ethical demands of the law.<sup>7</sup> This is Jesus clearly recalling and giving new emphasis on the prophetic ethical ideals more than ritual faithfulness as the real basis for considering the new spirituality required by God of his people.

If ever rituals are to be resorted to they are supposed to serve as instruments to uphold and enhance life. When Jesus healed the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19, he told them to show themselves to the priests at the temple in Jerusalem. Now the temple is the center of ritual purity, power and religious authority in Israel. No unclean, sick person, especially those suspected of leprosy, especially a Samaritan, can ever hope to come near or even be allowed to touch any of its portals. But for Jesus, the temple is there along with their priests, primarily to serve as a place for acceptance and healing of ordinary, unclean people. Jesus is actually revising

---

<sup>7</sup>Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. VIII (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 435-436.



the Law and giving new meaning to the rituals of the Law. That is why he angrily drove out of the temple those who were selling and buying sacrificial animals there and also overturned the tables of the money changers who were all agents of the ruling Sadducees in the temple and had been profiting a lot from this business at the expense of the poor (Mark 11:15-17; Matt. 21:12-13).

To be clear, Jesus was not rejecting the practice of the rituals of his Jewish faith. But what is clear for Jesus is that rituals alone do not make for a true, authentic and complete spirituality. Rituals alone without ethics or social conscience is but hypocrisy. The same thing can be said of the contemporary attempts to arrive at a meaningful experience of spirituality in the church. Rituals and their corresponding teachings devoid of any concern for justice, without any compassion for the suffering, without any tinge of humility, rituals that only tend to divert all our attention towards a more detached, mechanical and mystical view of Jesus and reinforcing a more exclusivistic, arrogant faith claim is itself a distortion of the kind of spirituality proclaimed and lived by Jesus and the prophets.

#### **IV. Jesus' Radical Spirituality**

Jesus actually proclaimed and exemplified a radically new kind of spirituality. But this is a spirituality that cannot be tolerated by those who control and benefit from the maintenance of the status quo, the slave masters, the prison keepers, the landowners, the usurers, the official guardians of rituals of the temple and the Law. This is a spirituality geared towards transformation or radical change. This is a spirituality towards alternative values and alternative and paradoxical modes of relationship, where the last shall be made first and the first shall be made last, where, as in the words of Mary in her Magnificat, *"the mighty are brought down from their thrones while the lowly are lifted up, where the hungry are filled with good things while the rich are sent away empty"* (Luke 1:52-53); where, as in the words of the Apostle Paul, *"the power of God to save has become foolishness to the wise of this world, where God's foolishness is still wiser than the wisest of human wisdom, and where God's weakness is still stronger than human strength"* (1Cor. 1:21-25). It is foolish and absurd because *God chose the foolish ones of this world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of this world to shame the strong and chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something.* (1 Cor. 1:27-28).

This is a spirituality rooted in this concrete, historic and paradoxical nature of the faith revealed to us by Jesus. It is concrete and historic because this faith came to us through a series of concrete events in the history of Israel but mainly because this came to us through a very human person but who has revealed to us the distinct character of this God. It is paradoxical because this kind of faith, according to Paul will easily be judged by the world as pure foolishness, absurd, where the power of God is made perfect in weakness and total powerlessness on the cross (2 Cor. 12:9). The greatest revelation of the power of God was during those moments when God's son was hanging on the cross in total weakness and

powerlessness. In the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, *“The crux of the cross is its revelation of the fact that the final power of God over man is derived from the self-imposed weakness of his love.”*<sup>8</sup>

This is quite paradoxical because our world has always been used to the ways of power as the one that make things happen. It is power, the use of power, state power, military power, brute masculine power, patriarchal power, economic power that shapes and determines the history and life of peoples and nations. This is the key to human progress and survival. It is foolish to think otherwise. Without this kind of power, we are doomed, so they say.

Advances in human civilization has been characterized primarily by this quest for power, the power to conquer and tame the forces of nature and the environment, the power to expand the reach of economic and political domination through the conquest of other peoples resulting in the history of brutal and violent colonization of nations including the Philippines, harnessing, exploiting their resources, their people in this very addicting quest for power.

But this worldly obsession for power acquisition and power accumulation at the expense of the powerless and at the cost of harmony and balance in our world is the very thing that is leading us to our destruction and corruption of God’s creation. We think we need such kind of power to live, that we can carry on by ourselves, to survive and even perpetuate our species. This is at the root of the crisis and the critical times we are in. The prophet Zechariah was already hinting of God’s rejection of such obsession when he says, *“Not by an army, nor by might, but by my spirit, says the Lord.”* (Zech 4:6)

Jesus showed in a more concrete way that there is an alternative way. For him, the typical obsession for power is simply the way of the Gentiles, as he told his disciples in Mark 10:42ff. *“Those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.”* Towards an alternative way, we also have an alternative image of how real power is to be understood and appreciated, in the image of a powerless slave or servant.

There is real power even in powerlessness as demonstrated ultimately by Jesus on the cross. He had taught this principle beforehand when he declared: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, (which stands for those deprived of any material and political potentiality) for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, which stands parallel with all of the following beatitudes: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth; blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God; blessed are the persecuted for righteousness’ sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and more (Matt. 5:5, 9, 10).*

---

<sup>8</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, ed., *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 22, quoted in Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in our Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 83.

This is the height of the paradoxical nature of our faith. But only as we are able to grasp this greatest paradox of the Christian faith can we be empowered enough to face the challenge of these critical times. For all the things we say of spirituality, in the ultimate analysis, spirituality is having and being imbued with the spirit to carry out with faith what the world considers impossible and even foolish. It is taking on life changing, radically transforming, history making tasks which the world considers as the domain only of the powerful, the privileged and the dominant classes and nations. It is being empowered enough to go beyond the limits set by this world, set by cultures, traditions, law and rituals. This is spirituality of transcendence. A spirituality that transcends, overcomes whatever barrier may have been set because it has been gripped by this different kind of power emanating from the love and graciousness of God.

The church, the UCCP must be imbued with this kind of spirituality of transcendence. We are not just an organization so concerned with structures, activities, programs, advocacies on the environment, human rights, witness and service, even with politics, rivalries and conflict. We are not just a gathering of worshippers going through our routine of rituals on a regular basis.

We are part of the body of Christ that has that quality of transcendence, to let the world know that there is a transcendent dimension, the dimension of the spirit, to let the world know of the continuing presence and the demanding love of Christ for the world, a love that is willing to sacrifice for the sake of the beloved, to let world know of the alternative vision and the alternative values, the alternative life coming from Christ, to let the world know that it is not just the powers that be that can shape our lives and history, to let the world know that there is a body here that will not automatically conform to the ways of this world, to let the world know that there is an urgent need for change, real transformation of lives and structures if we are to respond well to the crisis of our times, to let the world know there is hope because there is a God who would not give up on us.

And the church must continue to live and struggle in faith because of this hope and because of this love of God shown in Jesus Christ, even in the midst of crisis even in the face of her own imperfections and inadequacies. All because we know and trust that at the end of the day, after we have done our best even if at many times we in the church fumble and even fall, still the Lord will take care of the rest. This is the church making its confession in all humility. This is the church humbling itself and praying for that gift of spirituality that can enable us to face these times of crisis with faithfulness and steadfastness. May this indeed be so. Amen.