

## **INTRODUCTION**

# **WE ARE ALL THE PEOPLE OF A NEW BEGINNING<sup>1</sup>**

In his apostolic exhortation "Ecclesia in Europa" [The Church in Europe] promulgated on June 28, 2003, John Paul II points to the Christian roots of Europe's centuries-old culture. The Pope speaks of an open Europe, not closed within itself and oblivious to the rest of the world, but one that helps to "build a more just and brotherly world". This indeed merits closer attention.

It is evident that such a vision calls for a new model of thinking based on wise universalism—the deep awareness that human unity can be built only upon respect for diversity. Preparations for this future must begin today. As we know, our world is no longer a uniform culture based on Christian faith and hope, but is increasingly marked by cultural, ideological, religious and ethical pluralism. More and more, people are indifferent to any thought on transcendence, feel confused, spiritually burned out and lost, fear the future, and are disenchanted with a life whose meaning they cannot see. The meaning is to be found in hope for a life truly worthy of human beings, in hope for an ultimate fulfillment. Life without hope is impossible, as in our experience hope is a basic human need. We all need it — regardless of religion or ideology.

## **CHRISTIANITY AT THE BEGINNINGS**

I often think Christianity is still at the beginning of its history. The future needs to be viewed with deep confidence and "conditional optimism". After years of researching the theology of hope for universal salvation, I am increasingly convinced that Christianity's future will depend largely on whether it becomes a wise teacher and witness of true spiritual transformation; whether it sounds more convincing and optimistic — or whether it continues to increase human fears with visions of eternal punishment; on whether it becomes a messenger of good hope, moves closer to life and, remaining a demanding faith, develops more tolerance for human shortcomings; on whether it continues to concentrate on human sin and fault, or becomes friendlier to people and their strivings, acquiring a deeper understanding of the dramatic gift that is human freedom.

The heritage of Christian wisdom does not belong only to past ages, but is a program for the future as well. There exists a forgotten or lost greatness of Christianity open to God, but also sensitive to the destiny of fellow humans, capable of compassion which today is becoming a universal program for all religions, from Buddhism and Christianity to Islam, Judaism and other faiths.

The tragic instances of human cruelty to other humans witnessed in the 20th century have undermined the meaning of hope and deprived many of their belief in the merciful God. This hope will not be restored by decrees and orders coming from high religious authorities. What is needed is the universal experience of the real signs of hope for a better future. What is needed are not words, but convincing witnesses of hope, confirmed by our daily life. For Christians the Gospel still remains an insufficiently answered invitation addressed to human freedom. The spirit of universalism permeating the Beatitudes of Christ pronounced in his Sermon on the Mount awaits realization in each successive generation. In this sense we are all people of beginnings. I presume this is also true for other religions and their holy scriptures.

We have to listen to the great and wise witnesses, to their voices coming from various cultures and epochs. Such witnesses were also present in the turbulent 20th century:

In fact, Christianity has barely started taking its first, timid steps in the history of humankind. Many of Christ's words still remain incomprehensible. ... The history of Christianity is only beginning. All that has been accomplished in the past, and which today we describe as the history of Christianity, is a mere sum of attempts, some of which were inept, while the realization of others ended in failure.<sup>2</sup>

These words were spoken by an Orthodox clergyman, Alexandr Men, at a conference held at the Chamber of Technology in Moscow on September 8, 1990. On the following day he was murdered with an axe by an "unknown perpetrator". This extraordinary Christian was known for his openness and sensitivity, especially towards non-believers and people far removed from the Orthodox Church. For him universalism was not a vague idea, but daily experience and practice.

Another example: one year before his death (2000) an eminent religious thinker, Józef Tischner, wrote the following words:

I am convinced that Christianity—the Gospel—is not so much behind as before us. Heretofore history was a difficult quest for the identity of the Church through disputes with others—Judaism, paganism, dissenters from orthodoxy, etc. Today, we are facing a period when a search for, and a confirmation of identity will be accomplished through the discovery of similarities. [...] So far, we have ascertained the differences which stemmed from contradictions and bloody oppositions. Now is the time of reversal. We cannot revive the dead but, having learned how to appreciate differences, we may become sufficiently mature to attain deeper understanding.<sup>3</sup>

I have set these two unusual 20th-century Christians alongside each other for illustration. Each in his own way paved a path towards a better tomorrow. Both of them strove for a Christianity that would be more sensitive to human dramas, more benevolent to all, more

open, forgiving and understanding. It is such witnesses that change the image of the Church in the world and determine new horizons for the 21st century.

People of great heart and mind from various religions and faiths find a spiritual bond in their search for the world's hidden meaning along the multifarious paths of human thought and spiritual endeavor. They break through religious barriers. Their insights provide serious inspiration for overcoming all existing divisions now, in this life. Great spirituality and great wisdom help to spread the culture of openness and peace. This brings people closer together and encourages "wise and good" people to act together for the good of all.

## **TOWARDS A MORE PASCHAL CHRISTIANITY**

I have devoted a considerable part of my life to Christian paschal theology. First, an extensive trilogy: *Chrystus, nasza Pascha* [Christ, Our Passover, 1982], *Nasza Pascha w Chrystusie* [Our Passover in Christ, 1987] and *Pascha Chrystusa w dziejach człowieka i wszechswiata* [The Passover of Christ in the History of Man and the Universe, 1991]. The thousandth anniversary of the Christianization of Kievan Rus' (988–1988) inclined me to delve into Old Ruthenian paschal theology, which led to a consecutive trilogy based on the writings of the two most outstanding representatives of the Old Ruthenian period: *Chrystus zmartwychwstal. Motywy paschalne w pismach metropolity Ilariona (XI w.)*. *Przekład pism z oryginału cerkiewno słowiańskiego* [Christ Is Risen. Paschal Motifs in the Writings of Metropolitan Ilarion (Eleventh Century). Translation from the Old Church Slavonic Original, 1995], *Staroruska teologia paschalna w swietle pism sw. Cyryla Turowskiego* [Old Ruthenian Paschal Theology in the Light of Writings by St. Cyril of Turov, 1993] and *Święty Cyryl Turowski (XII w.). Homile paschalne. Przekład z języka cerkiewno-słowiańskiego i komentarz* [St. Cyril of Turov. (Twelfth Century). Paschal Homilies. Translation from the Old Church Slavonic and Commentary, 1993].

Contact with the great tradition of paschal reflection and spirituality produces a particular sensitivity. I have in mind the process of becoming closer to the very core of the Christian faith, namely, the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. It also enables one to perceive the history of Christian spirituality from a different perspective. Paschal theology still exerts an insufficient impact on the spiritual shape of the life of the Churches. This is the reason why we need often to return to paschal themes seen from the point of view of their connection with the spiritual form of Christian faith and existence.

Christianity of the third millennium will be capable of becoming more paschal and more aware of the enormous common good, i.e. the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the history of humankind. This awareness brings Christians closer to each other, and makes it possible to regard existing divisions in a different light. Great spirituality topples the walls of division, a truth probably best known to mystics of different denominations and religions, who find spiritual affiliation in the search for the same God along various paths of human thought and spiritual struggle. They break religious barriers, and their reflections stimulate the process of overcoming divisions, now, on this side of death.

Paschal theology suggests that the future of Christianity in this world will depend to a great measure on whether it will become more paschal, more close to life, more forbearing in relation to human shortcomings, and more friendly towards people. The mystery of Christ's Passover is that of a transition through the dark "valley of the shadow" of suffering. It gives a vision of vanquished evil, which does not have the last word. Finally, it is the expression of humanity's eternal longing for the victory of goodness, when God will ultimately become "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

For the Christian, the future of the world and the Church brightens in the light of the future of God. This certitude endows the whole of Christian spirituality with a tone of optimism and hope, by no means naive or shallow, but rooted in the realism of God's promises of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1). These are extraordinary eschatological promises: after the fulfilment of the history of the world not only will the earth change, but heaven too will become a new reality. The history of the world will introduce something which up to now has never existed. This is real history, maturing in order to gain ultimate fulfilment. God will accept it into His own history. It is this which is so amazing! Without it, the Christian view of the future would be much too shortsighted, deprived of spiritual depth and truly divine universalism.

Religious people believe that the meaning of life is not restricted to earthly existence, but reaches beyond it to the future of the new world. However, Christian hope is related not only to the final destiny of humanity and the world. The Christian believes that God is truly sovereign and present in all people who do good, who are open, sensitive and capable of showing understanding to others; that He is also present in people of other religions and world views. I also believe and trust that one day He will draw all people to Himself, purified, transfigured and reconciled.

For centuries this has been propagated by a frequently forgotten current in Christian tradition, marked by an extraordinary universalism of hope. This current of thought opens new horizons in the process of reconciliation of people here and now, on this side of death. It is particularly useful for all who pursue the path of universalism and dialogue. Christianity itself has not yet assimilated the full Gospel of hope. Had it truly done so, the history of Christian Europe and the Christian world would not have been so permeated with hostility towards other religions. There would have been no religious wars, no anti-Semitism, nor intolerance towards non-believers. Christianity would have displayed more modesty in its claims to universal Truth, and less selfishness and heartlessness. I do not know to what extent Christianity will be able—after twenty centuries of internal strife, rivalry and division—to better understand people and satisfy their spiritual needs in the future. I do not know whether it will prove sufficiently open and wise with past experience.

## **FACING THE UNKNOWN FUTURE**

Many today ask an anxious question whether humanity is threatened by self-destruction. Are we really approaching the end of our civilization? Perhaps we should fear our own irresponsibility and thoughtlessness more than cosmic disaster. The natural sciences

make no secret of the fact that life on our planet will not last forever.<sup>4</sup> The nearer future depends on our human behavior. We have to shape it responsibly. For this we need hope and a universal spiritual ecology.

The Bible predicts the ultimate transfiguration of the world and tells us to expect it. Thus it gives hope for the fulfillment of permanent human yearning for the prevalence of the good in the whole of creation. There is in this promise a breath of truly divine universalism with regard to the destiny of humanity, the Earth and the entire Universe. Christianity teaches how to love people, the world and all creation.

In a sense today we are all people of a new beginning, faced with new challenges and burdened by enormous responsibility for the world's future. Our survival on this Earth is in our hands; our time on this planet is limited. Let us hasten therefore to understand others and learn to respect the priceless gift of life, which is one for us all. We live only once on this Earth.

## NOTES

1 An enlarged version of an address given at the Third European Congress of Dialogue and Universalism in Warsaw, August 19-26, 2003, published in: "Dialogue and Universalism" 13 (2003) No. 9-10, pp. 37-40.

2 Elizabeth Behr-Sigel, *Pour un témoignage chrétien renouvelé* [For a Renewal of Christian Witness], *Contacts*, 52:2000, no. 189, p. 35.

3 J. Tischner, *Ksiadz na manowcach* [A Priest Gone Astray], Kraków 1999, p. 13.

4 See below my essay *Hope for Man and the Universe*.

## **Chapter I**

### **HOPE IN SEARCH OF UNDERSTANDING:**

#### ***SPES QUAERENS INTELLECTUM***

The feeling of hopelessness has been experienced by a growing number of people. It gives rise to deeper reflection on the rational foundations of hope and its role in our lives. There is no universal criterion which would enable a priori assessments of the appropriateness, truthfulness or deceptiveness of the various theories of hope. Religious issues cannot be adequately approached by rational means alone, hence the main task of the following reflections will be to determine if, and to what extent, the theory and praxis of hope serve human dignity and humanity's future prosperity.

Christians are not the only people of hope. Hope lives in all and is for all. Only in its universality can it help to build friendship and communion, and creatively contribute to the transformation of the world. The Christian hope for the universal Kingdom of God needs verification. It also needs comparison with non-Christian visions of human history or with other conceptions of hope. Christian hope by no means rejects other projects of fulfilling humanity's hopes for a future worthy of human person. It points to some other horizons which could only be discovered in the light of revelation. The horizons open our eyes to a unique surplus, whose source is not a human vision of the future — although noble and inspiring — but the divine promise already fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

### **RELIGIOUS HOPE AND SECULAR PROJECTS OF SHAPING THE FUTURE**

In this situation dialogue between religious hope and secular, rational and philosophical approaches to the future appears all the more necessary. We all face questions about truth and its significance for the future of the world. Christian hope may now have a real chance to be compared with, and verified in confrontation with, other concepts of hope and other approaches to the world's history.

At this point we are entering historical and philosophical reflection beyond the Christian vision of the world. The modern times have been marked by struggle for a future worthy of human beings. This, however, entails other kinds of hope than Christian trust in God's promises.

In rational categories the truth of world history must prove itself capable of shaping successfully the future for all people. What is at stake here is not a mere consonance with the original source of hope or the degree of its practical realization, as in the case of Christian hope with its reference to the Revelation. One has rather to verify whether

human hope and its implementation remain in conformity with this rational criterion which is, in fact, a worthy human coexistence and survival of all people on Earth. The dignity of the human person becomes thus a universal criterion for all. Every rational action presupposes a "utopian intention"<sup>1</sup> or partial anticipation of a universal "community of communication" and mutual understanding among people.

There exists, on the anthropological level, a transcendental ideal or an ideal vision of a future worthy of human beings, into whose realization all can be actively involved. Precisely this ideal can serve as the basis and starting point of a dialogue on the many ways in which hope can be experienced and its truth verified. This can be done by comparing human experiences of hope with the ideal of a "universal community of communication" and establishing the extent to which it answers what they really hope for. Hope is for all, and only in its universality can it help to build friendship and communion, and creatively contribute to the change of the world. The anthropological ideal is not to live only for oneself (which is egoism) or for others (altruism), but with all (coexistence) and for all (pro-existence).<sup>2</sup>

This ideal vision is by no means at odds with Christian teaching. It does not impair Christianity's most far-reaching objective—hope for universal salvation. As such, hope for the universal Kingdom of God is something more than a mere element of an anthropological ideal of dignified human coexistence or pro-existence. Nonetheless it also needs verification and comparison with non-Christian visions of human history or with other conceptions of hope. For this purpose a historiosophical consciousness is absolutely necessary. Comparing historiosophical theories and various ways of experiencing hope one can provide sound foundations for dialogue and give a chance to the process of mutual understanding.

Christian hope by no means rejects other projects of fulfilling humanity's hopes for a future worthy of human person. It points, however, to some other and more distant horizons of hope than just the fulfilment of the purely humanistic ideal of a perfect coexistence of people. It is not merely one more shape of hope among many others that are possible. In Christian eyes it has a certain unique *surplus*, whose source is not a human vision of the future—although noble and inspiring—but the divine promise already fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is precisely this promise, with its creative and saving power, which directs the eyes of the believers towards the ultimate fullness of the Kingdom of God. This Christian hope is an incarnate one, not divorced from our earthly realities, but capable of permeating human expectations, desires and dreams. This incarnational character of Christian hope becomes a constant appeal for its realization here and now. In this respect it differs from all theoretical speculations, because it always conveys a strong and clear imperative to be put into practice.

## **HOPE FOR THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE HUMAN IDEAL OF A UNIVERSAL COMMUNITY OF COMMUNICATION**

Christianity's contemporary struggle with secularism must not lead to its isolation (the ghetto is a real threat!) and withdrawal into Manichaean dualism. The world does not

need Christians able only to lament over its sinfulness, but Christians who are creative, open and courageous. The world's current situation requires that Christianity should be actively involved in the process of shaping, healing and changing reality. There is enough inspiration for this in Christian hope.

Christianity is not a religion of transcendental egoism and exclusive concern for personal salvation, but a faith inseparable from love, compassion and hope for universal salvation. This is why Christians with their hope for the coming of the Kingdom of God are able to initiate a dialogue with those who put forward an ideal of building a better future for all humankind, more worthy of rational beings. They should pursue this dialogue regardless of whether this ideal be called a project of ethical improvement of human beings leading to a "kingdom of virtue" (I. Kant's "chiliasm of the mind"), the maturing of humanity's historical awareness (G. W. Fr. Hegel), a classless society (K. Marx), reconciliation between person, society and nature (E. Bloch), a universal community of communication (K. O. Apel),<sup>3</sup> a "pan-human civilization of the future" co-created by "wise and good people" (F. Znaniecki, J. Szczepański, J. Kuczyński),<sup>4</sup> a religious "philosophy of the common task" of raising the dead (N. Fyodorov),<sup>5</sup> a philosophy of "all-unity" (V. Solovyev's idea of *vseedinstvo*), or simply universal benevolence and friendliness (Cz. Znamierowski)<sup>6</sup>.

The future will most probably bring many more such inspiring and rather utopian ideals which certainly would merit a detailed analysis. For now, however, let us restrict ourselves to a general look at the similarities and differences between various visions of the future. The differences are best visible in philosophies originating outside Christianity's sphere of influence.

Attempts to compare Christian hope with philosophical (utopian?) visions of an ideal future and universal communication are justified by certain similarities in their content. In both cases the main concern is an anticipation of universal understanding and reconciliation among people, and the fulfilment of humanity's dreams about a community based on justice and respect for human dignity. Such open visions contain a necessary element of hope that they are, by various means, attainable. There has been a long controversy going on about different theories and their practical implementation, and it appears that the debate will also continue in the future.

For people who keep their distance from religion the Christian hope for the coming of the universal Kingdom of God may seem to be but one of many ways leading to the concrete fulfilment of human ideals. However, Christianity's reference to God, the Lord of human history, changes the whole perspective in understanding the future. The hope of those who believe points to the absolute impossibility of achieving universal and eternally lasting communion by purely human means. The ideal of the Kingdom of God radically surpasses such a possibility. This makes the task of justifying the reality of this ideal very difficult indeed. Agnostics and non-believers will be inclined to consider it only as a religious myth, a sort of cultural entity or "theoretical crystal palace". The hope for the coming of the Kingdom will be, in this view, only a projection of human dreams, desires and expectations. Indeed it is not easy to prove that the surplus of meaning presupposed



by Christianity is something more than pure illusion, although able to advance the humanization of the world. Such proof will have to be founded on the logic of faith and hope, on the paradox of continuity and discontinuity so often evoked recently in the debate on hope and its significance for humankind and the universe<sup>7</sup>.

Christian hope is by its nature cosmic. It speaks about humanity's ultimate reconciliation with nature, with man's natural environment. The whole creation is a silent *epiclesis* (from the Greek *ἐπι-καλέω*—to invoke), i.e. invocation directed to God for liberation from suffering, from the stronger's right to devour the weaker. This was expressed in an unparalleled way by Saint Paul the Apostle:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation (*πάσα η κτίσις*) has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8, 18–23; RSV).

These words exude humanity's deep solidarity with the whole of nature, and hence exclude all inadequate vision of the universal Kingdom of God without the participation of the non-human world. Humanity is only a small particle of the material and living cosmos. With the rest of the created world it shares the incomprehensible miracle of existence. The nature humanized, but also destroyed by man thus carries a promise of participation in the freedom and glory of the children of God.<sup>8</sup>

We repeatedly refer to the hope for the ultimate fulfilment of the history of humanity and the world—the fulfilment possible only as passage through death and resurrection, as the Great Passover of the entire creation. This final fulfilment, however, does not entail the devaluation of the world's current history. It is rather the definitive and lasting future of this earthly history and the reason for its existence. The universal Kingdom of God is no mere external addition to our terrestrial reality—it has been initiated in this reality and will mature within the freedom of rational creatures. It is the ultimate fulfilment of the meaning of our lives. How else can God's universal Reign be understood? It is in this Reign that the dramatic gift of freedom, this most magnificent capacity of our lives, may be finally fulfilled. One who speaks of hope for universal salvation awaits with confidence universal reconciliation, definitive victory of goodness, and ultimate harmony of the world. In God's eyes only what is good is worthy of salvation and final fulfilment. Eternity neither absorbs nor destroys temporal reality, but thoroughly purifies and transforms it before admitting it into the eternal life of the Creator of the Universe. The eternity of creatures will never be identical with the eternity of God himself. It is only a participation which has its beginning in time but will have no end.

This explains why Christian hope speaks about the ultimate salvation of the world's history—of the *past* history of all created beings. Death is no obstacle in this respect. It is a transition, or Passover, to a new form of existence in the universal community of the new world of resurrection. Hope for the resurrection of the dead is not a projection of the human instinct of survival but fulfilment of the divine promise surpassing all human capabilities. Christian hope for the ultimate fulfilment of the world can, during its temporal history, come true only partially, in the form of approximations or anticipations. This, too, is a sign of its convergence with the philosophical rational ideal of reconciliation, universal communication and harmony. Faith and hope remind us, however, that this partial fulfilment is not the only one possible, and that God will have the final say. He makes it possible that the ultimate fulfilment of the ideal of universal reconciliation may come true. Thus, despite all oppositions and contradictions within the earthly history of humanity, Christians can and should hope for the final coming of the Kingdom of freedom, reconciliation and universal peace—the *shalom* of the Hebrew Bible.

We do not expect salvation to be a result of human strivings and efforts, but primarily a gift from God. On the other hand, we do not have to restrict ourselves to passive expectations. The final fulfilment of history as a divine gift already requires human active participation. Reconciliation, mutual understanding and better communication among humans are our tasks for the time given to us. Only in this way will we be able to increase signs of hope for even greater fulfilment, in anticipation of an ultimate reality. The history of humankind will always provide situations contrary to the work of reconciliation and communication. This does not mean we should only console ourselves with the perspective of a better life beyond. Now is the time to look for new ways of shaping a future more worthy of men and women, made in the image of God. This unique prospective ecumenism stems from the very status of human beings in a world whose "form passes away" (cf. 1 Cor 7, 31: *παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου*).

And here lies the great paradox of Christian hope: it awaits ultimate and God-given fulfilment, but simultaneously strives to shape a more human present and future. Thus we have a specific *ars sperandi* that is in fact *ars vivendi*. An active pursuit of goals possible to attain goes together with the ability to accept what can only be a divine gift. One ability does not exclude the other. In fact both of them are complementary and the result of their interaction is a true wisdom of life. Hope and wisdom together are able to shape human life now in ways which would have been unattainable if humanity were devoid of them. The Christian theology of gift does not preclude human cooperation. Otherwise, it would be difficult to notice even the very existence of this gift.

It is hope that gives human life its unique value, depth and rootedness in the future. The wisdom of life is more than stoic calm and indifference in the face of the passing time. It is the opposite of hopelessness, futility and the meaninglessness of history and of our own life. Not everything is absorbed by the insatiable Moloch of time. Human life appears to be underway to something greater than itself. In its wisdom Christian hope stands opposed to any one-dimensional vision of human history. It teaches that human

existence and human activity have an indestructible meaning and significance for the future of the new world of God—the world of peace, justice, reconciliation and freedom.

### **WEAK POINTS OF HISTORIOSOPHICAL PROJECTS OF HOPE**

Let us repeat: the Christian hope for resurrection of the dead (the passage through death is necessary!) and life in the Kingdom of God presupposes his gift which is not attainable by human efforts. Historiosophical projects aimed at universal reconciliation to be achieved by human labour alone are in many respects vague or even contradictory. For instance, E. Bloch sees the world as a "laboratory of possible salvation" (*laboratorium possibilis salutis*).<sup>9</sup> For him true *Genesis* is to be found not at the beginning of history but at its end. He believes the path to salvation leads through unceasing, tireless work. The history of humanity and of the whole nature is striving to create, by its own efforts, the kingdom of reconciliation. There is no reference here to God, grace and the divine gift. What is offered is a purely secular eschatology with its practically impossible postulate of achieving a gigantic historical success in the form of the Kingdom without God.

One can only ask how to bring about this qualitative passage to a kingdom of freedom, goodness and true human fulfilment. Can efforts at improving and bringing humanity to perfection lead to an ultimate state of harmony and communion, without any reference to the divine gift? Christians believe it is God's spirit that liberates in us, with our cooperation, the best abilities and constantly renews the face of the world.

Instead, secular visions of the future and historiosophical hope can be based only on the human *will* to achieve reconciliation, justice and freedom. History shows, however, that human willpower alone, and means at its disposal, are not enough to bridge the gap between the ideal and the reality. The wish for self-redemption even introduces a certain split in human existence and in this sense appears contrary to the very idea of reconciliation. We become torn then between what we really are, and what we should be. Thus, we find ourselves under constant ethical pressure to make historical success the highest norm of our life. This is why in the Marxist system the fate of individuals had to make way for class-struggle interests. Such optimistic ideologies do not really show much consideration for the dignity of the human person, although individuals are the actual subject of history and its final fulfilment.

Those who in their agnosticism or atheism have abandoned reference to God as the Lord of the history should in fact show consistency and consequently abandon also hope for a perfect universal "community of communication" between individuals, society and nature. Many philosophers have arrived at similar conclusions after honest reflection. Indeed, rescuing all that has passed away is an overly-ambitious, totally utopian, Promethean goal. How to do it? Death is the most evident "anti-utopia". How, then, to preserve the historical uniqueness of man's existence, his identity, his personal "self"? What is, therefore, the meaning of history for the individual human person? How can concrete people living in the past, present or future participate in history's final fulfilment?

These questions remain unanswered on a strictly historiosophical level. The answer can be found only through faith in God who leads the whole of history and raises the dead to the new life in the world of resurrection. It is the faith of Judaism and Christianity in the divine gift of final reconciliation of all creatures and the transfiguration of the universe that gives support to eschatological hope. We must place our trust in the divine Providence and divine Promise. No revolution will be able to redeem history or save the dead from oblivion and final nothingness.

Eschatological interpretations of history must answer the basic question: how the individual man or woman can in his or her death, and inspite of it, participate in the ultimate fulfilment of history? For this reason philosophies of hope propounded by eminent theorists of secular history appear so unconvincing, bloodless, weak and unclear. They limit themselves to postulating humanity's gradual attainment of ultimate perfection by its own resources. Such philosophies do not accept the idea that God has already given to humanity the exceptional opportunity to achieve the fulfilment of history by allowing it to share in the life of the risen Christ. Christian hope for salvation in God's Kingdom is here replaced by the insatiable human quest for happiness in its many shapes and forms. Another question arises then in all its acuteness: is such replacement and reorientation of endeavours legitimate without diminishing real dimensions of man's humanity? This is at least an open issue, especially in the understanding of those who believe.

## **SHORTCOMINGS IN THE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF HOPE**

Christian witness is all the more necessary in the present-day situation of a growing feeling of hopelessness and futility. Philosophical concepts of hope and projects of shaping a better future have a strong influence on many people, especially in the West. Theoreticians of contemporary historiosophy are not at all inclined to come closer to religious hope for final salvation in the Kingdom of God. The blame here does not seem to lie only in today's lifestyle with its pressure of success or in human pride wanting to attain universal reconciliation by its own resources. Christianity itself is also responsible for this situation, its theology and evangelization methods. The Good News of God's Kingdom has lost much of its radiant force. The Church has too often adopted a moralizing attitude, attempting to lead its faithful to salvation along a path paved with orders and prohibitions. All too frequently its teachings about the eschatological events only sowed fear among believers. The horrible visions of eternal torments in hell were meant to shake consciences and lead sinners to repentance.

I wrote about this frequently in earlier publications, trying to show the weaknesses of the Christian theology of hope. An encouraging fact is that the Constitution *Gaudium et spes* of the Second Vatican Council made a positive turn towards the modern world, showing more concern for the present and future (although now this approach is often seen as overly-optimistic). Already the Constitution's preface states that "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts".<sup>10</sup>

This turn has initiated a dialogue on possible joint ventures in the quest for the reconciliation of the "human family" (*familia humana*; *Gaudium et spes*, no. 2) and for the right attitude towards the rest of creation. This challenging dialogue must be continued. It will help to uncover the specific nature of Christian hope based on a divine promise of the ultimate transformation of the world (hope for a divine gift). This hope constantly urges one to strive for free-will collaboration with God and the employment of humanity's talents for shaping a future truly worthy of human beings (hope as a task). Thus gift and task appear as inseparable elements of the same reality.

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Hope's truthfulness is best proved not so much in theoretical dialogue with other concepts of hope or in theological debates as in the everyday praxis of the believers. Are there many visible signs of such experience of hope in our communities? Do theologians systematically reflect upon human hopes, doubts, quests and struggles? Life itself with its joys and sorrows, anxieties and suffering, fragility and transiency constantly forces us to ponder over such issues.

All we can do here on Earth is to uncover signs and symbols of the Kingdom of God, which is to fulfil our most daring hope for universal reconciliation and all-embracing human communion. We believe and trust that there will come a day when God will be "all in all", *πάντα ἐν πάνιν* (1 Cor 15, 28). This is our Christian response to the growing skepticism and hopelessness of our times.

## NOTES

1 M. Kehl, *Eschatologie*, 2. Aufl. Würzburg 1988, pp. 33, 301–306.

2 This view was put forward by the 19th-century Russian philosopher N. Fyodorov in his *Philosophy of the Common Cause* [Filosofiya obshchago dela]. Cf. V. Zenkovskij, *History of Russian Philosophy* [Istorija russkoj filosofii], Charkov 2001, p. 155.

3 K.O. Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie*, Bd. 2: *Das Apriori der Kommunikationsgemeinschaft*, Frankfurt 1973; id., *Ist die Ethik der idealen Kommunikationsgemeinschaft eine Utopie?* in: W. Voßkamp (ed.), *Utopieforschung* Bd. 1, Stuttgart 1983, pp. 325–355.

4 J. Kuczynski, *For a Global Coalition of "Wise and Good People"*, *Dialogue and Universalism* 12: 2002, no. 11–12, pp. 159–181. Florian Znaniecki – first president of the International Sociological Association, author of the possibly first world-known book on future universal civilization; J. Szczepanski – sociologist, *Dialogue and Universalism* editorial board chairman; J. Kuczynski – philosopher, *Dialogue and Universalism* editor in chief.

5 Cf. footnote 2.

6 Cf. Cz. Znamierowski, *Initial Reflections on the Science of Morality and Law* [Rozwazania wstepne do nauki o moralnosci i prawie], 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Warszawa 1966. Znamierowski (d. 1967) was a professor at Poznan University.

7 See below: *Hope for Man and the Universe*.

8 Cf. W. Hryniewicz, *The Passover of Christ in the History of Man and the Universe. An Outline of Christian Paschal Theology* [Pascha Chrystusa w dziejach czlowieka i wszechswiata. Zarys chrzescijanskiej teologii paschalnej], Lublin 1991, pp. 453–461.

9 E. Bloch, *The Hope Principle* [Das Prinzip Hoffnung], Frankfurt 1959. Cf. Th. Pröpper, *The Jesus of Philosophers and the Jesus of Faith* [Der Jesus der Philosophen und der Jesus des Glaubens], Mainz 1976, pp. 37–38; Kehl, *ibid*, p. 345.

10 *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, in: *The Documents of Vatican II*, W.M. Abbot, S.J., General Editor, London, Dublin, Melbourne 1967, pp. 199–200.

## **Chapter II**

### **HOPE FOR MAN AND THE UNIVERSE**

We are becoming increasingly aware that not only human life must irrevocably end in death but, as the natural sciences have confirmed, the universe itself is doomed to physical annihilation. Contemporary science's future visions are indeed pessimistic: abundant, though short lived, evolution culminating in a sense of final futility and the ultimate destruction of all life in the universe. Such forecasts also question religion's claims about the eschatological transformation of all creation. Proclamation of the world's inevitable finitude has undermined our optimistic faith in endless progress and universal evolution. The sense of dejection and hopelessness is additionally deepened today by ecological crises, spreading poverty and rising conflicts between nations and societies.

These visions of cosmic doom cause a wave of nihilism and apocalyptic despair which today pose an enormous challenge for religion and theology. How are we to believe in God and His goodness when human life—and, in fact, all life on the Earth—is progressing towards a foreseeable end? If someday everything is to end in silence, will a bitter sense of futility be our sole consolation? What are God's plans for our transient world? Can one honestly believe in God's promises today? How are we to explain Christianity's hopes for the final fulfilment of the whole creation?

These are questions I shall attempt to answer here. Theology is not quite helpless when it comes to such issues. In the present paper I will focus on several main points of the ongoing dialogue between science and theology in the light of certain forgotten aspects of Christian universalism.

#### **FUTILITY OR HOPE?**

At a recent Tischner Days philosophical event in Cracow, Leszek Kolakowski spoke about modern reason steering itself into a situation without any access whatsoever to God:

Since its earliest beginnings modern philosophy undermined our trust both in reason-acquired knowledge and religious or theological knowledge—our knowledge of God (...). Descartes was a (...) representative of the early Enlightenment, a period in which the world lost its ability to see divine traces in things, people and physical phenomena. The cosmos began to be perceived as mere machinery (...). The world is completely devoid of all

meaning, and God is only a figment of the imagination or a symptom of the human need for shelter.

The need to search for the world's hidden meaning and the absence of truth in its traditional sense are two conflicting spheres. Both through religion and reason we seek safety—understood both as the ability to control our physical world and the capacity to believe that the world indeed has an invisible meaning, which we are unable to deduce from empirical facts or personal experience.<sup>1</sup>

Are we, then, in a hopeless position? Christian hope is not a product of religious fantasy. Moreover, this hope finds today an ally in the dialogue with the natural sciences which began in recent years on the topic of the ultimate destiny of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Theology's task is not to provide easy consolation or generate false hopes. It has a good reason to avoid catastrophism and maintain calm in its strivings to keep up our faith in God's concern for the destiny of all His creatures. Theologians have to take a serious stand on the very concept of finitude furthered by natural and social sciences. This in turn will require a critical review of such concepts as the world's future in God, hope and new creation. This effort must be undertaken in dialogue with scientific views of the world's finitude. Both sides are prone to stereotype judgments and shallow answers, which must be corrected in consideration of the complexity of the issue at hand. Christian theology has to justify its claim to truth—but certainly not by launching battles with science. A common concern of both theologians and scientists today is to relieve the moods of eschatological gloom which pervade human attitudes and actions.

Theology as well as science must realize the limitations of their cognitive methods. The world and its realities are far more complex and complicated than we once imagined—a structure where space, time, matter and energy are closely intertwined. It is precisely this inter-relatedness that proves the complexity of the processes which take place in it. This awareness is spreading rapidly in the natural sciences, where we see a clear trend away from reductionist physicalism.

This is why theoretical physicists, who handle the world's software on a daily basis, generally display a great sense of the mystery, an awareness that they are part of something that is beyond them. (...) No one ever promised us the world will be cut to our measure, that we must understand everything about it. Thus, the world hides its mystery. Will it suffice us to know it is not irrational but beyond our reach?<sup>3</sup>

Viewed in apocalyptic categories of total renewal and the abolition of the old creation, the world's final transformation would be completely beyond the realm and possibilities of exact sciences. The true situation, however, is different. Meta-scientific debate on the nature of cosmic processes could bring in some valuable suggestions for Christian eschatology and Christian hope. If God's true intentions are, indeed, concealed in the



universe's temporal evolution, then careful study of its current development could help us to better understand His subtle, patient and active presence in the world.

Christian eschatology does not require reflection on the world's final transformation without reference to its present evolution. This transformation does not mean sudden, apocalyptic change, totally alien to the present shape of the world and its processes. God does not abruptly change His ways about the universe. If the "new creation" were to be absolutely new, what would be the meaning of the "old creation"? Then in fact we could well ask: why did God not create right away a world free of suffering and death? And what is the present world's purpose if its ultimate fate were only annihilation?

Christian hope says something different. It shows the new creation not as annihilation and destruction of the old, but as its ultimate transfiguration and salvific transformation. Thus, the new creation does not mean re-creation from nothingness (*creatio ex nihilo*) but the creation of a new universe from the old (*creatio ex vetere*), a universe belonging to the resurrection order (*universum resurrectionis*). Hope speaks about the continuity/discontinuity paradox in the emergence of this new universe. It is no coincidence that the risen body of Christ carries the marks of His passion, even though it has been transformed into new and glorious reality.

We must strive for a deeper understanding of this unusual paradox. If continuity/discontinuity really lies at its core, the sciences can well contribute to reflections on the world's final destiny. Studies on discontinuity will doubtless belong to theology, the exact sciences focusing on the continuity of the present world's processes.

## **SCIENTIFIC ACCOUNTS OF ULTIMATE CATASTROPHIES**

Before we further expound this topic, let us briefly consider science's prognoses regarding the world's future. On the one hand, science warns us about events which are irrevocable, on the other it points to a number of possible catastrophes. The outcome in both cases is the feeling of frustration combined with a sense of futility and absurdity. We often (and fearfully) ask ourselves whether *homo sapiens* is threatened with self-destruction, whether we really are nearing the end of our civilization, or whether we are in danger of earthly life's total annihilation. Or perhaps we should fear our own irresponsibility and thoughtlessness more than universal disaster? This indecisiveness stems from contemporary humanity's disposal of destructive technologies which are not only capable of annihilating other species but are a threat to humanity itself.

Most importantly, we have to strive for a better understanding of what the natural sciences have to say about the destruction of life and the survival chances of the human species. They are quite clear on this point: terrestrial life is not eternal. Caused by nuclear changes within our Sun, the world's irrevocable end will arrive at the latest in several billion years. Our nurturing star is gradually losing its hydrogen, its thermonuclear fuel will be exhausted in 7–8 billion years. As a result the Sun will shrink to a small star surrounded by a cold cosmos.<sup>4</sup> Finally all that will remain will be a burnt-out wreck called a black dwarf. The solar system will be destroyed, a similar fate will await most

other stars over further billions of years. Some will change into neutron stars—so-called "black holes", absorbing radiation, gases and exhausted stars. Some believe all that will be left in the end will be an endless expanse of cosmic radiation.<sup>5</sup>

The general belief is that the scientifically accessible universe displays two tendencies: on the one hand, to expand with galaxies moving away from each other, on the other, to contract in response to gravitation. Thus, its galaxies are at once moving farther apart and curbed in this process by gravitation trying to bring together matter blown apart by the Big Bang which produced the cosmos. Moreover, it appears that today's science is still unable to determine which of these tendencies will win the upper hand. This, however, has no bearing on our reflections on the fate of the universe, since regardless of which trend prevails, the universe is doomed to extermination. Increasingly dispersed through expansion, galaxies will begin to deteriorate from within as their radiation cools off. And if matter chooses to contract, the universe will eventually collapse into a fiery melting-pot. Contrary to P. Teilhard de Chardin's optimistic visions of the world's evolution, put forward a few decades ago, today's science foresees an entirely different scenario.

Some scholars claim the universe will continue to expand endlessly, increasing in volume, vacuum and repulsion force, and that the Big Crunch (the universe's contraction to its primeval form) will never happen. This theory envisions a universe born once in a single Big Bang and with no definite end, thus excluding its rebirth in an endless cycle of Big Bangs and Big Crunches.

However, several years of astrophysical research recently confirmed the existence of an unknown cosmic force pushing galaxies apart with increasing force and speed despite gravitation. This mysterious energy causes the universe to expand faster,<sup>6</sup> which in turn has an impact on its evolution. Astrophysical studies of the gigantic supernova explosions<sup>7</sup> which end the lives of burnt-out stars revealed that the more distant galaxies are distancing themselves from one other at a faster, not a slower pace—as if an enormous repulsion force had joined in the cosmic battle for the universe's future against all-prevailing gravitation.

This mysterious—and hence sometimes called "dark"—energy really exists, but despite several theories we still do not know where it comes from (an inherent function of vacuum itself or another, unknown quintessence of cosmic space?). What we do know is that if it does not recede we will soon lose sight even of the galaxies closest to the Earth as they fly away at near-light speed. We once believed the universe's expansion would be slowed down by gravity—now the cosmic distances of the supernova eruptions show us that the cosmos is in fact not contracting but growing apart ever more fast. Already in 1998 two astrophysical teams confirmed that over the past seven billion years the universe has been expanding at an increasing pace despite gravity. This led them to the conclusion that an unknown repulsion force must be at play, a force which does not affect planets and stars but is able to reshape galaxies. The existence of this enigmatic force has now been confirmed also by microwave background radiation readings.<sup>8</sup> This radiation permeates the entire cosmos echoing a hot era 400,000 years after the Big Bang. After passing through the universe's galactic clusters, the Big Bang's microwave echo gained

in strength and temperature, which suggests the existence of a cosmic repulsion force acting in opposition to gravitation. If there were no such force (i.e. if there were only gravitation), the universe would have a tendency to shrink and matter to contract. It appears the universe has many surprises in store, giving us a good reason for training new researchers and explorers.

During its lifetime the Earth has suffered a variety of cataclysms, some of which came from space (the natural sciences report cosmic and geological disasters wiping out whole species<sup>9</sup>). Natural scientists admit nevertheless that terrestrial life is highly resilient and adaptable, and we could console ourselves with their assurances that humanity's self-destruction is highly improbable even in the event of nuclear war. Therefore nothing appears to directly endanger the biosphere or the survival of human race. In fact, however, humanity does face major threats today—most endangered are its culture and values, especially as many of today's ills are caused by pollution, bacteria and virus mutations (HIV, SARS) and the misuse of modern technology.

## **THE CONTINUITY/DISCONTINUITY PARADOX OR THE LOGICAL STRUCTURE OF MATTER**

Science advises us to view the world's bleak fate with resignation and calm indifference. Humanity with its cultural riches, scientists say, is only an episode in universal history and doomed to perish. Hence, if the Earth is nothing more than an island of rationality in a cosmic void, then the only thing we can do is to keep up a heroic attitude worthy of human beings towards our own fragile existence.<sup>10</sup>

Science seeks understanding and often stands in awe before the universe's manifold secrets, its order, beauty, logic and dynamics. Nonetheless, science is unable to embrace the universe as a whole, especially in the knowledge that whatever order it now has will one day turn to chaos. Seen in this way even the most astounding cosmic development—the emergence of humanity and human consciousness—appears to be nothing more than a lucky coincidence in an endless dominion of absurdity. At this point we usually ask ourselves fearfully if the meaning of our transient world lies solely in its transience or somewhere deeper. For many researchers, studies of natural processes and the world's secrets provide insufficient proof of the universe's deeper sense and purposefulness.<sup>11</sup> They are unwilling to accept the fact that the world's history of creative fertility, although transient, tends at the same time towards its ultimate fulfilment.

The scientific discoveries deserve serious consideration. Let us recall once more: the Earth's destruction will take place at the latest in several billion years. Forecasts regarding the annihilation of terrestrial life are based on solid grounds and observations of similar processes elsewhere in the universe. They are both well-founded and reliable.

However, the visions of the end of the world should not lead us to underestimate the striking, awe-inspiring force of physical life. In dialogue with theology the sciences today are confronted with a reality which is beyond their grasp. Eschatology, on its part,

requires not only broadmindedness but perhaps first and foremost rejection of reductionist assumptions about the very nature of reality. The universe contains levels of meaning far richer than what we have been able to discover so far. Contemporary science knows its boundaries. It is based on empirical data and does not move beyond them. What science has to say can truly arouse a feeling of hopelessness and futility. However, science does not seek answers to theological questions. It is theology which speaks about hope of the "new creation". If this new creation is in any way a part of present reality, we have to conclude that the world displays both continuity and discontinuity in its very ability to be renewed. Such is the paradoxical logic of eschatology.

The continuity/discontinuity paradox underlies Christianity's faith in the resurrection of Christ and of the whole of humanity. If, however, this is to be the "new creation", then a certain amount of continuity should be hidden in the depths of the "old" reality. Eschatological Christian texts display a surprisingly high continuity/discontinuity logic. They admonish not to confuse human theories about the cosmos with the true nature of reality, and thus constitute a true challenge for the natural sciences. In suggesting a more realistic and less speculative and phantasy-based approach to eschatology, the logic of continuity/discontinuity is also a forceful challenge for theology itself. Between the present and future worlds there is both continuity and discontinuity. Such concepts as "new creation", "new heaven", or "new heaven and earth" suggest continuity between present creation and its final transformation through resurrection. Eschatological images assert, on the one hand, that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15: 50; RSV) and, on the other, the resurrection of the body.

If the world of ultimate events (*éschata*) is in fact to be a new world of the resurrection, created by transition into new reality, then certain scientific suggestions and data on the present world's processes could prove helpful in grasping the truly cosmic dimensions of Christian hope. Crucial here, however, will be not so much particular data but rather a sort of meta-science allowing the deduction of general concepts from the detailed achievements of scientific research. Such generalized insights include today the following elements: 1) the dynamic concept of physical reality, 2) the relationality of its processes and, 3) a deeper understanding of the complexity of matter and energy as carriers of a specific information-bearing pattern.<sup>12</sup>

The latter concept brings to mind the views of some outstanding Greek Fathers, such as St. Gregory of Nyssa (4th century) and St. Maximus the Confessor (7th century) on the logical (*logikós*) structure of matter. In their understanding matter belongs to an energetic order showing some "logical" features. The world is permeated by the principle of *lógos*, and its material realities possess also their individual *lógoi*, i.e. hidden forms of meaning. This results from the fact that the world has been marked by the creative action of the divine Logos, manifesting an unusual energy coming from God.<sup>13</sup> According to Gregory, nothing of that which constitutes the material body is a purely corporeal reality, but rather a collection of meanings which converge into one whole to create matter. Thus, corporality displays certain immaterial features.<sup>14</sup> As Maximus the Confessor says, everything is permeated by a certain mode of "mysterious Presence (...), a synthesizing

force which provides [created] beings with bonds of communion (*koinonia*) stronger than their very existence itself".<sup>15</sup>

In the case of those Greek Fathers such dynamic concepts of matter and corporality were essentially closer to what contemporary physics calls an information-bearing pattern concealed in the very structure of matter. They were also not far from modern physics' views on the relationality of physical processes.

## RELATIONALITY AND ITS IMPORTANCE

There are, of course, differences in ancient and current terminology but the general idea appears to be similar: the reality of matter is an energetic phenomenon manifesting its "logical" structure. The rational human *lógos* of the human person discovers traces of another *lógos* in the whole of nature. Today's approach to matter is largely dominated by mathematical methods because its properties are subject to certain logical relations, and its qualitative features to "ana-logical" relations. In its investigations of the structure of matter contemporary physics is not so much in search of statistical data. It rather discovers the manifold ways in which energy displays its dynamics.

Even the subatomic world, seen in the light of the quantum theory, can not be fully described in atomistic terms alone. Its individual quantum units interact, displaying an ability to exert causal and direct influence on themselves while forming an integrated system. Its elementary particles (e.g. electrons) are not locked within their atomic apartness, but show instead a noticeable tendency towards interaction and "togetherness in separation". This applies not only to the cognitive scientific level, but also to the truly ontological one. It affects in turn the holistic understanding of all created reality.

From a methodological point of view, natural sciences tend to a reductionist approach to the world, ignoring the complexity of its phenomena and ontological processes. This, however, can allow them to see only a small, although important part of nature's true history. The more deeply we explore the universe, the more we find out about the phenomenon of life and its processes, the more we will learn about reality and its vast network of relations. To a certain degree this is similar to the human world. The mere concept of "person" suggests a whole realm of interpersonal relations. In this respect it very much differs from the abstract, isolated "individual".

Such scientific data clearly confirm the importance of relationality and allow deeper insight into theology's understanding of the nature of created beings in their permanent relation to their Creator and themselves.<sup>16</sup> This is why biblical texts stress the fact that the destiny of humanity is strictly tied to that of the natural world in God's plan of salvation. A good example here are such texts as *Romans* 8: 19–22 and *Colossians* 1: 15–20.

Methodological ineptness of reductionism in describing physical reality calls for more studies on that of complexity of reality. Complexity theory has revealed some empirically important insights into surprising regularities in the natural world which offer an

interesting paradigm for explaining complex physical processes in energy/matter terms and a deep structural model for complex systems—to a certain degree analogical to Aristotle's concepts of matter (*ύλη*) and form (*μορφή*). Also mathematics confirms the existence of mathematical truths inspiring reflection on the relation between noetic and material worlds and acceptance of reality's non-material aspect. This could be a sign of the complementary polarity of global processes.<sup>17</sup>

This is why today's dialogue on the world's destiny between the natural sciences and theology confirms the belief that science may have something to say about the credibility of theological views of the new creation. Scientific data provide insight into Christian hope's consonance with science's discoveries in the material world. Scientists themselves admit, however, that exact science cannot contribute much to the debate, concentrating above all on analyses of current physical processes in the world. Theologians may extrapolate the effects of these studies on the reality that is at the very core of Christian faith and hope.

When cosmologists reflect on the world's future they do not see the fulfilment but the breakdown and futility of its existence. Science alone is unable to explain the full meaning of cosmic history. To date its statements sometimes sound as pessimistic as apocalyptic warnings. Therefore, we have to search for a comprehensive vision of the world and this can be found in theology's understanding of reality. An exaggerated claim? Scientists today, at least some of them, have the courage to challenge theology. They ask about the religious meaning of hope for the new creation.

## **HOPE FOR THE FINAL TRANSFORMATION OF ALL CREATION**

As we have already seen, the Christian hope of resurrection points towards the continuity/discontinuity paradox. In this way it tries to show the full meaning of the created world. The foundation of this hope is in the Christian understanding of the event of Christ's resurrection and the faithfulness of God to His own promises. In undergoing its glorious final transformation, Christ's earthly body gave hope to humanity and to the whole the material world. It is this unique event that initiated the reality of the new creation. Paschal appearances of Christ are the meeting points of the old and new worlds.

In its dialogue with the natural sciences theology must confirm the coherence of Christian hope. But can discontinuity and continuity be reconciled? A measure of discontinuity is necessary if the future destiny of humanity and the universe is to be more than an endless process of being revived to temporary existence. Eschatological change is not rebirth to earthly life. However, if humanity's and the world's fate is to be ontological transformation and not annihilation, a degree of continuity is indispensable for the preservation of individual human identities and the identity of the world.

At this point we can resort to the above-mentioned dichotomy between matter/energy and the specific information-bearing pattern inherent in the universe's processes. In this way we will come closer to comprehending the meaning of the eschatological dichotomy of continuity/discontinuity. Physically matter/energy in the future universe should differ

radically from the matter/energy of the present created world. Matter/energy of our "old world" does have the potential to develop its hidden possibilities and to assume new properties. This requires, however, its passing over through death, to a new mode of existence. Transition is crucial to the temporary world's evolution as without it nothing new could appear. Instead the new world—according to biblical promises—is to be free of suffering and death. This would mean its matter/energy will acquire new properties resulting from changed physical laws. Such transformation is a clear manifestation of discontinuity. The matter of the new creation is matter transformed by God.<sup>18</sup>

Some continuity between the old and the new is simultaneously preserved, especially with regard to human psychosomatic existence. This is possible thanks to what today's science calls a complex information pattern and what the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition defined as the body's substantial form—the soul. In the case of the resurrection it provides the continuity necessary for those who die and rise again together with their personal identities, including all the relations to other people and God which shaped them as persons.<sup>19</sup>

Contemporary science often points to the close bonds between matter, time and space in our universe. Seen in this way the resurrection is not only an embodiment in the new world's matter/energy but also in the new time and space of the new heaven and new earth. Theologians open to dialogue with science deal with this issue today by introducing concepts like reconciled temporality and redeemed spatiality.<sup>20</sup> In a certain sense all humanity reaches the resurrection together, simultaneously, regardless of when we die in our temporal world.<sup>21</sup>

New creation is transformed old creation. We should not imagine life in the future world as a timeless illumination or non-temporal experience of eternity. It must be a dynamic process involving progress and growing participation in all the richness of Divine life. In the old world we need sacraments as signs of God's acting presence. In the new world, itself becoming a divine sacrament, He himself will be "all in all", *πάντα ἐν πάντιν* (1 Cor 15: 28). This is the fundamental truth of eschatological "pan-en-theism". In the Eastern tradition the universe's final fulfilment is described as constant *théosis* (i.e. divinization)—eternal encounter with God and participation in the all-embracing life of the omnipresent Creator.

This implies some continuity with the present world and its evolution. The dynamic concept of life in God's future world by no means diminishes the fullness of divine life. Change should not mean imperfection or deterioration. If the present history of the universe is a continuation of the divine act of creation (*creatio continua*), a process involving evolution and the manifestation of hidden capabilities, then this must also be true of the future world.

God does not change His ways suddenly, and His action seems most probably to remain such in the new world. Divine patience, goodness and mercy are not limited to earthly life. God leaves an open path to purification and salvation for all creatures. This awareness together with biblical accounts is what nurtured the Christian hope for

universal salvation present in the writings of some eminent Eastern Fathers and later authors, mystics and theologians.<sup>22</sup> Hope for universal reconciliation with God is part of the Christian hope for the all-embracing process of ultimate transformation of the whole universe, so that God may finally be "all in all".

Universal hope is no marginal issue for Christian theology. Theologians realized long ago that it was decisive for the way we understand not only the world's future, but also the future of Christianity itself, its attitude to other religions, the role of the Church, its teachings and spirituality. Early Christianity considered the idea of *apokatástasis* a dangerous heresy with far-reaching consequences (Greek word *αποκατάστασις* means here restoration of all creatures to their primeval friendship with God and mutual reconciliation). It could well be that no other truth has ever met with so much opposition—the awareness of its inherent dangers was very much alive over past centuries. However, despite its marginalization throughout history, residues of this trend of thought survived in Christian consciousness and it seems that today we are better prepared to accept or at least tolerate its existence in the Church. This fact gives food for thought. It appears we have finally left behind us the centuries in which exclusivism dominated our approach to salvation and the Church, and are increasingly replacing it with a more universalistic pattern of thought.

Christians are permitted to believe in God's final victory over the powers of Evil. Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev wrote: "God's final victory over the powers of hell can not mean division into two kingdoms, God's and the devil's, into the saved and those damned to eternal suffering. There can only be one kingdom. The world's and humanity's fatal divisions are made on this side, not beyond".<sup>23</sup>

Hope for universal salvation is not merely a dream about the future of eternal happiness for all (this would be a pure "eternalism" and a sign of our wish to escape our earthly tasks). This hope carries on a remarkably strong imperative to shape human life here and now. If once we are to become a community of beings reconciled with our Creator, among ourselves and with the whole nature, then we should start building it here on Earth. Let there be as little misery, sorrow, tears and pain as possible! In our innermost depths we are closer to one another than we imagine.

## **NATURA SPIRAT RESURRECTIONEM**

Eschatological texts and Christian *Creeds* are a challenge for the natural sciences to expand their research and overcome their reductionist approach to the world. Theology in turn should pay more attention to science's accounts of the universe and its processes. This would also introduce a sense of realism to eschatology, which can only result in increased responsibility for the fate of creation on the part of the faithful and their Churches. Theology does not deny science's forecasts. It tries to show a dimension beyond the transient life of individuals, humanity and all creation. Dialogue between



science and theology provides considerable insight into the sources of Christian hope in view of the world's finitude and approaching end.

Both science and theology accept the existence of various forms of invisible reality. In their own ways both also allow a better understanding of the invisible. A good scientific example are quarks and gluons, imperceptible particles of nuclear matter closely bound within subatomic protons and neutrons. Physicists assume their existence because this allows them to explain many complex phenomena taking place in physical processes. It has nothing to do with fideism. On their part theologians also speak about spiritual experience of God's invisible and active presence in the world.

It appears, therefore, that there are some similarities in science's and theology's strivings for a deeper understanding of the truth of reality, which continues to evade our theories and teaches us modesty. Neither method nor concept has yet managed to explain everything. There exists no universal key to a comprehensive interpretation. The postulate to avoid reductionism in approaching the manifold richness of reality is addressed to scientists and theologians alike. Fideistic reductionism is just as dangerous as its scientific counterpart.

The difficult dialogue between the natural sciences and theology promises to be useful and to bear fruit for both sides. Far removed from naïve optimism, it nevertheless suggests a more optimistic view of the future. The Bible also speaks about the end of the world. What is more, it allows hope for its final transfiguration into a new, eternal reality, thus revealing the Creator's true plans for His creation: "For the form of this world passes away" (1 Cor 7: 31; RSV). Faith in Christ's resurrection signifies harmony between spiritual and material reality. Humanity's resurrection is impossible without the material world's participation in the miracle of transformation.

Ever since its beginnings earthly life has been a constant stream of death and revival. In an analogical sense the history of the Earth has a paschal character. *Natura spirat resurrectionem*—nature exudes resurrection! The Passover of humanity is inconceivable without the ultimate Great Passover of the cosmos: "We wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pt 3:13). Only rational human beings are able, consciously, to await this miraculous transformation, nurtured by faith, hope and joy.

\* \* \*

Imbued with awareness of the resurrection, Christianity teaches gratitude for the gift of life, however frail. It also teaches love for the Earth and all creation. Faithfulness towards the Earth does not mean we cannot harbour hope for a reality "not from this world," the more so, as already the Earth contains in itself all the beauty and mystery of the whole creation.

I have attempted to draw attention to some of the more or less forgotten aspects of the Christian universalism of hope. This hope is not merely a consoling phantasy in the face of death and life's inevitable extinction. Christians believe death has not the final word.

They trust in the faithfulness of their Creator and the mercifulness of their Saviour. This is why they can be witnesses of the universalism of hope for the ultimate transformation of the entire creation. Universalism is no abstract theory, but a sort of "cosmosophy" teaching wisdom in our approach to the destiny of humanity and cosmos. Wise and modest witness by Christianity would be the most effective proof of its responsibility and concern for the fate of all creatures.

## NOTES

1 L. Kolakowski, "O rozumie i innych rzeczach" [On Reason and Other Things], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 41, October 12, 2003, p. 8.

2 Cf. T. Peters, *Science and Theology: The New Consonance*, Boulder, Colorado 1998; *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, ed. by John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, Harrisburg, Penn. 2000.

3 M. Heller, "W poszukiwaniu sensu" [In Search of the Meaning], *Znak* 54 (2002), no. 10 (569), pp. 72–89, here pp. 77 and 79.

4 Cf. W. R. Stoeger, S.J., *Scientific Accounts of Ultimate Catastrophes in Our Life-bearing Universe*, in *The End of the World...*, pp. 19–28; J. Weiner, "Ekokalipsa" [Ecocalypse], *Znak* 51 (1999), no. 535, pp. 51–68, esp. pp. 53–54; K. Maslanka, *Gdy zgasna gwiazdy. Kosmologiczne scenariusze przyszłych losów wszechswiata* [When the Stars Go Out: Cosmological Scenarios of the Universe's Future Fate], *ibid.*, pp. 69–77, esp. p. 72.

5 This opinion is shared by a British theoretical physician Stephen Hawking (b. 1942). Cf. S. Hawking, *Predicting the Future* [Przewidywanie przyszłości, transl. by G. Kolodziejczyk, Warszawa 1996; P. Cieslinski, "Twarz Boga" [The Face of God], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, no. 45, Feb. 22–23 2003, pp. 14–15.

6 Cf. P. Cieslinski, "Piąty element. Tajemnicza siła w kosmosie" [The Fifth Element: A Mysterious Force in the Cosmos], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, no. 182, August 6, 2003, pp. 1 and 9.

7 Supernova explosions are billions of times more powerful than the Sun. Their force allows scientists to determine their distance from the Earth. Poor visibility means the explosion is taking place in a very faraway galaxy (Abel 1689, the biggest known galaxy cluster, is currently 2.2 billion light years away from Earth).

8 This was confirmed by a team of 23 astrophysicists working under Ryan Scranton from Pittsburgh University in Pennsylvania (see [www.lanl.gov/abs/astro-ph/307335](http://www.lanl.gov/abs/astro-ph/307335)).

9 For more on this point see W. Hryniewicz, "We are the People of the Beginning", *Dialogue and Universalism* 13 (2003), no. 3–4, pp. 103–112, esp. pp. 109–111.

10 Cf. statements by such Nobelists as J. Monod (*Chance and Necessity*, New York 1971) and S. Weinberg (*The First Three Minutes*, New York 1977).

11 For other scientists life is merely an information-relaying process and human beings "computers made of flesh", products of an artificial intelligence which the universe's constant evolution will transform into computers consisting of other categories of matter. Such concepts are highly reductionist, a sort of a "physical eschatology" which tries to provide only a substitute of meaning and fulfillment. They are evidence of the failure of eschatological optimism in understanding the world's evolution. Cf. F.J. Dyson, *Infinite in All Directions*, New York 1988 (constantly expanding universe theory); F.J. Tipler, *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God, and the Resurrection of the Dead*, New York 1997 (shrinking universe theory). For statements by quantum cosmology supporters see J. Polkinghorne, *Eschatology: Some Questions and Some Insights from Science*, in *The End of the World...*, pp. 33–34.

12 Cf. J. Polkinghorne, *Eschatology...*, pp. 30, 34–38. From other writings by this Anglican Cambridge scholar and former mathematical physics professor see *Science and Creation* (1988); *Reason and Reality* (1991); *The Faith of a Physicist* (1994); *Scientists as Theologians* (1996); *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (1998); *Science and Theology* (1998).

13 This interpretation was based on the Book of Genesis (*Gen* 1: 3.7.9.11.15.24.30). God created everything through His creative Logos: "He said, and it was so". Some analogies were noticed here with poets, whose verses form a new reality of a poem outside of their own person. Similarly the creative energy of divine Logos worked at the origins of creation when it brought forth the universe.

14 St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione*. PG 46, 124 C.

15 Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, 7. PG 91, 685 AB. Cf. related statements by Orthodox theologians: O. Clément, *Le Christ: terre des vivants. Essais théologiques*, Begrolles en Mauges 1976, pp. 66–69; Ch. Yannaras, "Science et foi: La vision 'logique' du monde", *Contacts* 38 (1986), no. 136, pp. 277–288, esp. pp. 279–282 (*La constitution "logique" de la matière*); Évêque Basile (Osborne), "L'unité de l'Église: une unité trinitaire", *Contacts* 55 (2003) No. 201, pp. 8–39, esp. 21–31. See also J.-C. Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur*, Paris 1996, pp. 112–131.

16 Cf. an inspiring study by a Greek Orthodox theologian Joannis Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, London 1985.

17 For more on this topic see J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation*, London 1988, esp. Ch. 5; id., *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, New Haven, Conn. 1998, Ch. 6.

18 For a New Testament view see H. Weder, *Hope and Creation*, in: *The End of the World...*, pp. 184–202, esp. pp. 193–196.

19 Cf. Polkinghorne, *Eschatology...*, pp. 39–40.

20 Cf. M. Volf, *Enter into Joy! Sin, Death, and the Life of the World to Come*, in: *The End of the World...*, pp. 256–278, esp. pp. 274, 278. According to this Croatian theologian, professor at Yale University and the Theology Department in Osijek, "redemption of space enables redemption of time". Our worldly pilgrimage is brief. By entering the new world we find rest. Well expressed by the pilgrimage metaphor, the Western concept of time embraces both time and space. Feeling at home in the new world is a pre-condition of "reconciled temporality". Ibid., p. 277 footnote 87.

21 From this point of view all theological speculations on the so-called intermediate state between death and resurrection appear pointless.

22 Cf. W. Hryniewicz, *Nadzieja zbawienia dla wszystkich* [Hope of Salvation for All], Warszawa 1989; id., *Dramat nadziei zbawienia* [The Drama of the Hope of Salvation], Warszawa 1996; id., *Chrzescijanstwo nadziei* [Christianity of Hope], Kraków 2002, pp. 341–378; id., *Nadzieja uczy inaczej* [Hope Teaches Otherwise], Warszawa 2003; id., *Dlaczego glosze nadzieje?* [Why Do I Proclaim Hope], Warszawa 2004; id., *Bog wszystkim we wszystkich. Ku eschatologii bez dualizmu* (*God All in All: Towards an Eschatology without Dualism*), Warszawa 2005.

23 N. Berdyaev, *Self-Knowledge: An Attempt at Philosophical Autobiography* [Samopoznanie. Opyt filozofskoj avtobiografii], Paris 1949, p. 329.

## **Chapter III**

### **THE CHALLENGE OF OUR HOPE:**

#### **HISTORY AND ESCHATOLOGY, AN EAST EUROPEAN VIEW<sup>1</sup>**

Eastern Europe has been passing through a very difficult period of change and transition. The gift of freedom demands responsibility. Either individual Christians nor entire church communities were prepared to face new realities. There is a lot of confusion in the minds and hearts of people, both clergy and laity. Many look for simple explications and quick remedies. They display a black vision of the world and detect hostile forces of the devil and sin. This pessimistic world-view creates a mentality marked by a constant search for outside enemies. It is easier to frighten people than to explain patiently the present-day situation, to give hope and confidence. A realistic approach needs hope; without hope there is no wisdom. According to Isaac the Syrian, the seventh century mystic, hope is above all "the wisdom of the heart"<sup>2</sup>. Those who propose simplistic solutions seem to lack such quiet wisdom. They are convinced they possess the whole truth and are therefore inclined to pass verdicts and condemn those who think in a different way. That is why there is a strong polarisation of divergent views and attitudes.

In this situation the need for hope becomes even more perceptible. Hope has a powerful educating force. Very often one can have the impression that our Churches fear to assume the consequences of the pedagogy of hope. They prefer an old pedagogy of fear. There remains still a clear discrepancy between the official teaching of the churches and academic theology on one side, and the mystical experience of hope on the other. The topic 'religion and hope' requires a renewed and thorough examination.

#### **WHAT CAN HOPE OFFER IN A SITUATION OF DIVISION?**

Instances of polarisation and division can be seen in practically all countries of Eastern Europe. It is also the case within the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. An open model of Catholicism faces a strong opposition on the side of those who see in it the influence of freemasonry or even of the devil itself. A closed, popular and traditional mentality is easily dominated by fear and condemnation. This is, above all, the fear of freedom and of otherness. Some would like to anticipate, as it were, the Last Judgment, passing verdicts and replacing God himself. Equally dangerous is a growing tendency towards exclusiveness in understanding truth and salvation. One of our bishops admitted recently: "A great defect of Polish Catholicism is the conviction that the world will be good only when all convert to Catholicism; that this is the only way to save the world and reform society."<sup>3</sup> This attitude of popular Catholicism does not reckon with the complexity of the contemporary world. It forgets that one has to show patiently, by one's own life, how

splendid the gift of faith is and to give witness to the hope which is in us. (Cf. 1 Peter 3:15)

In the eyes of the frightened groups of believers, the so-called 'open Catholicism' becomes a synonym of corruption and degeneration, precisely because of its universality, openness and courage to remain in dialogue with others. Who does not fear the unknown, who is ecumenically minded and hopes for the salvation of all, easily becomes a target of accusations and attacks.

The division between the Roman Catholics in Poland is undeniable. It does not seem, however, to involve the vast majority of people. Its impact can be seen above all among intellectuals and those who support certain Catholic media. In ordinary parishes one can hardly notice any interest in those controversies. The two already mentioned formations of Catholicism arose immediately after 1989. Chronologically, the so-called 'Open Catholicism' came first into being, very soon causing anxiety and worry among traditionally-minded Catholics. The latter are often labelled as 'integrists' or even 'fundamentalists'. They often speak a very aggressive language, not deprived of invectives and accusations personally addressed. Their 'private frustrations' and demonstrated fears create a style which defies elementary principles of Christian culture.<sup>4</sup>

This type of Catholicism is based on a restrictive or selective interpretation of the church teaching and, at the same time, on an attitude critical to pluralism and tolerance. It has little understanding for ecumenism and for the freedom of individual conscience. The truth is considered to be far more important than the human right to freedom. To the main features of this formation belong also extremist views, both political and national, pretending to be an expression of the only true teaching of the Church.

During the Communist era, national identity was built on resistance to the alien and hostile pressure of Marxist ideology. When this pressure disappeared, many people became uncertain about their own identity and started defining themselves in opposition to everything that is alien, foreign, unforeseeable, so different as to be opposed. The Catholic faith became, in the new situation, the decisive factor of self-definition. Popular Catholicism gives to a lost people a sense of safety. It offers a simple explication of contemporary phenomena, a feeling of dignity and moral superiority, in the face of an incomprehensible reality, shaped supposedly by a conspiracy of enemies.

In times of the Communist regime, the Roman Catholic Church in Poland was seen as a natural representative of the aspirations and hopes of the enslaved society. People saw in it a real sign of hope. They respected it for its attitude inspired by compassion and tolerance. In the struggle with Communist oppression the Church had an influential ally - all those intellectuals who looked for ways of improving the situation. Between the Church and those liberal intellectuals there was fruitful dialogue and cooperation. The end of Communism proved to be, however, the end of this dialogue. The Church became suspicious of liberal democracy. For a significant part of liberal society it was a turning point. Some integrist tendencies within the Church have increased the feelings of anti-clericalism. Very often one could have the impression that the official Church was

becoming a besieged fortress, whose defenders saw only enemies around it. There appeared a language of hatred, contempt, aggression and anathema.

This way the Gospel ceases to be a Good News of understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation and hope. Christians begin to witness against someone and, what is worse, to be against someone. There is only one step to bedevil people, to accuse and to condemn, to look for the presence of the devil in all that the liberals or the post-Communists do. Where is then the spirit of Christ's Beatitudes? Where is the message of hope, compassion and mercy?

After 1989 the gap between the two above-mentioned mentalities considerably widened. What could be seen was a wounded and dwarfed face of Christianity. Some people of the Church seemed to live still in post-tridentine times, not practically accepting the Second Vatican Council, out of touch with the challenge of a changing reality.

But this is, of course, not only the case in Poland; similar divisions in the Church appear also in other countries of Eastern Europe. Conservatism seems often to gain the upper hand. One can observe timid attitudes inspired by the spirit of intransigence and exclusiveness. Christian hope is thus deprived of its soteriological universalism. Exclusive tendencies usually come back into existence during the time of confessional tensions, conflicts and rivalries. After 1989 this is precisely the situation in Eastern Europe. Orthodox Christians fear the invasion of Western missionaries. They often speak of proselytism and "uniatism". They pass collective judgments on non-Orthodox Christians.

Here are two significant examples. In February 1991 an international Orthodox conference was held at the Pochaev Orthodox Monastery. Its participants were very critical of the Roman Catholic Church. They accused it of enmity towards the Orthodox faith and of expansionism. In their view, Catholics do not belong to the true Church of God. In the final appeal, addressed to all Orthodox Christians, there is an unambiguous statement that only the Orthodox faith saves people unconditionally.<sup>5</sup>

Another example is related to some decisions of the Orthodox Church, taken by 39 representatives, gathered for a pan-Orthodox conference in Thessalonica (April 30-May 2, 1998). Orthodox bishops and theologians decided not to take part in common prayers and liturgical services during the VIII<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, Zimbabwe (December 1998). This decision displays the deep dissatisfaction of the Orthodox with certain 'modernistic trends' in the activity of the Council. Those unacceptable tendencies consist mainly in practicing intercommunion, in acknowledging the possibility of salvation also in other Churches, in ordaining women and promoting the rights of sexual minorities.<sup>6</sup> Here again we can see the old maxim, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, in its rigid confessional interpretation: outside the Orthodox Church there is no salvation.

## **HOPE FOR RECONCILIATION AND A WISER CHRISTIAN**

## IDENTITY

What worries one today is the growing fear of the Other. There is often almost no willingness to know him, no attempt to understand. What we see is rather a radical tendency to reject the Other, and otherness as such. That is why education in dialogue, in "proxemics" (a special branch of human sciences), in ability to forgive and to be reconciled are so important. Dialogue is a sign of an outgoing concern, a willingness to understand the Other, to respect him and to be mutually enriched. One who knows the Other better becomes less aggressive, able to respect him and to live in peace. There is a clear clash today between open and closed mentalities. A closed mentality tends to be xenophobic, harsh and intolerant. Only an open mentality is ready to acknowledge the right of the Other to exist and to remain different. Christians have their own reasons for openness in the Gospel of Christ.

Ours is the time not to bar the door, but rather to "accept one another as Christ accepted us, to the Glory of God". (Rm 15:17) The last words are crucial: "to the glory of God". Everything that foments division, contempt and hatred can only profane the name of God himself, and in this way discredit the Christian faith as such. It is worth recalling here the words of the shocking 'prophecy' of the Koran concerning Christians:

They neglected a portion of that whereof they were reminded, so we [Allah] stirred up enmity and hatred among them to the day of resurrection. And Allah will soon inform them what they did.<sup>7</sup>

The Muslim commentators have their own explanations for these words. One of them wrote: "The prophecy that there shall always be hatred and enmity between the various Christian peoples has proved true in all ages, and never more clearly than in our own day".<sup>8</sup> No matter how we Christians would comment on such statements, the sad fact remains that our rivalries and divisions compromise the credibility of Christianity. The hope for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence may be greater than ever before.

The difficult pedagogy of the dialogue compels us to overcome the spirit of rivalry, competitiveness and confessional struggle. Any strategy to weaken the other side arouses only defensive reactions. Ecumenism educates all of us to discover an open, more full and wise identity. We are still victims of historical conflicts, confessionalism, denominationalism and some other forms of ecclesiastical competition.

The confessional issue: "Who am I?" does not take into account the christological component: "TO WHOM do I belong?" To remember who we are is not enough. One has to ask above all: "WHOSE are we?" Christology and Christian soteriology teaches us that we belong to Christ, the Suffering Servant who "emptied himself (*heauton ekénosen*) to assume the condition of a slave". (Ph 2:7) *Kenosis* means self-emptying or self-limitation. Christ's identity, resulting from his equality with God, is contrary to any rapacious possession of this dignity. He was able to renounce his own might and glory, and thus to acquire a new *kenotic* identity. *Kenosis* implies the ability of self-denial or self-sacrifice



in favour of others. What God dares is amazing. The purpose of the divine *kenosis* is not annihilation, but transfiguration.

The figure of the *kenotic* Servant has ecclesiological significance. Christ's *kenosis* becomes an imperative for his Church. A special duty of today's theologians is to ask the question of what their own Church can and should do to renounce all that diminishes her credibility, her ecumenical honesty, and the hope of reconciliation. Our Churches do not seem to be ready to change, quickly and painlessly, the established style in mutual relationships. The most difficult task is to convert the Churches to one another in compassion and forgiveness. For this a real breakthrough is needed, in biblical language - a *kenotic* act of renouncing everything which does not serve the work of reconciliation.

The ecclesiology of Sister Churches obliges us today to admit the lack of evangelical brotherhood and mercy in our mutual relations. The burden of historical faults and sad experiences of the past continues to live in our memory. The deep roots of distrust still make the progress of reconciliation a very difficult ecumenical task. What we need is a prospective ecumenism that does not allow us to remain prisoners of the past. The lessons of the past should not be forgotten, but all negative memories require healing. Only a healed and purified memory will allow us to open up a new future and give us hope for better days. An essential part of the process of reconciliation would be the acknowledgement of what other Christians have experienced at the hand of our church community. A compassionate appropriation of each other's memories thus becomes indispensable.

## **ECUMENICAL HOPE, COMPASSION AND UNDERSTANDING**

Out of our controversies and disputes we have built institutionalized divisions and have acquiesced in those divisions. Throughout the centuries our churches have developed different ways of justifying theologically the need for separation. The history of Christianity abounds in apologetic confessional tendencies of that kind. This approach, deprived of the sense of solidarity and compassion, has proved unable to discover the essential content of the faith in another church. Thus we have grown accustomed to the consequences of our divisions. Today we are more and more aware that ecumenism of the mind is not enough. We need also the ecumenism of the heart, and that is not possible without compassion. Hope and compassion go inseparably together.

To deepen this conviction, I would like to refer to the incomparable witness of a truly ecumenical figure who cut across all the ecclesiastical boundaries. He was humble and compassionate. He has been read in the East and today is more appreciated also in the West for his experiential wisdom. His name is Isaac the Syrian, or Isaac of Nineveh (seventh century). He speaks of two schools of life within us. The majority of people remain in 'the school of justice'. Only some of us are able to escape from it and to enter into the 'school of compassion'. The first one cultivates knowledge of justice, teaches us to pass judgments upon people and to separate them from one another. Such a knowledge gives birth to contentiousness, anger, confusion and willfulness. The school of compassion, on the contrary, teaches forgiveness and mercifulness towards all, discovers

the greatness of God's gift, cultivates peace, humility, patience and love.<sup>9</sup> The admirable gift of mercy and compassion is an icon of God's own mercy for all. Isaac's wisdom finds its best expression when he speaks about a merciful heart:

And what is a merciful heart? It is the heart's burning for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing ... For his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation ... He even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God.<sup>10</sup>

Mercy and humility give access to true understanding and wisdom. We may be tempted today to dismiss such an attitude as an expression of sentimentalism. But let us be honest. History shows abundantly what happens to us and our churches when they are deprived of the ethos of compassion. Certainly, a gesture of compassion does not immediately create a new civilization and a new relationship, but it has far-reaching consequences. It changes the whole pattern of behaviour. An old maxim says: "When somebody advances towards God just one step, God will take ten steps forward to him". We have to dare, in compassion to one another, to take the first steps towards reconciliation and forgiveness. God may then amaze us with the speed of his grace. This is our Christian hope.

## **TOWARDS BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS OF UNIVERSAL HOPE**

The eschatology of biblical statements related to hell requires a thorough reinterpretation. Apart from many warnings, the Scripture also conveys astonishing words of hope for everybody, including non-believers. Who fails to realize that there are two series of texts of soteriological and eschatological character will not understand the dramatic nature of the biblical message. This relates chiefly to the terminology describing the state of being lost and the penal terminology connected with punishment and torment. Some etymological intuitions make it possible to better understand the therapeutic, pedagogical and correctional purpose of punishment as a chance of conversion for all lost or rebelling rational beings.

There is a danger of treating Jesus' parables as a reportage outlining future events. Interpreting the biblical texts literally, without understanding their basic intentions, one reduces them to sheer apocalyptic fantasies. This concerns chiefly the parable on the Last Judgment (cf. Mt 25:31-46). The force of its persuasion is aimed at reviewing the current situation of life, inconsistent with the commandment of love of neighbour. Christ's words call for reflection. He defends the 'least', the weakest, those in need. He identifies himself with them. The only criterion of evaluation, in this vision of the judgment, is the love of neighbour in need. For insensitivity and egoism people deserve a severe verdict.

The Lord of history sends all those on whom the curse of human injustice and harm weigh to go first through "eternal fire" and "eternal punishment" or torment. The guilty ones are sent away into a state of punishment which is to lead them to repentance and conversion - *eis kólasin aiōnion* (Mt 25:46). Fire is a symbol of purification. The notion

of "eternal fire" broadens this symbolism. It indicates a long and truly *aeonic*<sup>11</sup> duration of the state of intense torment. It is not said in the parable that the relationship between God and his sinful creatures definitively ends in this way.

Let us consider for a moment the extremely important expression: *eis kólasin aiōnion*. The reality of *kólasis* is described as an "eternal" or *aeonic* torment. In fact the guilty people punish themselves. The word "eternal" does not indicate a state indeed ultimate and irreversible. "The cursed" people on the Judge's left (Mt 25, 41: *katēraménoi*) have to become first purified in the fire of suffering, repentance and remorse for evil deeds. It is the curse of all people neglected or wronged by them that weighs on them. "The King" orders them to depart from him because their state is irreconcilable yet with his kingdom. They must depart until the time of their inner change, repentance and conversion.

The etymological intuitions included in the word *kólasis* itself seem to point to this possibility. The Greek Fathers, especially those who favoured the hope of universal salvation and could sense well the spirit of language, understood punishment in its therapeutic meaning. The word *kólasis* is derived from horticultural terminology (*kólasis ton déndron*). It denotes pruning a tree, that is cutting off some of its branches in order to improve its fruitfulness. The expression *koládzein ta déndra* means to cut off wild shoots of branches, to curb their growth, to prevent that tree from running wild and to make it more noble in this way. The act of trimming branches means at the same time inflicting some sort of suffering on the tree.

Not surprisingly, the words *kólasis* and *koládzo* in relation to people mean punishing, but with a concrete purpose which is correction and improvement (*pros sophronismón*). In medical terminology *kólasis* means a cure given to someone because of his bad health (*hōs phármakon*). In this meaning the word was used in Old Greek literature.<sup>12</sup> In Plato's writings *kólasis* means "the curing of soul" (*psyches therapéia*).<sup>13</sup>

Now, let us connect the word *kólasis*, understood in the way presented above, with the adjective *aiōnios*, just as Matthew does (Mt 25:46). This might enable a deeper understanding of the message of Christ's warning. What does the adjective *aiōnios* mean? In Plato's writings it meant duration that would finally come to an end.<sup>14</sup> Generally, the word *aiōnios* in the Greek language is not synonymous with endlessness. It denotes first of all a "limited duration" (*periorisménē diárkeia*).<sup>15</sup> The meaning of this adjective has to be found in the Semitic languages. Its counterpart is the Hebrew *ōlam*, but this word has also many meanings because it is derived from the act of hiding. It may either mean eternity or simply long duration. Therefore, when Jesus in his parable terms punishment (torment) as 'eternal' one has to apprehend the adequate and proper sense of this expression.

Eternity belongs to God alone. It is a sign of his absolute transcendence. Only God is the absolute fullness of life without origin and without end. He alone is really and truly eternal and everlasting. The word 'eternal' in relation to creatures can only have a limited and relative meaning. The eternity of God and the eternity of life of those saved cannot be treated on equal footing with the 'eternity' of the existential state to which the 'cursed'

people have been sent away. It is a transitory state of therapeutic and pedagogical character as indicated by the etymology of the very word *kólasís*.

In Matthew 25:46, punishment, or torment, is called 'eternal' (*eis kólasin aiōnion*) as a parallel to 'eternal life' (*eis zoēn aiōnion*). In both cases the Gospel uses the same adjective *aiōnios*. Advocates of the traditional teaching on the eternity of hell perceive this parallel as a crown proof of the correctness of their teaching. However, if there is some kind of parallel in Christ's words, it is an asymmetrical parallelism. It results from the antithesis on which the parable of Jesus is based. It is the antithesis between the 'blessed' and the 'cursed', and in consequence the antithesis between 'eternal life' and 'eternal punishment'. It says that something of human ultimate destiny is fulfilled already in earthly life. It is a warning: be sensitive to the people in need, otherwise you may risk to find yourself among those who have been 'cursed'. Such is its basic purpose. The same adjective, 'eternal' is used in both cases, but its meaning is different according to the noun following the adjective. Despite apparently close parallelism, the asymmetry of 'eternal life' and 'eternal punishment' is maintained thanks to the carefully chosen word *kólasís*, with its therapeutic meaning. Such a punishment is purposeful only when its therapeutic objective is possible to reach. Any other punishment having no such purpose, even only allowed for by God, could not be worthy of his love and mercy<sup>16</sup>.

The Bible has to be read as a whole. One should not snatch from it individual quotations in order to prove a thesis specified in advance. The Scripture requires an honest and deep interpretation, free from any ideological assumptions. As a whole it speaks about God's untiring, searching, attracting and transforming love; about his mercy and patience toward sinful people. It is true that it does not lack warnings of the *Gehenna* - the existential state of being miserably lost. A number of biblical statements suggest that this state of self-destruction is of transitional nature. The lost creature must undergo a purifying inner struggle, inseparable from the feeling of pain and suffering. What we popularly call the punishment of hell acquires in fact therapeutic qualities. An endless and everlasting punishment, a punishment for its own sake, would not be a thing worthy of the good God.

## **UNIVERSALISM OF HOPE**

Salvation and damnation are not two parallel determinants of the ultimate destiny of humankind. These are not two coextensive realities. The Christian believes in the ultimate fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. He looks forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Such is the conclusion of the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, the very core of the eschatological hope. What is most important is expressed with faith and hope. The symbol of faith does not mention hell. The existential state of being lost is possible. But can it be really ultimate? Hope dares to trust that the one who has been lost may be found by the Good Shepherd of human history, that with the help of God he may again find himself and his own freedom. The mystery of hope for universal salvation is a mystery of freedom - the freedom which has been cured, regained, transformed and saved.

The universalism of hope is a cure for the temptation to appropriate the gift of salvation for the benefit of one's own religious community and to deny it to all other people. Such a hope becomes the strongest ally of ecumenism. The duty of expecting salvation for all may then become an eschatological motive of love and concern. It is not only a passive hope that some day God will be able to reconcile all the creation and gather it in the harmony of the new world. The hope of universal salvation relates also to the present day. Already today it requires a new attitude towards the people whom we will find beyond this life. It is a universal hope, free from the limitations of any ecclesiastical or secular particularisms.

The soteriological universalism of hope requires a new mentality and new pedagogy. We live in the age of a great breakthrough. Something new is being born, a new sensitivity and a new spirituality. Christianity contains in itself a vast and creative potential which has so far not been fully discovered and appreciated. It does not matter that our roads towards the Infinite are different. He Himself remains the greatest hope for every one. This awareness is the great liberation for ecumenism and universalism. Thanks to it the sense of a deep unity of all denominations and religions can be strengthened. The universalism of hope has a promising future before it.

## NOTES

1 A shortened version of a paper given at Third European Ecumenical China Conference in Stavanger, Norway, June 18-21, 1998, published in: "China Study Journal" (London) 13 (1998) No. 2, pp. 12-20 and in: "European Ecumenical China Communication" No. 4: *Papers and Materials of the European Catholic China Colloquium "Europe – China Theological Exchanges"* (Paris, 6-9 November, 1995) and the Third European Ecumenical China Conference (Stavanger, 18-21 June, 1998). Sankt Augustin 1999, pp. 179-187.

2 Homily 40, in: *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Translated by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston MA, 1984, p. 203.

3 Bp. Tadeusz Pieronek. *Nie wyreczajmy Pana Boga (Let Us Not Replace God)*. "Gazeta Wyborcza" No 126, May 30-31, 1998, p.10.

4 Cf. Abp. Jozef Zycinski. *Styl Kosciola (The Style of the Church)*. "Tygodnik Powszechny" No. 21, May 24, 1998, p. 10.

5 *Obrashchenie k brat'iam po vere*. "Literaturnaja Rossija" No 8, February 22, 1991, p.23: "kotoraja odna bezuslovno spasaet celoveka".

6 *Itgovyj dokument mezpravoslavnoj vstrechi po teme 'Otsenka novych faktov v otnoshenijach mezhdru Pravoslaviem i ekumenicheskim dvizheniem'* (Salonika, Grecija, 29 Aprilja - 2 Maja 1998 goda). "Russkaja Mysl" No 4222, May 14-20, 1998, p.20. See also "Tygodnik Powszechny" No 20, May 17, 1998, p. 2.

7 Surah V, 14. Cf. *The Holy Qur'an*. Arabic Text, English translation and commentary by Maulana Muhammed Ali, 6th edition, Chicago Ill., 1973, p. 245.

8 Ibid., note 674.

9 *The Book of Grace* 6,29.32, in: *The Ascetical Homilies*, p. 415.

10 Homily 71, in: *The Ascetical Homilies*, pp. 344-345.

11 The Greek word αἰών, *aeon* or *eon* means a period of time too long to be measured.

12 See D. Demetrakou. *Mega Lexikon oles tes ellenikes glosses*, vol 8, Athens 1964, 3993-94, 3996-97.

13 Cf. Abp. Athenagoras Kokkinakis. *Eisagoge: Gregorion Nysses apanta ta erga I, Dogmatika A*, Thessaloniki 1979, p. 107.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 121.

16 See Z. Kubiak, *O pogaństwie. [On paganism]*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" no. 36, Sept. 7, 1997, 1: "...It is not accidental that the Gospel was written in the Greek language... When God decided to speak to us about love he did so in Greek".

## Chapter IV

# A FAITH FRIENDLY TO NON-BELIEVERS<sup>1</sup>

An important statement was published in Poland in July, 1999, entitled: "Non-believers in the Parish"<sup>2</sup>. It was issued by the Committee for Dialogue with Non-Believers, operating within the Council of the Polish Episcopate's Conference for Religious Dialogue. It deserves thorough examination. The Christian faith is by its nature friendly to all people, also to non-believers.

On the occasion of the Great Jubilee 2000, the Council for Religious Dialogue issued also another statement entitled "Dialogue at the Basis of Evangelization"<sup>3</sup>. It underlines the duty to undertake dialogue always and with everybody, because it is "an evangelical obligation of all the disciples of Christ", "a mother tongue of humankind". Moreover, the dialogue should be a "norm and style of the whole Christian mission" which without it would become "incompatible with the requirements of true humanity and with recommendations of the Gospel".

My task is not to comment in a detailed way on these inspiring statements. Rather, I will propose some reflections encouraging their careful reading. Non-believers much too seldom encounter attitudes of esteem and understanding; they too seldom meet with favorable reception and sincere openness. The trauma of the past decades under the Communist regime will continue to cast a shadow on the relations between people long into the future. How many habits must be discarded; how many stereotypes in thinking about other people must be done away with! A new approach and a deeper commitment are required to help to find the right attitude towards those who have left the Church or have become non-believers.

The document of 1999 encourages believers to look upon non-believers with "love, respect, and understanding — not only for tactical reasons". One has to remember the tragedies and dramatic turns in people's personal lives. Distrust, indifference, condescension, pity, or aggression toward such people cannot be reconciled with the spirit of the Gospel. They should not *a priori* be considered enemies of the Church — or of God himself. The statement of 2000 regrets that church people often lack love towards non-believers. Many of them were once within the Church. They had been wounded and therefore left it discouraged, with the feeling of injustice done to them by the representatives of the Church. One should not forget that in the eyes of non-believers the image of the Church is shaped by those who believe.

**MAN IS A BEING THAT CALLS AND IS CALLED**

We have become accustomed, owing to contemporary personalism, to speak about humans in terms of relationships, relationality and outgoing concern for the Other human being. The Christian faith permits us to see one more important dimension of human existence. This is the person's ability to respond to the call or invocation which comes from another person. This call is an appeal for acceptance, openness and rescue. Each person possesses the inner fundamental ability to call and be called.

Only a person can respond to another person in a free manner. Only the person called can respond to the caller. The ability to call and be called makes a person an epicletic being (Greek *epikaléo* — I call, I invoke). Humans have no choice but to call another person by their own existence, or to be called themselves. Relationality, relationship and responsiveness are deeply integrated into the very nature of the person.

Christian tradition knows the concept of epiclesis in relation to the sacraments. It is an invocation of the Holy Spirit to come down and change the deepest meaning of the fruits and elements of the Earth (bread, wine, olive, water) and, by this, to transform the whole of human life. There is no reason why the concept of epiclesis, understood as invocation, could not be extended to an anthropological level. Through his very existence, even if fallen and miserable, each human constantly invokes the Creator, often without being aware of it. Indeed, there exists a special sort of ontological epiclesis, one which is voiceless and wordless — but equally real. Humans, as epicletic beings, are able to call from the depths of their confusion and spiritual misery. A ruined life, the experience of emptiness and meaninglessness, lost hopes, suffering, disorder, and death can be such a calling. No human being can identify the voice of this call. This can be done only by the Holy Spirit who penetrates the innermost recesses of the human heart and spirit. Each person's invocation is always accompanied by a call coming from within — the call which the Christian faith identifies with the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Man is a creature that cannot escape this kind of calling, a creature who needs and calls the Other. Human nature carries in itself an appeal for being rescued. The very existence of man or woman is a powerful epiclesis for the Creator himself, a call for rescue and final salvation. The epiphany of the human face expresses first and foremost what Emmanuel Lévinas considered the ontological "substantial poverty", "the dignified nakedness" and helplessness. This poverty can be masked. We may take up different poses to hide it and show off our self-confidence. But in fact, we are all creatures which through our own poverty constantly launch an appeal for being spared, rescued and led to fulfillment. This applies to all people, both believers and non-believers.

## **THE CHOICE OF THE GOOD AND OF TRUTH**

One often speaks of the desacralization of values in the contemporary world. Although some of those values have roots in religious tradition (e.g. universalism, respect for the human being, equality, fraternity, justice, freedom), modern ethics considers them to be secular values. They are considered as values in themselves. In this type of axiology, the central place is taken by humanistic ethical ideas which exist independently of religion.



In the secular system of values, religion has ceased to play the role of an inspiring criterion.

The spiritual situation of the contemporary world urgently requires openness and humanistic sensitivity on the part of believers. People who believe should avoid exclusivity and shallow apologetics. One has to discover that the decision to follow ethical values contains a deep truth about our own humanity in need of salvation. Salvation does not take place alongside or outside human existence, but within it and through it. The path to salvation is a path leading through human freedom in its fundamental option and day-to-day decisions.

Human deeds integrate into good or bad habits which, in turn, take deep root in human personality. The fundamental option develops its shape throughout one's whole life. By its nature, the choice of truth and the good carries with it certain features of a liturgical act of worship. The person who makes such a decision agrees that the good should determine his or her freedom and the ascertained truth guide their mind. This act involves the intention to subordinate oneself to the power of good and truth, as well as to serve them. Thus, human freedom finds its fulfillment in the acceptance of truth and the good.

A person who makes the decision to follow the voice of truth and the good enters by this fact itself the sphere of supernatural radiation of the mystery of salvation. This is a peculiar threshold of supernatural reality. God would take care that by my decision to commit myself to the service of truth and the good, I can have a real part in the process of salvation. This act has a saving power. It brings the human being into friendship with God by the power of the saving good, the original source of which is God Himself. This takes place in the decisions of human freedom. Any service done for the good is, in its essence, a service to God Himself. The act of choosing the good implies a basic response of a person to the entire reality. By choosing the good, humans give priority to the very depth of reality and, by the same, they enable themselves to perceive more of its meaning. The one who does not choose the good, voluntarily renounces the gift of encountering the truth of one's own existence.

## **THE GOOD LEAVES NO ONE IN PEACE AND QUIET**

From this perspective, any choice of the good and truth is, in fact, an existential salvific event. As such, this event puts humans eye-to-eye not only with their natural truth and authenticity, but also with their ultimate truth and destiny. This is the consequence of the fundamental option for the good, the true, and the beautiful. According to the Second Vatican Council, "By His Incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man".<sup>4</sup> This unusual solidarity of Jesus Christ with every human being, which escapes every precise analysis, allows His mystery to be realized within all people.

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers

to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery<sup>5</sup>.

A person who chooses to stand on the side of the good becomes a participant in the divine work of salvation also when he or she are not aware of it or when they are unbelievers. The choice of truth and the good, made within their inner selves, has a salvific nature. Thus, the light of grace and salvation penetrates the mystery of man's freedom in a way "known only to God". Each decision to serve the good and to follow its requirements is already an anonymous realization of the mystery of salvation. Good, by its nature, brings about rescue and salvation, prevents destruction, liberates, and leads to ultimate fulfillment.

Ethical values live by our existence, loyalty, and commitment. They address everyone with an appeal to entrust oneself to them. They wither away and die whenever people allow them no access to themselves and fail to respond with their own commitment and faithfulness. To exist, they need the person's free co-operation. A dramatic feature of all human values is that they are dependent on the human's response. But individual decisions are always uncertain. These values exist as much as the people opting for them allow them to inspire and direct their actions. Indeed, good never leaves anyone unattended, in peace and quiet. It approaches us with an incessant call. And it dies at the doorstep of the one who chooses evil. By rejecting it, humans deprive it of its reality and become deaf to the inner call.

Ethical values play an intermediary role in our encounter with God. Every deed we want to perform in service of what is considered to be good — because it is really good — is, in fact, also in the service of God Himself. This service can be named the liturgy of the good that is ultimately addressed to God. The ordinary, human and creative good is the most universal sacrament of salvation. This basic intuition of ethical values is confirmed and complemented by the ethos of the Gospel which proclaims our supernatural vocation.

In the process of creating any sort of good (e.g. creative love, the search for justice, disinterested help to people in need), we have always to deal, indirectly, with God himself. "*Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*" — reads an old church hymn. In this way, He Himself brings people to salvation. Anyone who here and now works to build the true community among people may not even know about his or her contribution to the fulfillment of the final goal, namely, to the Kingdom of God. Human service to the good becomes service to God himself. God's invitation addressed to every human being to take part in the Truth and the infinite Good is realized, through our struggle for the authenticity of life, in a truly sacramental manner.

## **ACCEPTANCE OF HUMANITY — ACCEPTANCE OF GOD**

A worldwide known theologian, a Jesuit Karl Rahner (+1984), wrote over four decades ago:

God and the grace of Christ are present in everything as the mysterious essence of reality that can be a subject of choice. This is why it is not so easy to reach for something without having to do — in one way or another — with God and Christ. Therefore, the man who (...) accepts his existence, i.e., his humanity (...) as the mystery that reaches into the mystery of eternal love (...), he says 'yes' to Christ even if he does not know it [...]. For he who accepts his humanity totally (oh, how inexpressibly difficult it is, and it remains unclear whether we do so at all), he accepts the Son of God, because God accepted man in Him.<sup>6</sup>

In this type of existential vision, meeting with God is possible also when we are not aware of it. The mystery of God is beyond human comprehension, awareness, freedom, and knowledge. This involves an admirable mystery of human freedom which indeed chooses what it can perceive, but — in fact — this choice reaches much further, up to that which is impenetrable.

This applies to all people. Truth and good allow them to find, even though unaware, a direct personal relationship with God. The non-believer may also disclose in them an absolute value. This is then his or her first step towards supernatural salvation. Good and truth become thus an invisible universal "sacrament" of salvation. In accordance with their outlook, non-believers may be genuinely convinced that their actions are restricted only to the sphere of purely human and worldly values. But in the light of faith, the whole of terrestrial human life is subject to the saving power of God. The Earth we love is constantly visited by God and saturated with His acting presence.

Shortly before his death, on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, K. Rahner admirably described the tasks of Christian theology:

Even if our theology is deliberating only on the question of how people who stay outside the sacramental care of the Church can find their way before the face of God, it should ponder much more upon the question of how it is possible that the odyssey of all people — among them the most primitive ones living a million years ago, also non-Christians, and even atheists — ends up in God Himself.<sup>7</sup>

The true light "enlightens every human" (Jn 1:9). Everyone "that does what is true comes to the light" (Jn 3:21). The mystery of salvation becomes present, in a manner known only to God, in this very "doing what is true". This view is typical of the theology of the Apostle John who links truth and the good into one. The gift of salvation is accessible to all who "do what is true", including non-believers.

These are some anthropological implications of the universalism of the good in light of the Christian faith. No human can put a limit to the sovereign action of God. This way of thinking is no subtle form of religious imperialism that tries to appropriate the good which can be found also in non-believing people. Christianity properly understood has no such pretensions. It only believes in the universal extent of salvation. This view contains

nothing offensive to people of other creeds or to non-believers. Saying this I would like to forestall any possible criticism of similar kind.

The participation of humans in the mystery of salvation is performed in a variety of ways. It can be done within the mainstream of life when persons, by an act of goodwill, commit themselves to the service of a specific good and truth. The power of salvation is not ascribed only to this particular good and truth, but also to the very act of devoting one's freedom to the service of a true good. Such a decision makes the mystery of salvation present at the very core of our humanity, i.e. in our rational and free nature.

## **BELIEVING IS NOT AN ENEMY OF HUMAN HAPPINESS**

The problem of unbelief is a challenge to all those who believe. Questions asked by non-believers require deeper reflection into one's own way of believing. Christians are not exempt from inquiry about the meaning of their own existence merely because they believe in what Christ said. They are in the situation of all people who inquire and ask questions. Their faith quite often comes close to disbelief.

Christians should not think that non-believers are all immoral. The above mentioned document of the Polish Episcopate (1999) says with good reason right at the beginning: "The ethical level of non-believers is often higher than that of many so-called standard Catholics."

The Christian understanding of salvation should not cause distrust towards human happiness. It only wants to straighten our ideas about it and to correct methods used to achieve it. The expectation of happiness and search for it can be burdened by guilt and egocentrism, marked by greed and domination. The human being is not fulfilled in the conditions of egoistic isolation, but in love and commitment. Human happiness is inseparably linked with the experience of meaning and personal fulfillment. Meaning has not simply been given to human life. It has been given as a continuous task to be carried out. The belief in the meaning and purpose of life is an intrinsic need of every human being.

Human joy and happiness is an experience abundant in the deep anthropological and eschatological sense. Hope and joy must be an experience known to us so that we could be able to trust in God and feel the meaning of His promises. Unhappy persons crave for joy not because they are unhappy, but because they keep in their memory the past experience of joy and happiness, however small these might have been. Had such persons not known these experiences at all, they would not even be able to understand the meaning of these words which would only be for them meaningless sounds. The Gospel constantly refers to various human experiences because they help to understand its great promises.

Faith and hope presuppose some preparation within human experience. One must first experience at least the smallest dose of human joy and happiness before the words of the Gospel can move us and stir a fresh response within us. Salvation is not a result of human

efforts alone and is not identical with natural human happiness, although both have some points in common. The experience of happiness allows a better understanding of the meaning of salvation. Belief in salvation motivates us to care for the happiness of ourselves and others.

## **THE CALL FOR A BETTER WORLD**

Humans experience themselves in this world as beings that expect happiness and fulfillment. They are, however, aware that under the current conditions of human existence they will never achieve total fulfillment. Every human failure with all its painful consequences causes us to bear this in mind. This fact is strongly expressed by a scene from one of the novels by Victor Hugo. An elderly woman walks down a street. She has brought up her children, but they paid her back with ingratitude. She has worked hard to provide for them. But now she is living in poverty, alone and humiliated. She gave away all she had and now is forgotten by her dearest. Someone who knows her story would look at her and say: "This must have its tomorrow!" *Ça doit avoir un lendemain!* Human failure and misery are a dramatic call for a better tomorrow and a better world.

In this way we have unexpectedly come back to thinking about humans as epicletic beings who call and are called, who invoke the Other and are invoked by others. The present existence of the world is not its final form. The "today" of our earthly existence calls for a "tomorrow" of the future world – the world of human hopes for the ultimate fulfillment of the good, truth and beauty.

During His life on earth, Christ demonstrated an immense care for people. He was totally on the side of the poor, sick and needy, and bore witness of God's goodness and sympathy. That is why the Christian mission in the world has to be constantly inspired by the Gospel of Christ who saves people from unhappiness, both now and in the hereafter. In this respect, both the above-quoted documents about non-believers speak with a sense of urgency: "believers are called to common actions with non-believers for the good of local communities, the mother country, and the world".

Let us hope that this will not be only an evanescent appeal doomed to oblivion. The Christian faith is, in its very depth, a faith friendly to non-believing people.

## **NOTES**

1 An improved and enlarged version of a paper initially published in: "Dialogue and Universalism" 10 (2000) No. 7-8, pp. 161-168.

2 *Niewierzacy w parafii* [Non-believers in the Parish], "Wiadomosci KAI" [Catholic News Bulletin], No. 27, July 8, 1999, pp. 18-21; "Gazeta Wyborcza", No. 153, July 3-4, 1999, pp. 26-27.

3 *Dialog u podstaw ewangelizacji* [Dialogue at the Basis of Evangelization], "Wiadomosci KAI" No. 36, August 31, 2000, pp. 9-10.

4 Constitution "Gaudium et spes," 22. In: *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbot, S. J., General Editor, Very Rev. Msgr. Joseph Gallagher, Translation Editor. London-Dublin-Melbourne 1967, pp. 220-221.

5 Pastoral Constitution on the Church *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 22. Ibidem, pp. 221-222.

6 K. Rahner, *Zur Theologie der Menschwerdung*, in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd. IV. Einsiedeln-Zürich-Köln 1962, pp. 153-154: "Und Gott und Christi Gnade sind in allem als geheime Essenz aller wahlbaren Wirklichkeit, und darum ist es nicht so leicht, nach etwas zu greifen, ohne mit Gott und Christus [...] zu tun zu bekommen, Wer darum [...] sein Dasein, also seine Menschheit, annimmt [...] als das Geheimnis, das sich in das Geheimnis ewiger Liebe birgt [...], der sagt, auch wenn er es nicht weiß, zu Christus Ja. [...] Wer sein Menschsein ganz annimmt (ach, das ist unsagbar schwer, und dunkel bleibt es, ob wir es wirklich tun), der hat den Menschensohn angenommen, weil in ihm Gott den Menschen angenommen hat."

7 K. Rahner, "Erfahrungen eines katholischen Theologen," in: *Karl Rahner in Erinnerung*, hrsg. von A. Raffelt. Düsseldorf 1994, pp. 134-148; in the Polish translation: *Doswiadczenia katolickiego teologa*, "Znak" 44 (1992), No. 441, pp. 72-82, quoted p. 76.

## Chapter V

# UNIVERSAL SALVATION: QUESTIONS ON SOTERIOLOGICAL UNIVERSALISM<sup>1</sup>

*Let all the roads be blessed,  
The straight, winding and roundabout ones,  
If they lead to You...*

*(Roman Brandstaetter)*

We live in times when many people, tired perhaps of uncertainty and a multitude of divergent views, start leaning towards exclusivism, integrism, or even sectarianism. This concerns not only Christianity but also other religions. A common feature of the attitudes denoted by the terms listed above is, in the area of religion, a tendency to appropriate exclusively truth and salvation, accompanied by a desire to disqualify all other beliefs and views. We are thus facing phenomena which are the negation of the spirit of universalism. The problem is not only the literal interpretation of the Bible or other texts recognized as authoritative and normative.

Much more important in this kind of mentality seems to be sheer suspicion that the others are completely wrong and in

consequence deserve to be damned: all those who do not share my belief, do not belong to my Church or my religious community, are sent to hell; God saves only orthodox members of my community; others are to suffer eternal damnation. Hell is for others; we are the ones chosen by God and faithful to him; he will save us, all others will be damned. The one we condemn is damned by God; we are sure of that! We do not need any dialogue, any common search for truth; the truth is ours; there is no alternative to the truth advocated by us. We are forced to accept it under threat of damnation...

These are only several characteristics of a closed and narrow mentality, inspired by the feeling of exclusivism, self-sufficiency and fear of others. It often happened in the past that hell was filled with a countless number of sinners, infidels, pagans, atheists and all other opponents. This attitude lacks any sympathy and understanding for weakness and sin of a human being. There is no compassion for the lost and damned. There resound verdicts of condemnation for the sinful world.

Christian Churches used to judge each other in this way in the past, guided by the conviction that there was no salvation outside them. The hostile attitude towards certain groups of people (heretics, non-believers, witches, fortune-tellers, Jews, Gypsies) suspected of treating with the devil, was being strengthened in this way. An inclination to regard split and division as normal things gradually increased. The sense of all-human solidarity, being at the



very heart of the Christian understanding of salvation, was disappearing.

As a result the Christian Good News lost its credibility, especially among non-believers and people distrustful of the Church. Today we are slowly learning again the difficult wisdom of universalism. We are learning it in the age of ecumenism, at the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity, in spite of all difficulties.

The followers of the New Age ideology preach a happy future, an all-embracing cosmic reconciliation, an ultimate harmony of the universe. They offer hope, humanitarianism and universalism. All positive energies present in the world are supposed to overcome finally every sort of evil. This means that we do not need any God-given gift of redemption, liberation and salvation. The universe liberates itself in the process of universal reconciliation and transfiguration. Thus we may hope for the end of any antagonism between good and evil. The process of self-liberation should result in removing any separation between God and the world, between heaven and hell. The New Age ideology presents itself as a philosophy able to offer to people much more than Christianity. Is this fact not a real challenge to Christian hope and the vision of salvation?

Not finding answers to difficult questions concerning the future, many Christians turn to other religions, world-views and doctrines. They seek comfort and encouragement in Buddhism, in the doctrine of reincarnation, in theosophy or in the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Still others succumb to the temptation of nihilism, become totally

indifferent or even cynical. On the other hand, the atmosphere dominating in the world marked by secularism favours the growing inclination towards sectarianism, fundamentalism and integrism. These trends do not spare traditional Churches. Who preaches the existence of hell for others will be inclined to fill it with those whom he or she condemns, and to leave them to their own fate.

Today we are slowly learning again the difficult wisdom of universalism. We are learning it in the age of ecumenism, at the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity, in defiance of opposition and all difficulties. The lesson of history is especially important and admonishing in this respect.

## **THE EPOCH OF CONVERTING: COLLECTIVE VERDICTS OF**

### **CONDEMNATION**

Up to the time of the Second Vatican Council the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church maintained that it was the only true Church of Christ in the world and the only space of salvation. Who did not belong to it could not be saved. Infidels and non-believers should be converted. All the separated groups of Christians should return to unity with the Holy See of Rome. Only a Christian who lives in communion with the Pope could belong to the Church of Christ. The illusion of "converting Russia", nurtured for many centuries, was an element of this narrow context of thinking about the Church and salvation<sup>2</sup>.

The Council of Florence issued a verdict of condemnation not only for pagans, non-believers and non-Christians but also for all non-Catholics:

The unity of the Church's body is of such great importance that church sacraments can help in being saved only those people who remain in this unity, and only they can obtain the eternal reward through fasts, charity and other pious deeds and practices of Christian life. No one who remains outside the Catholic Church, in disunity with it, can be saved, no matter how great his [or her] charity might be, and even if he [or she] might have spilt [his or her] blood for Christ<sup>3</sup>.

This statement is preceded by a solemn declaration that the "Holy Roman Church" (*Sacrosancta Romana Ecclesia*) believes, professes and proclaims that no one from outside the Catholic Church may become a participant in eternal life, and that this concerns not only pagans but also "Jews, heretics and schismatics".

One can only be astonished today by this dark courage on the part of people of the Church of those times in pronouncing collective verdicts of damnation. These verdicts did not remain solely in the sphere of theory. They were directly referred to entire human communities existing outside the Roman Catholic Church. They became the reason for unjust treatment of people and many historical tragedies. They justified methods of converting other people inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel.

A transformation towards soteriological universalism was slowly taking place in the awareness of the Catholics. It is not accidental that at the end of the second millennium which brought to Christianity the tragedy of the lasting division, John Paul II called for the thorough examination of conscience. The Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio adveniente* contains the following characteristic passage: "Another painful phenomenon to which the sons [and daughters!] of the Church must return with a spirit of repentance is that of the acquiescence given, specially in certain centuries, to intolerance and even the use of violence in the service of truth."<sup>4</sup>

### *Centuries of Pedagogy of Fear*

The traditional Roman Catholic doctrine on the everlasting damnation of non-believers, members of other religions and denominations was following the biblical warnings of hell. These warnings were transformed into the assertion about the real existence of everlasting torments in hell and applied to concrete groups of people. The part of biblical wisdom which gives hope for salvation was completely ignored. There was no room in the official teaching of the Church for such universal hope. This hope was eliminated from the doctrine and spirituality out of concern for the moral order of believers' lives. It would reappear, but mostly among mystics and people who were able to think independently.

In his monographic study on the history of hell, Georges Minois quotes an opinion expressed by another renowned French historian, Jean Delumeau, who wrote some time ago

that, within Christianity, "The questioning of the notion of the 'vengeful' and punishing God, as well as the defense of tolerance was the work of the 'Church's clochards' [i.e. vagabonds, WH], people from the margin of faith, sincerely concerned with rehabilitating the Supreme Being by restoring to it the quality of infinite goodness"<sup>5</sup>. One of the thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, A. Pezzani, wrote: "If hell does exist, my choice is clear: I want to be there, where there is unhappiness and torment in order to bring comfort, because in this case God is no longer our Father... Theology has committed the crime of offense of humanity on account of the dogma on everlasting hell."<sup>6</sup> Numerous similar charges against theology appeared many times in the course of past centuries.

The teaching about damnation and eternal hell was an integral part of the church pedagogy. The fear of death and hell was considered to be an essential motive for moral behaviour. Christians themselves were becoming such people, as Friedrich Nietzsche remarked sarcastically, whose faces bore no signs of joy because of the gift of redemption: "*Erlöster müssten mir seine Jünger aussehen!*"<sup>7</sup>. Faith in eternal hell and the final division of humanity discouraged people from overcoming the walls of separation and making efforts aimed at the rehabilitation of guilty persons. This can explain a non-Christian inclination of believers to opt for the severe order of penalizing justice, and especially for the death penalty. Since we know for sure that the final division of mankind into the saved and damned ones will once inevitably take place, is there any point in striving to change this inevitability?

Today, theologians have the courage to speak with their own voice about the infinite goodness and liberating mercy of God. This is the voice of hope for universal salvation. Times do change and so does religious mentality.

## **TOWARDS A UNIVERSALISM OF SALVATION**

The Second Vatican Council has initiated a new way of thinking about the salvation of people of other denominations, religions and worldviews. It states unambiguously that non-Catholics "in some real way (...) are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them also He gives His gifts and graces, and is thereby operative among them with His sanctifying power. Some indeed He has strengthened to the extent of the shedding of their blood".<sup>8</sup> Such words were dictated by the ecumenical sensitivity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Let us compare this statement with the passage of the Council of Florence mentioned above and related to shedding blood, to perceive the gap between the two ways of thinking. The Second Vatican Council goes even further. It refers in a completely different spirit to Jews, Moslems and those who "in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and every other gift (cf. Acts 17: 25-28), and who as Savior wills that all men be saved (cf. 1 Tim 2:4)."<sup>9</sup> It is in this context that the characteristic phrase appears:

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their

deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.

God is truly ecumenical in His mercy and generosity, and does not refuse assistance to anybody:

Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life thanks to His grace. Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She regards such qualities as given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.<sup>10</sup>

One has to look back towards the past centuries in order to become aware of the change of paradigm in soteriological thinking marked by universalism. The comparison of the teaching of the Council of Florence with that of the Vatican II sufficiently illustrates the depth of this historic process of transformation. However, the Second Vatican Council cannot be treated as a final say. It has opened the road to even more courageous thinking.

For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. (...). The Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.<sup>11</sup>

These words concern also non-believers. All necessary conclusions have not yet been drawn from such statements for the thinking and practical behaviour of believers.

Some openness to soteriological universalism can be perceived in the thought of Pope John Paul II. In his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* he cautiously developed his eschatological reflections, posing to himself difficult questions and seeking answers. The feeling of truly inscrutable mystery of the ultimate destiny of humanity accompanied him unceasingly. He did not close the road to further research. He also admitted that the problem of hell has always disturbed the most keen minds in the history of Christianity and recalls that the ancient councils rejected the theory of the final *apokatástasis* which indirectly abolished hell. It is in this context that an important statement of the Pope appears: "But the problem remains. Can God, who has loved man so much, permit the man who rejects Him to be condemned to eternal torment?"<sup>12</sup>

The very admission that "the problem remains" seems to be a clear encouragement to theologians for further studies aiming at the deeper interpretation of the Scripture and Christian tradition. In the Pope's opinion hell is above all a moral requirement of the divine justice in the face of horrendous crimes of humankind:

Is not God who is Love also ultimate Justice?  
Can He tolerate these terrible crimes, can they go  
unpunished? Isn't final punishment in some way  
necessary in order to reestablish moral  
equilibrium in the complex history of humanity?



Is not hell in a certain sense the ultimate safeguard of man's moral conscience?<sup>13</sup>

At the end of his eschatological reflections John Paul II comes back to the fundamental idea that "God is Love" (1 Jn 4: 8.16): "Before all else, it is Love that judges. God, who is Love, judges through love".<sup>14</sup>

In fact all those who favour the hope of universal salvation are by no means the advocates of forced amnesty. Everyone will have to suffer the consequences of his or her wicked deeds. Salvation is neither necessity nor compulsion; it is God's gift which has to be accepted voluntarily, with inner conviction, great reverence and gratitude. Hope dares to trust that God will not remain completely helpless in the face of human freedom, that he will finally be able to draw it towards himself, purify and transform it thanks to his patient and boundless love. This can be achieved through suffering and torment which in human language could be termed endless, aeonic, i.e. lasting for centuries, because of its quality and intensity, as is suggested by the Greek word *aiōnios*.

A great thinker of the Early Church, Origen (died in 254 or 255), one of the propagators of hope for universal salvation, was well aware of this. He pointed many times to the ambiguity of the term *aiōnios*, used in the Bible to denote either eternity or only long duration. He regarded the punishment, termed in the Bible as 'eternal', as the sign of God's mercy, as a cure designed to bring about improvement and conversion. God will finally manage to soften and overcome any resistance and revolt of his

creatures without violating their free will. There is room for such a hope in Origen's theology.<sup>15</sup> In the light of contemporary research the condemnation of Origen's views seems highly questionable. It bears signs of sinful dogmatization present in the turbulent historical context under emperor Justinian. Origen's rehabilitation appears to be a moral obligation owed to the man who has been treated so unfairly by history. Galileo has already been rehabilitated. Let us hope that this will once be the case also with Origen.<sup>16</sup>

### *Biblical Universalism of Promise*

Christians are not the only sheepfold of Christ. He also has, as he has clearly stressed, "other sheep that are not of this sheepfold". Further words in the same passage astonish us with the universalism of vision: "I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." (Jn 10:16) One cannot overlook the eschatological universalism of promise and fulfillment expressed in these words. It would be naive to connect them with the earthly history of the Church. They reach into the ultimate future of the world reconciled with God. Christ tells about some of them: "my sheep", "they listen to my voice", "I know them and they follow me", "I give them eternal life". But he has to bring "other sheep", the ones that are not of this sheepfold. There is a kind of historical necessity in this statement. Only then will the unification of one great "sheep-pen", run by one Shepherd, take place.

The vivid language of these expressions hides deep eschatological contents. The Good Shepherd, who lays

down his life for "the sheep" (Jn 10:15) - all the sheep, not only those called by him "my sheep" - is not indifferent to the fate of "other sheep". The laying down of life confirms his rights to "the other sheep". An astonishing statement about ultimate victory over the power of darkness and a promise to "draw all to himself" by the power of beauty and goodness (his whole life was the sign of it!), does not appear accidentally on Christ's lips. The tone of hope and optimism is linked in these words with the motive of judgment and conquering the power of evil: "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself" (Jn 12:31-32).

This is an unusual announcement of the ultimate victory of the good. We face again the universalism of promise. Jesus did not say that he will *want to* "draw all" or that he will *try to* do so, but that he *will* draw them indeed. Is there any reason for disbelieving his words?

The ultimate consequence of these words can be perceived in the teaching of the Apostle Paul who says that when the end comes Christ will "hand over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power" (1 Co 15:24). In this passage Christ's victory was presented very vividly in a way characteristic of the mentality of those times: "He will put all his enemies under his feet". There is also an announcement of the ultimate universalism of salvation: "When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put

everything under him, so that God may be all in all' (1 Co 15:28).

The most daring propagators of the hope of salvation for all used to refer to these unusual words over centuries. We have not yet learnt to collect the voices of hope. Those who are prone to preach damnation to non-believers or believers in other religions and denominations should reflect over the depth and boldness of the quoted statements. And their number is even greater that it might have seemed at first glance.

Soteriological universalism included in many biblical statements is often lost in translation. Opponents of the universalist interpretation quote among others the words of Jesus which in many translations sound as follows: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved (*sothésetai*); but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16: 16; RSV, JB). The fate of non-believers would thus be determined in advance: all those who have not believed and have not been baptized cannot be saved, and damnation is their final destiny. However, in the Greek original the latter part of the sentence seems not to speak categorically about damnation but about future judgment: "Who does not believe will undergo judgment" (*katakriθήsetai*). The main idea is the need of judgment and verdict in such an important matter in which the fate of a concrete human is being decided. The one who has not believed will have to be subject to judgment and a verdict indicting him or her for an intensive process of repentance and purification.

This will be an unimaginable transition through suffering and maturation to the acceptance of God.

Many surprises in the more thorough examination of the Bible's message wait future generations of Christians. Revelation as a whole can hardly be reconciled with the doctrine on hell understood as an everlasting reality opposed to the Kingdom of God. Hell is no work of His. Humans create hell, for themselves and others. God does not create it for anyone. To have thought so would insult one's Creator, belittle Him and make him look like a punishing and revengeful man. The faith in eternal hell is in fact the faith in the power of evil, a sign of disbelief in Christ's power to save. How can He be praised at the same time for his victory over death, hell and the devil? This has been one of the great contradictions in Christian theology.

### *Is God Helpless in the Face of the Gift of Freedom?*

In defending human freedom traditional theology assumes that we are able to reject God ultimately and irreversibly. This assumption is one of the foundations of the doctrine on the actual possibility of eternal damnation and the real existence of hell. But the question arises whether human freedom can indeed persist in an everlasting state of separation from God. Can a decision to reject Him be truly ultimate and irrevocable? It is God himself who knows and defines the mystery of created freedom. He is its ultimate horizon and goal. It is in Him that it can attain to the ultimate purpose for which it has been created. Creating humans and calling them to participation in his eternal life, God wanted to have free and creative beings rather than

slaves. The human being able to shape his or her own fate and history is a person longed for and beloved, given the admirable ability to take free decisions. The gift of freedom is a gift for eternity in order to achieve the ultimate fulfillment of the whole of existence. One must not forget this positive and ultimate purpose of freedom, this dramatic but wonderful gift.

There is something astonishing in the mystery of freedom: the ability to reject God comes from His own gift! Many things seem to indicate that the Creator is not afraid of granting this dramatic and dangerous gift to His rational creatures. He behaves as if He were sure that He will be able to save this gift and rescue it from the most dangerous and harmful situation of being lost. Freedom may be ill and blind but it never ceases to be God's gift. It carries in itself a promise and hope for achieving its ultimate goal because it does not cease to be, even in case of wrong and sinful decisions, an ability given by God himself. There is always hope that every freedom will finally prove to be what God wanted, namely, freedom to the right decision. He alone can save the created freedom in a truly divine manner without destroying His own gift.

A deeper understanding of the gift of freedom is able to open new perspectives of universalist eschatological thinking. One can then perceive that God is always present in the very depths of His creatures. A created being is unable to free itself entirely from this immanent presence of the Creator. It may ignore or reject it, but it cannot change the very fact of being created and its dependence in

existence on the all-embracing reality of God. This fact already implies a mysterious promise stemming from the indestructible bond between God and each creature. No fault, nor the state of getting completely lost, can destroy this ontological bond. The human being is and will always remain an *icon of God*, a being who with the help of the Creator is able to overcome all resistance and make the ultimate and irreversible choice of the Infinite Goodness.

Another understanding of freedom makes God helpless, unable to overcome its resistance and denies Him any possibility of saving those who got lost. Is not the sovereign freedom of God limited in this way? Is not God's gift of freedom turned then into a logical idol before which He himself has to capitulate? It seems that this logic does not allow us to perceive the truly divine manner of reaching the deepest secrets of freedom and transforming it from within without violence.

Whoever denies the freedom of coming out from the existential state of Gehenna believes in fact in the ultimate victory of evil over at least a part of God's creatures. Practically he consents to a failure of the divine plan of creation and salvation. This approach means to some extent the acceptance of a dark doom, more horrifying than the doom of Greek mythology. So far Christian awareness has failed to deal successfully with this problem. The obvious failure of the plan of salvation cannot be called the triumph of divine justice or just retribution for the sins of one's life. An ordinary earthly feeling of justice shudders to think of everlasting punishment for faults of sinful creatures

committed in time because of weakness, blindness, anger or simple stupidity.

Being convinced of this incommensurability of time and eternity many people today choose therefore the doctrine of reincarnation rather than on the eternity of hell. In the light of the theory of reincarnation the evil deeds committed in time are subject to expiation also in time, and not in eternity. Although this theory is not easily reconciled with Christian teaching (such attempts have already been made), it is a useful warning against constructing an ontology of eternal torments. It reminds us that our ultimate fate is determined only through undergoing the incomparably greater experience of the spiritual world than is possible during a short earthly life, limited by the date of birth and death, marked by guilt, weakness and ignorance.

Eternal hell and everlasting damnation mean in fact a terrifying lack of proportion between the endless punishment and the evil done during the quick passage of a short life. I dare to think that this would also be a sort of hell and eternal distress to God himself who is Love. What is terrifying is not what God wills to do to me; it is what I can do to myself. Hell does not mean that we get into the hands of a just, angry and punishing God. Hell is what I have done or what I may do with my own life and the lives of others.

The doctrine on eternal hell is a fruit of the moral awareness inspired by the idea of divine justice and shaped by the conviction that a decision of human freedom is irreversible. This awareness divides the ultimate destiny of



creation in a dualistic manner into two opposing kingdoms: the kingdom of the good and bad, of the just and sinful, of the saved and damned. The advocates of the doctrine on eternal hell stress that only wrong decisions of human freedom and bad life lead to the everlasting perdition. They do not admit the freedom which would lead out of hell. According to them, entrance to hell is voluntary but there is no exit from there, because death, as they claim, decides about our eternal future.

Every human being faces the real possibility of getting existentially lost. Biblical texts include warnings against this terrible state. Christ used to speak about the "eternal" or aeonic character of human suffering in Gehenna. However, one should not rashly identify the adjective "eternal" (*aiōnios*) with the eternity of God himself. Hell is the negation of eternity. There exists no diabolic and evil eternity. The only true eternity belongs to the Kingdom of God. There is no negative eternity, parallel to the eternity of life with God. The notion of eternal hell is characterized by an inherent ontological contradiction. Gehenna or hell may exist in the form of a subjective existence. It is an inner existential state of infernal experience. Whoever finds himself or herself in intense torment has the impression that it lasts and will persist endlessly.

God himself is the greatest hope for all His creatures. He penetrates even the infernal depths of the human heart. He can lead out of the depths of Gehenna. He does not destroy the freedom of rational beings, but respects human choice. However, he has his truly divine way of persuading the

freedom of the beings most in revolt. He attracts and transforms them from the inside through His goodness, beauty and boundless love manifested above all in the voluntary *kenosis* of Christ. The existential inner state of being lost is constantly visited by Christ. He does not leave anyone on his or her own. To persist in sinful resistance to God is the worst illness of freedom. I believe that Christ is forever the Good Shepherd of all those who got lost. Not to leave, to return again and again, to persuade and attract - this is the most divine feature of God.

## **TIME FOR REVALORISATION OF THE UNIVERSALISM OF HOPE**

Some of the outstanding theologians and hierarchs of the Christian Churches speak today a language totally different from the one heard during the past centuries. In his conversations with Patriarch Bartholomew I, a French Orthodox theologian, Olivier Clément, summarised his views in the following words:

Current intellectual revolutions have been in progress which discover and develop the most outstanding intuitions, such as those of Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor and Isaac the Syrian; they oppose the sadism of the expiatory conceptions of salvation by paschal joy, hell conceived as an eternal concentration camp -- by prayer for universal salvation.<sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere, Clément mentions his meeting with the great contemporary mystic, Father Sophronius from Mount Athos, whom he asked what would happen if a person does not agree to open his or her heart and accept the love of God. The old monk answered: "You may be certain that as long as someone is in hell, Christ will remain there with him".<sup>18</sup>

These words appear to echo those from the Book of Revelation: "Here I stand knocking at the door"(Rev 3:20). God stands at the door of the human heart even if the latter is closed and rebellious. He is ready to wait, if the need arises, for a whole "eternity", until resistance is finally overcome. This is the ultimate consequence of the paschal belief in the overwhelming and all-embracing power of the risen Christ.

The time is coming for the revalorisation of the universalism of hope. One should not rest satisfied with concern for one's own salvation since we are all responsible for each other. Universal hope is the duty of every Christian. Traditional eschatology perceives only two ultimate possibilities: heaven or hell. It does not take into account the great synthesis of the history of the world in God. It also excludes all thoughts about the universal reconciliation of the lost creatures with God. It does not hear the voice of hope resounding in numerous biblical statements, nor does it heed the patient cry of hope which has not vanished from Christianity throughout the ages. It prefers to remain an eschatology of the ultimate dualism of the creature torn apart, the dualism of good and evil, of

light and darkness, of love and hatred, and of heaven and hell. Is this the ultimate logic of being? After all, there also exists the logic of goodness and love, discernible in such evangelical parables as that about the shepherd and the lost sheep, or about the prodigal son, or rather two sinful brothers (cf. Lk 15).

By preserving his or her freedom and the possibility of negating God, the human being is never left alone. Not to leave the other alone is, as I said earlier, a truly divine attribute. God helps even the most sinful creature attain the ultimate purposefulness of freedom, and not remain in a state of split, contrary to its inner nature. Beyond death, the rebellion of a rational and free being may last for an indefinitely long period of time. The term "long" signifies the intensity of experience rather than the quantitative extent of duration.

Thanks to this hope, I can trust that freedom is incapable of rejecting God irrevocably, definitively, and once for all. Such a possibility may appear rather as a theoretical hypothesis as long as one does not reflect deeply on the very nature of freedom, which is created towards God and for God. Whoever speaks about the hope of universal salvation cannot remain indifferent towards such categories as beauty or goodness, which attract and persuade human freedom. "And I shall draw all men to myself (*πάντας ἐλκύσω πρὸς ἐμαυτόν*), when I am lifted up from the earth" (Jn 12:32) — Jesus said shortly before His death. Special emphasis is due to the words of universal significance: "draw all people". Let us repeat once again:

this is an astonishing and amazing promise! Attracting by means of beauty and goodness constitutes God's way of persuasion, which does not destroy the freedom of rational creatures.

Hope for the universality of salvation should not lead to ethical cynicism, nor destroy responsibility for one's own life and the life of others. Nonetheless, it demands a different pedagogy than that of fear. The great wisdom of life is not shaped in an atmosphere of fear of condemnation, but in a calm and trusting view of the whole course of life in which, despite various falls, the experience of eternity continues to mature. What matters most is the fundamental option of one's life for God, illumined from the inside, permeated with a feeling of inner meaning, stronger than the fear of sin, futility, void and hopelessness.

### *Restorative Justice*

But the question is in what way can the distorted human relationships be healed *already now*, during our earthly life. In this context one can point to an interesting evolution in contemporary philosophy and theology of justice. We slowly come closer to an ancient understanding of a therapeutic, re-educational, pedagogical and restorative punishment prevailing in the Early Church's eschatology during the first four centuries. I would like to draw attention to the concept of the so-called *restorative justice* recently developed and put into practice by a Catholic priest from New Zealand, Jim Consedine<sup>19</sup>. As an experienced prison chaplain, he has always tried to restore the destroyed relationships between perpetrators and their

victims. Restorative justice aims at something more than a pure retribution for evil deeds. Retributive and punitive justice is oriented towards the past. It exhausts itself in the very act of retribution and punishment. The restorative justice is much more positive in this respect and oriented towards the future. Its very name indicates a certain likeness with the ancient theory of *apokatástasis*, i.e. final restoration of all things.

In this approach all people affected by a transgression are involved in the process of overcoming its social consequences. How to rebuild then the damaged or destroyed inter-human relationships? Restorative justice embraces not only the victims and perpetrators, but also their families and local community in which a determined crime has been committed. It urges that all motives, attitudes, emotions and means should be taken into account. It also indicates the need for compassion, readiness to forgive and to be reconciled. Some competent people would be summoned here to help in this difficult process of healing the damaged relationships. The basic motivation in all this is care for the good of a human being lost in his or her humanity.

As can be seen, restorative justice does not concentrate on the very punishment understood as retribution or motivated by purely utilitarian goals of preventing future crimes. It goes further and intends to heal and to restore what has been lost, destroyed or damaged. The very category of relation and relationship plays a central role here. But restoration and healing cannot be achieved unless an inner

change has taken place in people affected in whatever way by the transgression.

One should ponder the far-reaching consequences of such an understanding of restorative justice. It is deeply linked with the biblical idea of justice and mercy. This conception urges a profound revision of a re-socializing model of penal law that often does not respect the dignity of human person and of human rights, and in addition remains ineffective. The labour of re-socialization should therefore be carried out in a different way. The method inspired by restorative justice brings more positive effects. It does not infringe upon the dignity of human person. The respect for human rights constitutes in it an indispensable condition of the whole pedagogy of restoration of damaged human relationships.

The highest norms of human legislation and international pacts consider social rehabilitation and improvement of transgressors as an essential purpose of punishment. In this context the idea of everlasting hell would be a total denial of the educational and therapeutic meaning of punishment. Should humans then be better than their Creator? Eternal punishment of the lost creatures would be the greatest failure of His role as Creator, Saviour and Pedagogue of humanity. The therapeutic function of punishment would be doomed to failure as well, which seems to be totally impossible. God is, however, unfailingly, the most effective and creative Pedagogue whose final victory over every evil is secured by his convincing love, goodness and beauty.

*Universalism of God's Overwhelming Grace*

Those who speak about hell as a provisional and transitory state of perdition do not, by any means, ignore the gravity of evil. They simply indicate that evil is not universal and everlasting, that it has to be exhausted, and cannot gain the ultimate victory. Victory belongs to God who does everything possible to free His creatures from the bondage of their own guilt. Such hope for an ultimate reconciliation with the Creator is not only the voice of the "vagabonds of the Church" nor of figures from the margin of the faith.

The words of a Jesuit, Karl Rahner (+1984), one of the most outstanding Catholic theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are close and dear to me:

Therefore we know (!) in our Christian faith and unwavering hope that despite all the dramatic and open character of freedom of individual people, the history of salvation as a whole will lead humanity to a favourable end under the action of God's overwhelming grace.<sup>20</sup>

I can see no reason why we should be less courageous than many wise teachers of such a hope in the history of Christianity whom we call saints, the Fathers of the Church, great mystics and theologians. Certainly, no words about God's victorious and overwhelming grace will ever instill in a concrete human person presumptuous confidence in his or her own salvation. They introduce an atmosphere of trust and hope. The most courageous expectations in the Christian tradition are expressed in such a hope. This is also a hope for all non-believers. Such hope



becomes a strong ally of inter-human solidarity and Christian ecumenism.

The hope for the salvation of all teaches us a lesson of universalism. The deep experience of inter-human unity allows the believers to understand the meaning of life more deeply than can the mere logic of reasoning. The mystery of the ultimate destiny of the world and of humankind is one. We have to know how to discover it in ourselves and in others.

## NOTES

1 A modified version of the paper initially published in a poor unauthorized translation in: "Dialogue and Universalism" 8 (1998) No. 1-2, pp. 61-74.

2 See W. Hryniewicz, *Czy Rosja należy nawracac? Ekumeniczna lekcja przeszłości a dialog z prawosławiem [Should Russia Be Converted? The Ecumenical Lesson of the Past and a Dialogue with the Orthodox Church.]*, "Zeszyty Naukowe KUL" 37 (1994) No. 1-2, pp. 3-20; id., *Iluzja nawrócenia Rosji [The Illusion of Converting Russia]*, "Studia Rosjoznawcze. Nauki Humanistyczno-Spoleczne" (Torun) 310 (1996), pp. 19-35 (Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici); id., *Na drogach pojednania (On the Ways of Reconciliation)*, Warsaw 1998, pp. 143-156.

3 See the decree of the Council of Florence for the Jacobites (1438-1445). DS 1351.

4 Apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio adveniente* (Nov. 10, 1994), No. 35.

5 G. Minois, *Historia piekła* [Histoire de l'enfer], Polish transl. by A. Kedzierzawska, B. Szczepanska, Warszawa 1996, p. 305.

6 Ibid., p. 341.

7 F. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra* (II *Von den Priestern*; III, *Vom Gesicht und Räthsel*; *Vom Geist der Schere*), in: *idem, Werke*. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, hg. von Giorgio Colli /Mazzino Montinari, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967ff.

8 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, no. 15. In: *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbot, S. J., General Editor, Very Rev. Msgr. Joseph Gallagher, Translation Editor. London-Dublin-Melbourne 1967, pp. 220-221

9 Ibid., No. 16.

10 Ibid.

11 Pastoral Constitution on the Church *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 22. Ibidem, pp. 221-222.

12 John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. by Vittorio Messori, transl. from the Italian by Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee, New York 1994, p. 185.

13 Ibid., p. 186.

14 Ibid., p. 187.

15 See H. Crouzel, *Origène*, Paris 1985, chapter XIII.

16 For more information see W. Hryniewicz, *Dramat nadziei zbawienia* [*The Drama of the Hope of Salvation*], Warsaw 1996, pp. 171 -173; id., *Nadzieja uczy inaczej* [*Hope Teaches Otherwise*], Warsaw 2003, pp. 124-141, esp. 137-141; id. *Bog wszystkim we wszystkich. Ku eschatologii bez dualizmu* (*God All in All: Towards an Eschatology without Dualism*), Warszawa 2005, pp. 145-149.

17 O. Clément, "*La vérité vous rendra libre*". *Entretiens avec le Patriarche oecuménique Bartholomée I<sup>er</sup>* [*The Truth Will Set You Free. Conversations with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I*], Paris-Bruges 1996, p. 308.

18 O. Clément, "Taizé, un sens à la vie," *Service Orthodoxe de Presse* (SOP), July-August 1997, no. 220, p. 37.

19 J. Consedine, *Restorative Justice: Healing the Effects of Crime*, Lyttelton, N.Z., Ploughshares Publications, c. 1995; see also an interview with Jim Consedine in: W. Osiatynski, *O zbrodniach i karach* (*On Crimes and Punishments*), Poznan 2003.

20 K. Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens. Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*. Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1976, p. 418.

## Chapter VI

# **CHRISTIAN UNIVERSALISM: ITS ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS<sup>1</sup>**

There are different kinds of universalism. It is a complex phenomenon. Some forms of universalism tend to converge, and some seem to compete with each other. We have become accustomed in the past to the fact of competition and rivalry among different religious world views. Religious communities and various denominations were claiming a universal relevance of their own religion or confession. The age of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue has brought some significant changes in this situation. Monotheistic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam still claim a universal value of their doctrine and moral principles. Are we facing again a conflict of different interpretations of religious universalism?

In her book *A History of God*, Karen Armstrong outlined ten years ago a rather dark scenario of the future of religion<sup>2</sup>. She shows an increase of neo-fundamentalist tendencies within the Christian world which manifest themselves in the call for a strict observance of moral precepts, and in an intransigent attitude towards all "adversaries of God". The Jews and the Muslims are sent by some Christian writers to hell. In oriental religions some were inclined to see only inspirations coming from the devil. Similar attitudes could be observed at present also in Judaism and Islam.

There are in today's world various streams of militant and exclusive religiosity which ascribes only to itself the right to possess the unadulterated truth. This type of religiosity was well known in the past. It constitutes an unceasing temptation in all religious communities. In this way it is easy to pervert the basic aim and truth of every religion. Such attitudes as mutual benevolence, compassion and mercy are doomed to disappear.

### **TOWARDS A MORE HUMANISTIC RELIGIOUS CARE FOR PEOPLE**

I am not inclined to view the general situation of religion in the contemporary world in such dark colours. Some important changes are taking place in human minds and hearts giving witness to the vitality and ability of religion to renew itself in order better to serve people in need. The desire for truthfulness, justice, peace and fraternity among people has not disappeared in human consciousness. A modern secularism has not destroyed the sense of solidarity of human destiny and the willingness to help those who suffer poverty and oppression. Religion requires social commitment and following the voice of conscience. The new sensitivity in understanding the role of religion becomes more and

more humanist. It does not close its eyes to the concrete situation of those who are pushed to the margin of human society. It appeals for solidarity and justice in human relationships. It warns against the danger of dehumanization and reducing human beings to the level of objects.

The future of religion requires more than a readiness to preach the truth about God. The truth and wisdom of religion is verified by its relationship to people and to the whole nature which also has its spiritual and transcendent dimension. This is a task facing all religions today. In this respect they are doomed to mutual encounter, collaboration and dialogue which deliver them from the spirit of competition and confrontation. We slowly liberate ourselves from the bonds of an exclusivist theology which does not recognize the positive values of other religions. One of the hopeful and promising signs for the future is the growing interfaith dialogue and collaboration of religions.

I am deeply convinced that the religiosity and spirituality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will have to prove convincingly their humane orientation, friendliness to people and truly humanistic concern. The very fact of being a human commands respect for one's identity and that of others. It excludes any kind of cruelty hidden behind a mask of religious ideology. Inhuman behaviour "in the name of God" is in fact a denial of any true religion. True humanism strengthens the sense of solidarity with all people which should be also the central concern of every religion. Humanistic care of religion for concrete people in need is an effective criterion of its authenticity, even more in the world of growing inclinations toward violence and inflicting suffering on other people.

In the following reflections I will concentrate on the ethical and spiritual implications of Christian universalism in today's world, marked so painfully by the reality of human suffering and ecological deterioration. Human and ecological suffering now menaces our world. Given its universality and its urgency, this issue has the highest priority. It becomes a contemporary hermeneutical *kairós* with new opportunities and responsibilities.

The global suffering with its various faces calls for our common ethical responsibility. Is it a genuinely humane world that we are producing? How can we deepen a common concern for the suffering of others? Is it possible to transform the present order of the world into one that is more truly humane? These seem to be our most urgent questions.

## **THE SUFFERING OF THE WORLD AS AN ETHICAL CHALLENGE**

The common human experience of suffering and the dangers that it brings forth are well known today. The world as it is now reveals dehumanizing living conditions, unjust distribution of wealth, malnutrition and ecological destruction. These are universal cross-cultural realities demanding a human and religious response.

It is not my task to analyze in detail the various faces of suffering. Many others have done so more or less extensively<sup>3</sup>. The world of suffering surrounds us. It is the human

suffering due to poverty, starvation, injustice, victimization and violence. It is also the suffering of the Earth due to abuse and pitiless exploitation.

This situation judges all of us – Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims. Religion must confront the basic needs and suffering of people. The contemporary spectrum of eco-human suffering affects the way people are human and religious. It calls for critical verification of how we believe and act as human and religious persons. One is less a human being and less a religious person if one remains insensitive and does not react to the sufferings of others. One's faith loses its credibility; one must take the needs of the world to heart and respond to them.

Peace has become a powerful symbol for our times. But we know well that there can be no peace in a world ravaged by violence without a profound *metánoia* or conversion of our thinking and being. How is such a conversion to be brought about? Religious texts are full of metaphors and narratives of peace, which is a symbol that all religions can share and make real.

The horrible reality of suffering endangers the future of humankind and life on the planet. This world of ours calls for coordinated action based on commonly recognized values. Moral commitment has become simply unavoidable. It should be not only individual but also communal. There is a vast common ground on which we can make common ethical decisions. The situation of the world demands common responsibility on the part of all the religions. Christianity with its "cosmological faith" has, as we shall see, specific insights to offer in this respect.

An encouraging fact in our present situation is the growing awareness of many people that religious identity must be closely related to the common human experience of suffering. This applies also to unbelievers. The great and noble aspiration of our time - whether we believe in God or not, whether we are Christians or Muslims - is to build a more human world for all its inhabitants.

No wonder there resound today more and more voices calling for a global ethic that would guide our common response to human and ecological crises. If humankind is to survive on this earth, we need one basic ethic. Contradictory and antagonistic ethics can lead only to confrontation and mutual destruction. We do not need a global ethics in great detail; what is needed is a global consensus on the fundamental attitude towards good and evil. Common action is impossible without general consensus on certain shared values, norms, moral convictions, guidelines for action, ethical priorities and the ethical means to achieve the intended goals.

But consensus can come only through dialogue. It is not enough to leave each other alone, not to disturb others, to live and let live. A global ethics requires more concerted actions as needs arise. Through dialogue one can always remain open to new input from a diverse multicultural and multi-religious world, ready to change as new problems appear<sup>4</sup>. An ethical dialogue among nations and cultures could lead to an ethical consensus on action.

To carry out our communal responsibility, we need global dialogue leading towards a global ethics. This may sound idealistic or utopian, yet it is necessary. As individuals and as communities, human beings have a global responsibility to promote the life of a threatened humanity and our planet. It is evident that such a communal responsibility cannot be carried out separately. The urgent need for a global ethos is becoming more and more apparent today. Perhaps, as some suggest, the United Nations should formulate a "Universal Declaration of Global Ethics", similar to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The ethical contents of such a declaration would have to be agreed upon in the dialogue of the nations. It would serve as a minimal ethical standard to live up to. One of its basic principles might be, for instance, the need to resolve conflicts nonviolently, to overcome human suffering, or ecological responsibility. Proposals of this kind are no doubt inspiring and useful, but they have to take into account the dangers that such international programs may be strongly affected by the interests of the dominant nations.

A global ethic cannot be achieved without the joint contribution of religious communities and their interfaith dialogue. It is not my purpose here to enter into discussion about the nature and universality of ethical obligation. Some theologians believe that morality requires a religious rooting. In their view reference is necessary to an Absolute, the Ultimate Reality accepted in a rational trust, regardless of how it is named and interpreted in different religions<sup>5</sup>. Without this reference one cannot ground the categorical quality of the ethical demand which cannot be explained merely through rational arguments. According to other theologians this point of view is philosophically debatable. Religious convictions give greater clarity to our ethical commitments. I would be inclined to say that all people have an implanted ethical imperative.

It is indeed difficult to prove that religious faith is necessary for ethics. But one can show that religion is valuable and helpful for ethical ideals. It gives both vision and energy<sup>6</sup>. First, it offers hope that this world of sin, injustice and suffering can be transformed into a better and more compassionate one. Second, religion in its various forms instills the spiritual energy needed to realize this vision of hope and to give ourselves to it. All genuine religion is able to bring about enlightenment, internal change, a true *metánoia*. People spiritually transformed live and act in a different way. Religion can thus lend its ethical support to all projects of overcoming negative sides of our life. We all need new forms of ethical cooperation which, in turn, requires dialogue and consensus on basic values.

### *Metanoia as Conversion to the Suffering Humans and Other Creatures*

This formulation expresses not only an intellectual conversion which allows one to pursue the truth in all honesty, but above all a moral conversion by which one endeavours to live up to this truth. Inter-religious dialogue requires such a *metánoia*. Understood literally this word means the change of thinking, or even more precisely: "thinking after" (*meta-noeō*) one has before experienced something good or bad. The newly won experience calls for a new way of thinking, urging one to pursue and live the truth. This conversion should be understood not only as a religious experience of conversion, but

also in worldly terms as a dedication to the eco-human well-being, i.e. to the well-being of suffering people and other creatures of our Earth. Today one can see in this sort of personal *metánoia* a pre-religious priority relevant to both believers and non-believers.

A responsible dialogue is then expected to be easier and much more fruitful. There are problems which can be resolved only in the dialogue itself. One will know the path to follow by walking it. Of course, we may discuss theoretically many issues, but our real commitment to eco-human justice cannot be known until we experience it in concrete situations. The same applies to our responsibility, which can be determined only within the particular situations of our involvement.

The dialogue about eco-human well-being demands attentive, unreserved listening to each other. The conversion (*metánoia*) to the suffering will be inspired in a special way by the witness of the victims themselves. They are an essential part of the dialogue. The ethically changed or converted people have the ability to know the good, a sort of ethical intuition or feeling to make correct decisions in concrete situations. They are able to learn from other participants in dialogue and remain open for being corrected when they are not right in the assessment of the situation. Dialogue has its own pedagogy which cannot be learned only theoretically.

All religions have a liberative teaching in their holy scriptures, rituals and traditions which enables them to respond to the ethical demands of the suffering world. The implications of that teaching may not be fully known or lie hidden in the form of modest seeds. Here again, a real *metánoia* to the eco-human needs of those who suffer may become for religions an opportunity and an exceptional occasion to rediscover their liberative power. A responsible dialogue between different religious communities can help in this way to discover not only what the situation demands but also what they have to offer.

Christianity is no exception to this liberation praxis. It also has to reinterpret its teaching with a sharpened consciousness of the situation of the world. This task requires listening to, and learning from, others. Global responsibility is the common ground on which all religions can meet and cooperate in harmony and peace. We belong not only to our particular ethical communities, but also to the global ethical community. I do not say that such global community of ethical dialogue is already present or particularly active in the world. It is rather in the process of becoming more and more real. Religious ethical decisions should be formed not only in our own community, but also together with other communities.

This is not an easy task but necessary for our survival. Belonging to our own religion and culture, preserving our religious convictions we can genuinely participate in the global community of those who work for removing human and ecological suffering. All our truth claims might then recover their proper proportions. The responsible dialogue with claims of other people leads to a necessary *ridimensionamento*, i.e. to restoring the true dimensions to our own convictions in pursuing and living the truth. In saying this I am no relativist.



Is an ethical global responsibility only a dream? If so it is a necessary one to awaken our common commitment. The more people dream such dreams, the more our human responsibility grows and becomes truly effective. Not without reason are different religious communities throughout the world developing their own responses to human sufferings and planetary devastation. This is their eco-human theology of liberation. If it is done self-critically, then it involves confessing how some traditions may have served as tools of dominance or exploitation. Therefore a certain hermeneutics of suspicion towards one's own religious community is necessary for the proper evaluation of the present situation. At the same time it turns out to be, paradoxically, a hermeneutics of rediscovering the liberative values of one's own religious tradition. Such a process of retrieval is an essential part of the *metánoia*, the beneficial conversion to the liberation of suffering humans and other creatures.

One can only hope that this kind of responsible dialogue with other traditions will bear good fruit in the future. Pleading for this kind of a global dialogue P. Knitter speaks confidently about "an ethical-dialogical community of communities"<sup>7</sup>. It depends on our good will, firmness and decisiveness whether such projects will have a chance to be successfully carried out.

### **SALVATION (*SOTERÍA*) MEANS LIBERATION**

Being religious should in fact mean being concerned about this world which offers all humans a place to live. Today we are able to better understand our connectedness and profound communion not only within humanity, but throughout the living and not-living creatures of the universe. The findings of science show the entire universe as an interrelated and organic reality<sup>8</sup>. What we are depends on others, through relationality, connectedness and interrelatedness. Such a contemporary picture of our world can provide a deeper insight into the relation between the Transcendent and the finite as well<sup>9</sup>. The new awareness of the universe is a sort of universal cosmological revelation, a type of revelatory experience. The universe and the Earth itself, menaced by ecological devastation, have become for us a larger sacred community.

In this context religions can understand themselves and other religions in new ways. They have a special role in responding to the ethical and ecological demands of our situation. Speaking in Christian terms, what we need at present is a truly sacramental awareness of the Earth as the Sacred (*sacrum*). Orthodox theologians like Alexander Schmemmann and Dumitru Staniloae wrote many years ago about the world as sacrament in the light of Eastern tradition<sup>10</sup>. Nature, its plants and animals have a dignity and value of their own as members, with us, of a larger community of creatures.

The same insight can be expressed both in theistic terms or in secular language. Some sense of the sacred or mysterious value of the Earth is a necessary condition for a comprehensive and effective ecological programme. A Christian theologian would see the nature of creatures as being comprehensible only in their relationship to the Creator. Some New Testament texts emphasize that the destiny of humanity and the destiny of all created things are inextricably intertwined in the divine economy of salvation (cf. Rm

8:19-22; Col 1:15-20). Such insights constitute spiritual foundations of the struggle for the integrity of creation. They are to be found in many world's spiritualities, especially in the original vision contained in the "wisdom traditions" of various religions which oppose the self-centeredness, teach respect for life and interconnectedness of our destinies. Concern for the suffering people must go hand in hand with concern for our Earth, so unique in its mysterious evolution and connectedness. All nations and religions face the common task of saving the integrity and the well-being of the planet. The Greek word *sotería* means salvation and liberation.

How should the religious communities respond to the sufferings of people and planet? How to move from destructive self-centeredness to saving and liberating Reality-centeredness? How to reach consensus in this matter among differing views and conflicting doctrines? There is no easy answer to these questions. One can imagine a Buddhist calling for the total selflessness of nonviolence, and a Christian pleading for the self-giving in armed resistance. Yet, they can listen to, learn from each other, and correct each other in patient dialogue. One vision can temper and deepen another through dialogue. Each vision might grow richer in understanding and implementation. Religious communities can resolve their differences only through genuine conversation about basic criteria for religious truth. The most applicable, cross-cultural ethical criterion seems to be, especially in our present situation, that of concern for human and ecological suffering. It relates to problems that are truly urgent, common to us all and provide common ground for action. Of course, solidarity with the suffering and ethical concerns do not automatically resolve interreligious disagreements, but they can facilitate the path towards consensus, beyond our differing doctrines and cultural interpretations.

Human and ecological suffering is universal an immediate reality which every day confronts us all. It provides therefore a common criterion for religious truth claims. Religions may question each other and come to joint assessments of truth. Suffering questions directly and cross-culturally our doctrines, asks for the ethical effects of our claims, beliefs and practices. It becomes a universal verification of the credibility of any truth claims. We have to ask each other: What are the ethical fruits of a particular religious claim? How do images of God affect our attitudes to other people and to the world?

There is no exaggeration in speaking about the "hermeneutical privilege" of the suffering<sup>11</sup>. Their voices are to be heard and understood. One can truly understand the message of the suffering only if one is sensitive to it and actively involved in dialogical praxis for its removal.

## **THE LOVE OF GOD IDENTIFIED WITH THE LOVE OF THE SUFFERING NEIGHBOUR**

Christians can draw inspiration for their praxis in Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God which is an eschatological reality, both "already" and "not yet" present in this world. The Kingdom is already mysteriously present in its demands for love and justice and, at the same time, not yet fully realized and manifest. The Christian Gospel (*Euangélion*

means the Good News!) reminds the followers of Christ that there is no final fulfillment of the Reign of God, for there is always something more to come. God is already coming, but incognito, especially in the person of those who are in need.

One can reasonably assume that all religions have a liberative teaching in their holy scriptures and wisdom traditions which allows them to respond to the ethical demands in the situation of need and suffering. In the Christian tradition there is a very striking text, a parable or the story in the New Testament, speaking about the Last Judgment (Mt 25: 31-46). Let me reflect briefly on its extraordinary, truly stunning ethical universalism, conveyed in apocalyptic images and phrases. It contains, as many scholars have noted, one of the noblest and most sublime passages in the Gospel. Its doctrine assigning the worth to every human being has had strong influence upon the morality of people throughout the world.

The text is coherent with the very core of Jesus' teaching. The story about the separation of the good from the bad at the end of the ages contains clear parallels with the first three Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-5) and strikes the same note of warning against insensitivity as in the parable of the good Samaritan (Lc 10:30-37). Using the image of the separation of the sheep from the goats Jesus did not want to predict an ultimate separation of the good and bad people. It would be false to attribute to this parable a teaching about an eternal punishment in hell, filled with sinners for ever. This kind of teaching, as I tried to show in the previous chapters and in many other publications<sup>12</sup>, would be incompatible with such key parables that of the lost sheep, the lost coin or the prodigal son (Lc 15). God loves all people and will never cease to look for every single lost human being.

The parable's original meaning has another thrust. It contains the urgent appeal to the individual conscience to meet God in other people during this earthly life, especially in those who are in need or suffer. The consequences of our life extend to the life after death: everyone will be judged, and will judge himself, on his or her attitude to other people. The deeds for others will be the criterion of judgment. Jesus calls all people in need his "brothers" [and sisters, to use today's inclusive language]. This concept in the parable is indeed striking for its universality. The message is clear: according to Jesus, one meets God in any suffering person, without exception. This universalism should not be blurred by restricting the expression "the least of my brethren" only to poor, insignificant or suffering Christians. The stunning identification of God or Christ (if "the King" in the parable is interpreted christologically) with people who suffer reveals his mysterious presence in them. By doing good things for those afflicted, one is actually doing something good for God himself.

Both in Judaism and in other religious traditions the deeds of mercy towards the needy have been highly respected and greatly admired. One can show some parallels of Jesus' parable of the Last Judgment in the Egyptian Book of the Dead and in the Jewish Talmud. But there is a significant difference in those texts. The Egyptian Book shows the dead man boasting self-confidently of his good deeds and of giving satisfaction to God by doing what he loves. Instead both the righteous and "those on the left hand" ask in surprise the question when could they have rendered any service to the Judge himself.

They are not conscious of this fact. Precisely this is a characteristic of Jesus' preaching. He calls everyone to discover the reality of the mysterious identification of the needy and suffering people with God or the hidden Messiah himself. The very surprise shown by the merciful at the time of judgment suggests a purity and disinterestedness of motive: they were doing good for other people not because they thought of the reward from God, but because they simply wanted to help those needy and suffering people. Their full attention was focused on the suffering persons themselves. Jesus encourages the acts of love and mercy not as isolated deeds only, but as the whole orientation of one's life<sup>13</sup>.

I have drawn attention to the parable's central message and its implications for both individual and social ethics. The acts of compassion are crucial in our life as humans, whether believers or not. Today we may call it a social concern as an integral part of a religious attitude. In fact this is one of the most significant contributions that Christianity can offer to the world if it is taken seriously.

### **Universality of the Final Reconciliation Between Victims and Perpetrators**

The Gospel parable of the judgment of the nations leads to another important aspect of the Christian universalism. The Judge says to those on his right: "Come, o blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34; RSV). This means that God has prepared "the kingdom" without any human participation. But God does not act in human beings without their consent and participation. It is impossible to enter the kingdom without one's personal willingness to participate in it. In Jesus' parable the Judge invites only the righteous to enter into his kingdom. Nothing is said about the final reconciliation among people themselves as the prerequisite condition for this entry. Here the task lies on our human side.

Christian universalism does not exclusively concentrate on the individual destinies of human beings. It also takes seriously human persons as social beings, whose identities are interdependent, inextricably linked with their near and distant neighbours. Social relations are inscribed in the logic of God's treatment of sinful humanity.

The Last Judgment could be well imagined as an event in which all victims and all perpetrators will have to face each other. The evil suffered and inflicted will be fully manifest to each person. Without God's immeasurable goodness and willingness to forgive, such an encounter of victims and perpetrators would turned out to be not a day of reconciliation, but a day of wrath and retribution. As sinful human beings we are all, more or less, prone to accuse others and justify ourselves. Would all the victims be ready then to forgive and not to condemn the perpetrators of their evil to hell? Perhaps each could insist of being finally someone's victim and plead for the punishment of those found guilty. Yet, faced with divine goodness and forgiveness, who would withhold his or her forgiveness?<sup>14</sup>.

One can reasonably hope that divine compassion and mercy shown to all will be able to overcome any resistance to forgive one another. Victims alone can forgive the crimes done against them. Divine forgiveness does not substitute for inter-human forgiveness,

but reinforces the motive for granting it to others. According to Jesus' teaching, persons who remember that their brother or sister has something against them should first go and be reconciled to them before offering their gifts at the altar (cf. Mt 5:23-24).

Forgiveness alone is not yet true reconciliation between enemies. Still more is required to enter God's world of love and peace. Reconciliation will take place only when everyone moves towards one's former offenders or enemies and embraces them as belonging to the same family of God's children. God has first embraced sinful humanity "in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19).

Theologically one can therefore make a further step from forgiveness to reconciliation. Salvation requires social reconciliation because of the social character of human beings and their sins. If the past imbued with enmity is to be redeemed, then social reconciliation of all who died unreconciled has to take place in the eschatological transformation. The judgment is a social event aimed at the restoration of universal shalom among people (as already some eschatological prophecies in the Old Testament suggest). The divine judgment will attain its purpose when, inspired by God's Holy Spirit, all people overcome attempts at self-justification, acknowledge their own sins, experience liberation from guilt, and when each recognizes that all others have done the same. When that happens, each person freed from the power of sin and having recognized that others have really changed, will no longer condemn others, but offer them forgiveness. An evangelical theologian, Miroslav Volf from Yale University recently wrote: "to refuse to show grace to the offender and to receive grace from the offended, is to have rejected God's judgment of grace"<sup>15</sup>. It seems hardly possible, because as the Apostle Paul reassures, "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rm 8:18)<sup>16</sup>.

Reconciliation between people requires their own involvement. It cannot take place, so to speak, "above" their heads. Human involvement is related to divine action and divine invitation to enter into the kingdom. God's grace transforms sinful persons and their relationships with other fellow humans. However, we are not simply passive objects of God's action. His action is connected with the participation of human persons coming to enjoy one another's presence. For this reason the final reconciliation among people is an essential dimension of their entry into the kingdom. What we call "heaven" is a new world of love, justice and peace. Social transformation and reconciliation between victims and perpetrators is therefore an indispensable part of the transition from a world of sin to the world of love and peace. The healing process of human relationships is by its very nature not only individual, but also social. The acceptance of one's existence as healed and transformed by God must go together with the acceptance of others.

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The New Testament speaks about the reconciliation of "all things" (cf. Col 1:15-20), so that God will at the end be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). This means concretely: "reconciliation between human beings and God, reconciliation among human beings

themselves, internal reconciliation within human beings, and reconciliation of human beings and the nonhuman environment"<sup>17</sup>.

This universal vision of the final social reconciliation and eschatological transformation of humanity encourages social concern for other people already in this earthly life. It fosters understanding and compassion. Today we need more and more a spirituality of open eyes and open hearts, sensitive to the situation of people and of the whole nature. This would really contribute to "a global coalition of 'wise and good people'"<sup>18</sup>. We need today a universal anamnestic culture, a kind of comprehensive *memoria passionis* that would prevent us from forgetting about human and ecological suffering. These are urgent ethical imperatives of our time, common to Christianity and to other world views, both religious and secular.

## NOTES

1 A paper delivered at the International Conference: "Dialogue among Civilisations – the Key to a Safe Future" in Warsaw, April 23-26, 2003, published in: "Dialogue and Universalism" 13 (2003) No. 5, pp. 33-45.

2 K. Armstrong, *A History of God. From Abraham to the Present: the 4000-year Quest for God*, London 1993.

3 Cf. P.F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*, Maryknoll, NY 1995, pp. 58-67.

4 Cf. among others H. Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, translated by John Bowden (from the German *Projekt Weltethos*), London 1991, pp. XX + 158.

5 See *ibid.*, p. 53.

6 See Knitter, *One Earth...*, p. 71-72.

7 P.F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, p. 134-135.

8 See J. Polkinghorne, *Eschatology: Some Questions and Some Insights from Science*, w: *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, ed. by J. Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, Harrisburg, Penn. 2000, pp. 29-41, esp. 34-36.

9 Cf. J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, London 1985.

10 A. Schmemmann, *The World as Sacrament*, London 1965; D. Staniloae, *The World as Gift and Sacrament of God's Love*, "Sobornost" 5 (1969) No. 9, 662-672.

11 Knitter, *One Earth...*, p. 128.

12 Cf. W. Hryniewicz, *Nadzieja zbawienia dla wszystkich* (Hope of Salvation for All), Warsaw 1989; id., *Dramat nadziei zbawienia* (Drama of the Hope of Salvation), Warsaw 1996; id., *Chrzescijanstwo nadziei* (Christianity of Hope), Cracow 2002; id., *Nadzieja uczy inaczej* (Hope Teaches Otherwise), Warsaw 2003; id., *Dlaczego glosze nadzieje?* [Why Do I Proclaim Hope?], Warsaw 2004; *Bog wszystkim we wszystkich. Ku eschatologii bez dualizmu* (God All in All: Towards an Eschatology without Dualism), Warsaw 2005.

13 See A. Wierzbicka, *What Did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts*, Oxford 2001, pp. 356-372, esp. 360ff.

14 See some reflections in this respect put forward by J. Niewiadomski, *Hoffnung im Gericht. Soteriologische Impulse für eine dogmatische Eschatologie*, "Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie" 114 (1992) 113-126, esp. 126.

15 M. Volf, *The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on a Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition*, "Modern Theology" 16 (2000) 91-113, here 104.

16 For more reflections on this topic see W. Hryniewicz, *Dramat nadziei zbawienia* (*Drama of the Hope of Salvation*), pp. 136-142.

17 M. Volf, *Enter into Joy! Sin, Death, and the Life of the World to Come*, in: *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, ed. by John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, Harrisburg, Penn. 2000, pp. 256-278, quoted here 275.

18 J. Kuczynski (The Editor), *For a Global Coalition of "Wise and Good People," "Dialogue and Universalism"* 12 (2002) No. 11-12, 159-181.

## **Chapter VII**

# **UNIVERSALISM OF SALVATION:**

## **ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN<sup>1</sup>**

The seventh-century mystic, Isaac the Syrian, known also as Isaac of Nineveh is, in the history of the Church, one of the most courageous supporters of the eschatological hope of universal salvation. This paper is based on three chapters devoted to the topic of Gehenna in 'The Second Part' of his writings discovered in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (1983), translated and published by S. Brock (1995)<sup>2</sup>.

### **INTERIOR AND OUTER MEANINGS OF THE SCRIPTURES**

Isaac clearly distinguished between "interior" meanings of the Scripture narratives, on the one side, and their "outer meanings" and "bodily exterior," on the other. This distinction gave him a deep insight into the symbolic meaning of eschatological images, warnings, and threats. What is striking in his comments is a deep understanding of the nature of the figurative language of the Bible. He was convinced that many figurative terms employed in the Scriptures are far removed from God's true nature.

He often says that literal understanding of biblical texts about "eternal punishment" can lead only to regrettable misinterpretations of their meaning. To properly understand the "difficult matter of Gehenna"<sup>3</sup> one needs the gift of spiritual knowledge, able to penetrate into the logic of the relationship between the "outer surface" of the biblical text and its inner meaning.

Just because (the terms) wrath, anger, hatred, and the rest are used of the Creator, we should not imagine that He (actually) does anything in anger or hatred or zeal. Many figurative terms are employed in the Scriptures of God, terms which are far removed from His (true) nature. And just as (our) rational nature has (already) become gradually more illuminated and wise in a holy understanding of the mysteries which are hidden in (Scripture's) discourse about God – that we should not understand everything (literally) as it is written, but rather that we should see, (concealed) inside the bodily exterior of the narratives, the hidden providence and eternal knowledge which guides all – so too we shall in the future come to know and be aware of many things for which our present understanding will be seen as contrary to what it will be then; and the whole ordering of things yonder will undo any precise opinion we



possess now in (our) supposition about Truth. For there are many, indeed endless, things which do not even enter our minds here, not even as promises of any kind<sup>4</sup>.

Isaac willingly makes use of long and involved sentences. His complex syntax may baffle the reader, but the content is straightforward. Perhaps only today are we able to appreciate his long-sighted wisdom and deep insights. Symbolic images of the Bible cannot be interpreted as factual statements. What particularly strikes me is his acute awareness, that our terms, concepts and images are not adequate to the invisible reality, even if we are gradually able to better perceive divine mysteries. The disproportion is so great that we cannot imagine many things, even in the form of promises.

The symbolic and apocalyptic images of the Bible should not be interpreted as future eschatological facts and events. One should not understand everything literally, "as it is written". Isaac resolutely rejects what he calls an "infantile way of thinking"<sup>5</sup>, leading to blasphemous representations of God which ascribes to Him the feelings of anger, vengeance or retribution. A serious mistake would be to remain only on the "outer surface" of biblical texts dealing with eschatology. Their inner meaning is more profound. He writes:

That we should imagine that anger, wrath, jealousy or such like have anything to do with the divine Nature is something utterly abhorrent for us: no one in their right mind, no one who has any understanding (at all) can possibly come to such madness as to think anything of the sort about God. Nor again can we possibly say that He acts thus out of retribution, even though the Scriptures may on the outer surface posit this. Even to think this of God and to suppose that retribution for evil acts is to be found with Him is abominable<sup>6</sup>.

We do not attribute a wish of retribution even to noble and virtuous people. How then believe that God can take retributive actions against those whom He has called to being with honour and great love? He knows certainly our bad behaviour but does not withhold, even for a moment, His care and grace. According to Isaac, it would be a blasphemy to think that God, out of His patience, bears with sinners here on earth, but will punish them mercilessly after their death.

It is not (the way of) the compassionate Maker to create rational beings in order to deliver them over mercilessly to unending affliction (in punishment) for things of which He knew even before they were fashioned, (aware) how they would turn out when He created them – and whom (nonetheless) He created<sup>7</sup>.

The merciful God, in everything He does looks to ways of assisting rational beings. One cannot remove from God His unchanging kindness, eternal goodness and compassion:

Among all His actions there is none which is not entirely a matter of mercy, love and compassion; this constitutes the beginning and the end of His dealings with us<sup>8</sup>.

### **ISAAC'S VIEW OF THE PROVISIONAL AND THERAPEUTIC NATURE OF GEHENNA**

In his meditations on Gehenna Isaac often thinks of the Kingdom of God. He sees both Gehenna and the Kingdom as belonging to God's plan of salvation, both being the expression of His love, mercy and compassion. He emphasizes, however, that it is not a matter of reward and punishment, although the Bible uses these terms. Both the Kingdom of God, as well as Gehenna, have been foreseen by Him for the good of the whole of creation: "The Kingdom and Gehenna are matters belonging to mercy, which were conceived of in their essence by God as a result of His eternal goodness"<sup>9</sup>.

These are surprising affirmations. How can Gehenna no less than the Kingdom be embraced by the same salvific purpose of God? Isaac has no doubt: if we think that the issue of Gehenna has nothing to do with the love and compassion of the Creator towards His creatures, this would be "an opinion full of blasphemy and insult to our Lord God"<sup>10</sup>.

(By saying) that He will even hand us over to burning for the sake of suffering, torment and all sorts of ills, we are attributing to the divine Nature an enmity towards the very rational beings which He created through grace; (the same is true if we say) that He acts or thinks with spite and with a vengeful purpose, as though He was avenging Himself<sup>11</sup>.

In fact it is the other way round. In Isaac's explanations one can feel the mystic's passion in defending God against those who calumniate Him and do not understand the proper meaning of the Scriptures. He does this with calm and lucidity.

If God is really so, then we ought to admire Him and to praise His magnanimity and compassionate love for all people. In a true believer these attributes of God arouse the feelings of wonder and gratitude.

How much to be worshipped is our Lord God's gentle compassion and His immeasurable munificence: He makes many threats, but He makes the punishment small out of grace, all in order to increase love for Him in ourselves. May His name be blessed!<sup>12</sup>

In the sufferings of Gehenna Isaac perceives a hidden mystery. Gehenna has no sense in itself. The wise Creator knew that it would disclose its purpose in the future. Iniquity and willfulness of rational creatures will not remain in them for ever in the state called Gehenna. God is able to carry out His work to the very end. The mystery of Gehenna remains provisionally hidden before humans, angels and demons.

If the world to come is entirely (the domain) of grace, love, mercy and goodness, and because the resurrection from the dead is also a

demonstration of the mercifulness of God and of overflowing abundance of His love which cannot be repaid, how (can one think of) a dispensation in which are included requitals for our own good or evil (actions)?<sup>13</sup>

Isaac belongs to those Christian mystics who do not exaggerate the power of evil. In his eyes human sin is infinitely small in comparison with the infinite mercy of God<sup>14</sup>. The torments of Gehenna are caused by self-exclusion from the great feast in the Kingdom of heaven, by a person's inability to participate in the love of God. Yet they will come to an end, although here on earth we do not know when it will take place. Gehenna is a consequence of sin which also will have its end. If God punishes, He does it out of love, in order to heal a sick freedom of rational creatures. Sinners in Gehenna are not deprived of the compassionate love of God. The purpose of punishment is change for the better, purification and conversion. The punishment ceases when this purpose is achieved. The sinners are not deprived of God's love even in their infernal state. They can always count on His help. God's justice and mercy are inseparable. He awaits with love all His creatures at the end of their purification. If evil, sin and Gehenna do not have their origins in God, how can they be eternal?

I am of the opinion that He is going to manifest some wonderful outcome, a matter of immense and ineffable compassion on the part of the glorious Creator, with respect to the ordering of this difficult matter of (Gehenna's) torment: out of it the wealth of His love and power and wisdom will become known all the more – and so will the insistent might of the waves of His goodness<sup>15</sup>.

According to Isaac, Gehenna can only be temporary and provisional, permeated by God's love and mercy. He would not allow a punishment which would deny His own nature. The punishment has a therapeutic and correctional meaning. It is always connected with His "compassionate intentions and purpose" to set us on the upright path, and not to bring us to perdition. Gehenna's torment is "a matter of immense and ineffable compassion". It must have its end and achieve its purpose. For this reason it is subject to a limit. It is not for eternity and will last only for a fixed period, decreed by God's wisdom. The punishments, measured out in correspondence to the sins, are finally going to have an end. The eternal punishment would be a monstrous reality unworthy of God. Who thinks otherwise has not overcome an "infantile way of thinking", "the childish opinion of God"<sup>16</sup>. The Syrian mystic dares even to affirm, that by God's grace "the majority of humankind will enter the Kingdom of heaven without the experience of Gehenna"<sup>17</sup>. This does not concern those who fail to show remorse in suffering for their faults, because of their hardness of heart and abandonment to wickedness. But even in this case God is so good and compassionate that "He is always seeking to find some small means of putting us in the right"<sup>18</sup>.

Who reads Isaac feels his constant fascination with God's goodness, mercy and "immense grace that, like an ocean, knows no measure". God is incomprehensible in His compassion: "His face is set all the time towards forgiveness"<sup>19</sup>. One has only to show the will to compunction and a little suffering because of committed sins, and He without any delay grants forgiveness. An eloquent example for the Syrian is the case of the tax

collector (cf. Lk 18:14) or of the man who received forgiveness on the cross (cf. Lk 23:40-43). "For (God) wishes for our salvation, and not for reasons to torment us"<sup>20</sup>.

Isaac does not deny the reality of separation of sinners from their fellow human beings. Following Jesus' parable of the Last Judgment he believes that "the sheep" (usually white) will be separated from "the goats" (usually black) who will be sent to Gehenna. However, his attention is directed beyond this separation which in his eyes is not irreversible. The parable should not be read as a dogmatic statement on the final destiny of the righteous and sinners. It is a prophetic warning against the lack of love and compassion for people in need during our earthly life<sup>21</sup>. The separation takes place already now, and the Last Judgment will only reveal our spiritual state which would require the awful torment of Gehenna, even though limited in duration.

The merciful God knew, writes Isaac, that "if a genuine righteousness were required of human beings, then only one in ten thousand would be found who could enter the Kingdom of heaven"<sup>22</sup>. For this reason He provided everyone with a medicine of repentance and compunction. However, Isaac's inner experience prompts him to warn people against neglectfulness in facing the danger of Gehenna:

Let us beware in ourselves, my beloved, and realize that even if Gehenna is subject to a limit, the taste of its experience is most terrible, and the extent of its bounds escapes our very understanding. Let us strive all the more to partake of the taste of God's love for the sake of perpetual reflection on Him, and let us not (have) experience of Gehenna through neglect<sup>23</sup>.

In another meditation he adds:

Nevertheless (Gehenna) is grievous, even if it is thus limited in its extent: who can (possibly) bear it? For this reason the angels in heaven rejoice at a single sinner who repents<sup>24</sup>.

What strikes me is an unshakeable confidence with which the author of the three meditations on Gehenna speaks about the hope of universal salvation. He is strongly convinced that this hope is fully in accordance with the profound meaning of the Bible. He discovers this hope in the biblical "discourse about God", under the "bodily exterior of the narratives". Expressing this hope he wants to disclose the hidden wisdom of the Scriptures.

No part belonging to any single one of (all) rational beings will be lost, as far as God is concerned, in the preparation of that supernal Kingdom which is prepared for all worlds. Because of that goodness of His nature by which He brought the universe into being (and then) bears, guides and provides for the worlds and (all) created things in His immeasurable compassion, He has devised the establishment of the Kingdom of heaven for the entire community of rational beings – even though an intervening

time is reserved for the general raising (of all) to the same level. (And we say this) in order that we, too, may concur with the magisterial teaching of Scripture<sup>25</sup>.

So, in the matter of Gehenna there is indeed some hidden mystery. For Isaac it is only "a starting point for its future outcome", "a way of bringing to perfection" God's whole dispensation. This teaching makes wise and gives "the advantage beyond description"<sup>26</sup>. It shows a different image of God, full of condescending care, outgoing mercy and compassion. The future judgment and possible sufferings are not a matter of retribution for evil acts. St. Isaac's contemplation on the topic of Gehenna is full of wonder and amazement at its mystery.

### **DEMONS WILL NOT REMAIN IN THEIR DEMONIC STATE**

The Syrian mystic untiringly speaks of God's love and compassion towards all His creatures. The love of the Creator is not diminished towards "those rational beings who have become demons as a result of their demonic action". It is the same as His love towards "those who remain in the angelic state"<sup>27</sup>. It is the same for sinners and for the righteous. God has "a single caring concern for those who have fallen, just as much as for those who have not fallen"<sup>28</sup>. The divine nature is not affected by opposition of the creatures and by its consequences. It remains the same from eternity. Therefore God's love and mercy are without alteration, timeless and everlasting, independent from events taking place in all creation. Isaac is convinced that hate or resentment do not exist with God, "even against demonic beings"<sup>29</sup>. Salvation is His gift for all rational beings, also for those who have fallen. Our human language concerning the final destiny of demonic beings is helpless. Isaac struggles with words, looks for new shades of meaning, reminds of earlier formulations. Words like the following give impressive and moving witness:

And it is clear that He does not abandon them the moment they fall, and that demons will nor remain in their demonic state, and sinners (will not remain) in their sins; rather, He is going to bring them to a single equal state of perfection in relationship to His own Being – in a (state) in which the holy angels are now, in perfection of love and a passionless mind. He is going to bring them into that excellency of will, where it will not be as though they were curbed and not <free>, or having stirrings from the Opponent then; rather, (they will be) in a (state of) excelling knowledge, with a mind made mature in the stirrings which partake of the divine outpouring which the blessed Creator is preparing in His grace; they will be perfected in love for Him, with a perfect mind which is above any aberration in all its stirrings<sup>30</sup>.

So the demonic beings are also embraced by the divine dispensation of compassion and mercy. If the devil and demons were created by God as good and sinless, but fell away from Him by their own free will, how can one suppose that the merciful Creator will eternally reconcile himself with this perdition? No wonder, Isaac clearly opposes a dualistic conception of the co-eternal existence of God and the devil, good and evil. Sin

and Gehenna will be ultimately abolished, although their end is a mystery surpassing human understanding. The final outcome of the history of the created world must correspond to the beauty of the beginning and to the goodness of God. If we suppose the truly eternal punishment of sinners and demons, this would mean that the creation of the world was an enormous failure and mistake. God is able to overcome, by His goodness and beauty, every evil, even the opposition of the devil himself.

It is worthwhile to stress the astounding boldness of St. Isaac's insights which go far beyond the dogmatic teaching of the Church. He does not confine himself to affirming the possibility of conversion of evil spirits, but also believes that they may once achieve a higher degree of perfection than the angels.

May be (they will be raised) to a perfection even greater than that in which the angels now exist; for all are going to exist in a single love, a single purpose, a single will, and a single perfect state of knowledge; they will gaze towards God with the desire of insatiable love, even if some (divine) dispensation [sc. Gehenna] may in the meantime be effected for reasons known to God alone, lasting for a fixed period, decreed by Him in accordance with the will of His wisdom<sup>31</sup>.

According to Isaac, God's love is prior to any of His ways to the freedom of rational beings. He does not forget any of His creatures and carries out His plan of salvation to the advantage of all, although we are not yet able to understand how. The state of separation from God is totally unnatural, and He will not permit those who have fallen away from Him to remain in this state for ever. The true aim of Gehenna is hidden from those who undergo punishment. Only when Gehenna is abolished will this therapeutic aim be fully revealed. Everything is now known to God alone, but once He will make it known to all. Gehenna, then, is in this view a sort of purgatory, conceived for the salvation of human beings and fallen angels. Yet, this salvation will not be forced upon anyone. It has to be accepted freely by each rational being.

## **CHRIST, OUR GREATEST HOPE**

To support his teaching on the incompatibility of an eternal Gehenna with God's love and mercy, Isaac used various sources: Scripture, patristic writings and some logical arguments. He never denies the awful reality of Gehenna, but understands it within the Gospel message of God's boundless love, compassion and mercy. In his teaching God is like the householder in Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard (cf. Mt 20:1-15). He rewards equally those who worked only one hour and those who have borne the burden and heat of the whole day.

To avoid any possible accusation of "those who zealously imagine that they are being zealous for the cause of truth", Isaac emphasizes that this teaching is by no means an innovation or his private opinion. Such was also the teaching of "orthodox Fathers" before him, that of "the blessed Interpreter" of the Scriptures, Theodore of Mopsuestia and of "the holy Diodore, Bishop of Tarsus"<sup>32</sup>. Theodore, "like one of the apostles" taught

about pedagogical and therapeutic purpose of Gehenna's punishments which are finally going to have an end. In a similar opinion of Diodore, the torments for the wicked "are not for eternity". God in His mercy diminishes them and shortens their length<sup>33</sup>. This applies also to the case of the demons: "Not even their immense wickedness can overcome the measure of God's goodness"<sup>34</sup>.

That is why, in the access of an all-embracing compassion, Isaac prayed also for the conversion and salvation of the demonic beings<sup>35</sup>. He quotes his predecessors to confirm his own hope for salvation of all God's rational creatures. These "astonishing insights and opinions" should lead us on to love God and wonder at His wise dispensation. The hidden meaning of the divine judgment and of the punishment in Gehenna can therefore be understood in a new light, far from "the childish opinion of God". Gehenna is a manifestation of "the immensity of God's mercy" which overcomes all evils done by created beings. Only then can we understand better the therapeutic nature of Gehenna's torments and the divine "compassionate intentions and purpose He has in allowing (these) to come upon us"<sup>36</sup>, as well as the beneficial outcomes of these sufferings.

Gehenna does not destroy our created being and will not endure the same for eternity. God allows it "in a fatherly way, and not vengefully"<sup>37</sup>. He does not bring us to perdition. In His wisdom "our good God" effects everything for us to set us on the upright path. All painful things He allows to come upon us will have an end<sup>38</sup>. Only what is good will endure for eternity. The purpose of the punishments is not retribution for past actions, but improvement: "God is not one who requites evil, but He sets aright evil"<sup>39</sup>. He does not act like evil people, but like a loving father. The mystery of Christ shows in abundance God's immense compassion for all, and not a retribution for evil deeds<sup>40</sup>.

So then, let us not attribute to God's actions and His dealings with us any idea of requital. Rather, (we should speak of) fatherly provision, a wise dispensation, a perfect will which is concerned with our good, and complete love. If it is a case of love, then it is not one of requital; and if it is a case of requital, then it is not one of love. Love, when it operates, [...] it looks to what is most advantageous in the future: it examines what is to come, and not things that are past<sup>41</sup>.

These are, in St. Isaac's eyes, the deepest motives not only to wonder at God's goodness and to love Him, but also to feel ashamed at our faults and to change the conduct of our lives here on earth. He has no doubt that this is precisely what the Scriptures remind us of. But this understanding comes to us only through "the gift of spiritual knowledge", able to penetrate deeper than "corporeal images", into the interior meanings of biblical texts<sup>42</sup>. God has given to all repentance as a remedy to be cured from sin. It is enough to ask for forgiveness and repent. The guarantee of this forgiveness is Christ's Incarnation and His death on the cross.

Contemplation on the topic of Gehenna requires a spiritual attitude full of wonder and amazement at this mystery. Already at the very beginning of his meditations St. Isaac wrote:

All who have knowledge of truth are full of wonder and amazement at this mystery: since the contemplation of this escapes all enquiry, all rational beings endowed with (the faculty of) knowledge and who are conversant with the spiritual meaning of the divine mysteries retire and have recourse to silence, and (fall down) in worship before the mysteries of the wisdom of Him who should be worshipped in silence, for all His actions are to be wondered at in adoration<sup>43</sup>.

The hope of universal salvation has strong foundations. It is not deceptive, because its ultimate foundation is Christ himself. The figure of the Saviour often appears in Isaac's meditations. He ponders with amazement on His love surpassing all understanding and contemplates His words about the world to come. Christ is "our hope"<sup>44</sup>. In this context one can better understand his ardent encouragement:

Let us not be in doubt, O (fellow) humanity, concerning the hope of our salvation, seeing that He who bore sufferings for our sakes is very concerned for our salvation; His mercifulness is far more extensive than we can conceive, His grace is greater than what we ask for<sup>45</sup>.

The Syrian mystic had a deep intuition of "the beauty of truth" and of "the beauties of God"<sup>46</sup>. The perception of the divine mysteries takes place "in the inner sanctuary of the heart", as "a silent form of revelation and in visionless insights"<sup>47</sup>. The connection between hope and the human heart is not accidental. The mind and the heart have to act in harmony. The theology of the universalism of hope requires such a harmonious co-operation between these two highest human faculties. That is why in his Ascetical Homilies Isaac calls hope "wisdom of the heart"<sup>48</sup>. The human heart full of compassion and hope has a better insight into "the mysteries of our Saviour" than a mere logic of the mind, so often deprived of the sense of wholeness. God is God of the Great Symphony of the world to come, of "the House of Mysteries"<sup>49</sup>.

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Today, after the twelve centuries which have elapsed since the times of Isaac the Syrian, one reads his texts with deep affection and sincere admiration. His universal hope makes him one of the greatest guides and teachers, especially in theological thinking about the world to come. His eschatological insights correspond to the teachings of quite a number of ancient Fathers, yet what he taught was not simply a repetition of his predecessors, but the result of his personal theological experience. In this experience the central conviction is that God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4: 8.16).

## NOTES

1 A paper initially published in: *Die Wurzel aller Theologie: Sentire cum Ecclesia. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Urs von Arx*, Bern 2003, pp. 139-150.



2 *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian). 'The Second Part', Chapters IV-XLI*. Translated by S. Brock (=CSCO 555; *Scriptores syri*, t. 225). Lovanii 1995. On Isaac's universal hope in *The First Part* of his writings see W. Hryniewicz. *Hoffnung der Heiligen. Das Zeugnis Isaaks des Syrers*. "Ostkirchliche Studien" 45 (1996) Heft 1, pp. 21-41.

3 *'The Second Part'*, XXXIX, 1; p. 162. Isaac constantly uses the biblical term Gehenna.

4 *Ibid.*, XXXIX, 19; p. 171.

5 *Ibid.*, XXXIX, 2, 14, 17; pp. 163, 169, 170.

6 *Ibid.*, XXXIX, 2; p. 162-163.

7 *Ibid.*, XXXIX, 6; p. 165.

8 *Ibid.*, XXXIX, 22; p. 172.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*, XXXIX, 21; pp. 171-172.

14 See Hryniewicz. *Hoffnung der Heiligen*, pp. 25-29.

15 *'The Second Part'*, XXXIX, 6; p. 165.

16 *Ibid.*, XXXIX, 2 and 14; pp. 163, 169.

17 *Ibid.*, XL, 12; p. 177.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

21 How this view corresponds to modern biblical exegesis of the recent past see A. Wierzbicka. *What Did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts*. Oxford 2001, pp. 356-372. Jesus spoke the language of the Jewish prophets called, in modern hermeneutics *Drohrede* (*ibidem*, pp. 455-464).

22 '*The Second Part*', XL, 8; p. 176.

23 Ibid., XLI, 1; p. 180.

24 Ibid., XL,7; p. 176.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., XXXIX, 20; p. 171.

27 Ibid., XL, 2; p. 174.

28 Ibid., XL, 3; p. 175.

29 Ibid., XXXIX, 3; p. 163.

30 Ibid., XL, 4; p. 175. Italics are mine W.H.

31 Ibid., XL, 5; p. 175.

32 Ibid., XXXIX, 7, 8, 11; pp. 165-167.

33 See *ibid.*, XXXIX, 11-12; p. 168.

34 Ibid., XXXIX, 13; p. 169.

35 See *Homily 71*, in: *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, translated by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Mass. 1984, p. 344-345. More about this in: Hryniewicz, *Hoffnung der Heiligen*, p. 30.

36 '*The Second Part*', XXXIX, 14; p. 169.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., XXXIX, 15, p. 169.

39 Ibid., XXXIX, 15; p. 170.

40 Ibid., XXXIX, 16; p. 170.

41 Ibid., XXXIX, 17; p. 170. Commenting upon these texts Hilarion Alfeyev (today a Russian Orthodox Bishop) writes in his recent study: *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*. Kalamazoo, Mich. – Spencer, Mass. 2000, p. 296: "A place in the kingdom of heaven is given to a person, not on the basis of his worthiness or unworthiness, but on the basis of God's mercy and love for humankind. The kingdom of heaven is not a reward,

and gehenna is not a requital: both are gifts of the merciful God 'who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim 2:4)".

42 '*The Second Part*', XXXIX, 18; p. 171.

43 Ibid., XXXIX, 1; p. 162.

44 Ibid., XL, 18; p. 179.

45 Ibid., XL, 17; p. 179.

46 Ibid., XLI, 1; p. 180.

47 Ibid., XLI, 2; p. 181.

48 *Homily 40*, in: *The Ascetical Homilies...*, p. 203.

49 '*The Second Part*', XLI, 2; p. 181.

## **Chapter VIII**

### **WESTERN MYSTICS AND THE HOPE OF UNIVERSAL SALVATION: JULIAN OF NORWICH AND THOMAS MERTON<sup>1</sup>**

Great spiritual culture is shaped by people who are open, capable of understanding and compassionate of others. Mystics belong to this category. They can cross over religious and confessional divisions. A mystic is far from being a bitter recluse, devoid of any sense of human solidarity. Quite the opposite, his spiritual experience allows him to find the deepest bonds between people. He is able to discover that beauty, which is a herald of their ultimate rescue and transformation. Those who read thoroughly the witness of the mystics will find in it a rejection of all fundamentalisms or narrowness of spirit. They will discover mercy and compassion encompassing all people and all creatures.

In this witness there is a great wisdom of the view of the world and the human lot, wisdom releasing from exclusivism and overconfidence in oneself. This wisdom is born out of a deep experience of community among people. Thus the mystics' witness is enormously edifying. Julian of Norwich and Thomas Merton have helped me to reach deeper into the wisdom of hope for the salvation of all.

#### **UNIVERSALITY OF HOPE IN THE WRITINGS OF JULIAN OF NORWICH**

Reflection on the mystics' language proves extremely instructive. Set in comparison with Merton's writings, those of Julian of Norwich, an anchoress of the 14<sup>th</sup> century England, deserve special attention<sup>2</sup>. Merton must have been well acquainted with them. Their language of both is dramatic, particularly when it is dealing with the difficult matters of human guilt, suffering, evil and sin.

##### *Sin in Human History*

Julian of Norwich, this English mystic, wrote in an astonishingly courageous way, using the kind of language, which not only proved a deep intuition of her faith-enlightened intellect, but also showed heart and feeling. Such language was used to write the following apostrophe to sin, which is full of poetic expression. It expresses anxiety and yet hope that God will prove to be more powerful than the terrifying power of evil.

Ah, wretched sin! What art thou?

Thou art naught.

For I saw that God is all things;

I saw not thee.

And when I saw that God has made all things

I saw thee not.

And when I saw that God is in all things

I saw thee not,

And when I saw that God does all things that are done, small and great,

I saw thee not.

And when I saw our Lord sit in our soul

so worshipfully,

and love and like, rule, and care for all that He has made,

I saw not thee.

Thus I am sure that thou art naught,

and all those who love thee and like thee and follow thee

and wilfully and in thee,

I am sure they shall be brought to naught with thee and endlessly confounded.

God shield us all from thee!

So be it, for God's love. (XXIII)<sup>3</sup>

This apostrophe to sin, which survived only in the short version of "The Showings" is an appeal addressed not so much to reason, but above all to heart and feeling. It might have been written during an intensive spiritual experience. The reader's attention is riveted by its opening words. Each of the five parallel statements ends with the chorus: "I saw thee not" or "I saw not thee". The latter verbal form, of long cadence, appears at the beginning and the end of the whole series of parallel statements, which proves a remarkable mastery of language. The piling of accumulated sentences strengthens the intensity of experience, and in the end gives rise to the feeling of contempt for the nothingness of sin. The final, somewhat longer choral cadence, leads to the quieter rhythm of the second part of the apostrophe. Yet in that part too, the part expressing the human state of being embroiled in

evil and sin, there is visible a similar gradual increase of content; sin ends in being "brought to naught" and "endlessly confounded". After such an outburst of emotion the final invocation to God is an expression of hope for the rescuing power of His goodness and love.

Julian does not say that sin doesn't exist. On the basis of her inner experience she merely claims that it is "nought". It doesn't have its own, independent being, but is like a parasite on good. It cannot be the final and perpetual state of the world that God would be helpless against. These thoughts bear a vivid resemblance to what in the 4<sup>th</sup> century St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote about evil<sup>4</sup>.

Seeing everything in God, the mystic does not perceive sin in the ultimate shape of the world (XXVII). Its existence is temporary and passing. Although it does deform God's image in man, it doesn't destroy it or replace it with a new and self-contained image of evil. We still remain beings created in God's image. By his suffering and death Christ defeated the greatest incorporation of evil (the longer version, XIII). Sin is neither the first nor the last characteristic of human being, because it will cease in the end, just as Jesus' suffering ended in the joy of the Resurrection (LXXV).

This is a truly paschal attitude of Julian's profound optimism, and at the same time a source of her hope that sin and evil can be overcome in creation, and all goodness salvaged. Sin is the cause of suffering, but ultimately "all will be well." (XXVII). In "The Showings" one can find a number of other traces of a composed view on evil and sin, present both in the history of salvation and in every person's life. A conviction of the unlimited goodness of God, of the necessity for human erring and its place in the plans of Divine Providence is continually finding expression in them. The reality of sin is inseparable from the freedom of creation. However, God's goodness does not remain helpless and idle.

For wickedness has been suffered to rise in opposition to that goodness; and the goodness of mercy and grace opposed that wickedness, and turned everything to goodness and honour for all who will be saved. For this is that property in God which opposes good to evil. (LIX)

In Julian's words one can sense the wisdom that is sympathetic to man, cheerful and profound. They make one think of the way St. Isaac the Syrian spoke about sin in the 7<sup>th</sup> century: "As a handful of sand thrown into the great sea, so are the sins of all flesh in comparison with the mind of God. And just as a strongly flowing spring is not obstructed by a handful of dust, so the mercy of the Creator is not stemmed by the vices of His creatures."<sup>5</sup>

Julian's understanding of sin stems from her overall view of the history of salvation. It is a consequence of God's vision and His attitude to the world. To a certain extent it resembles some of the thoughts expressed by St. Irenaeus of Lyon centuries ago. And so, sin – although in itself certainly worthy of contempt – is perceived by the English mystic as a sign of unfulfilment and immaturity in the process of the moulding of humanity. This

is why she doesn't speak of damnation, since damnation alone doesn't lead to healing and rescuing. Jesus Christ, our Saviour, cares about the healing of His children like a mother. Being hurt by sin only strengthens the caring love of God. It is a truly maternal love, no situation of predicament or suffering can leave it indifferent. If God condemned, He would leave man to his own devices. It would mean that He gives up the possibility to heal the wounds, which man had sustained as a result of his own failings. God's ways indicate something quite contrary – He heals the wounds of sin with His own love, most completely revealed in Christ. Acquaintance with the writings of the hermit from Norwich teaches this kind of calm perception of God and of the history of His mercy in people's lot.

*"All will be well"*

The intuitions of the English mystic are too important to be passed by indifferently, without deeper understanding. Julian does not exaggerate human sin. She knows that Christ is like a mother full of compassion, mercy and patience, that He can bear human sins and unfaithfulness. Let no man think that everything is lost and ruined! The author of "Showings" does not hesitate to write about the certain necessity of human falls. Indeed, she encourages understanding of this necessity:

And when we fall, quickly he raises us up with his loving embrace and his gracious touch. [...]. And yet after this he allows some of us to fall more heavily and more grievously than ever we did before, as it seems to us. And then we who are not all wise think that everything which we have undertaken was all nothing. But it is not so, for we need to fall, and we need to see it; for if we did not fall, we should not know how feeble and how wretched we are in ourselves, nor, too, should we know so completely the wonderful love of our Creator (LXI.)

Full comprehension will be possible only in the next life. Despite the presence of sin in our lives we will then see that it was not successful in its attempts to deprive us of God's love, or lessen our worth in His eyes. Experience of the fall will become the source of incessant comprehension of the inconceivable goodness of God. People's failings will not lessen His love and compassion. We are learning humility on our own, by seeing our falls and our smallness. However man must see and recognize his own fault. Without it the fall could not be a reason to arouse the feeling of humility and gratitude. God's mercy also means the fall does not become an irrevocable situation. As Julian writes in the shorter version of "The Showings": "God showed me that sin is no shame, but honour to man" (XVII). In these words we hear a distant echo of the astonishing message of the Church on the paschal night: "Adam's sin was indeed necessary! Oh, happy fault!" We are faced with great paradox: "wretched sin" she wrote about in the apostrophe can become "blessed guilt".

Neither the fall nor sin are the centre of human history. It is the person of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected, who is the very core of paschal Christian faith. In the face of the greatness of redemption the Easter Exultet praises Adam's "happy fault": "*O felix*

*culpa!*" One cannot think about sin while forgetting the patient and forgiving love of God for sinful people. The power of grace is stronger than sin. "Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more" (Rom 5:20; RSV). A Christian must not think about human guilt, even the greatest, as if God stopped loving a sinful man.

The theological vision of the Norwich hermit, close to the liturgical joyful call "*O felix culpa*," demonstrates her spiritual effort to penetrate into the Christian mystery. Her bold thinking was one of the reasons why "Showings" have not been widely recognised during past centuries. Julian confesses that she had been reflecting on the sense of the existence of sin. She asked herself the question why God, in His far-sighted wisdom, didn't prevent the possibility of sinning. It seemed to her that if He did, all would be well. Yet in one of the revelations Christ answered as follows:

Sin must needs be. [...]

But all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well. (XIII, shorter version)<sup>6</sup>

We have also been assured that Christ „very tenderly" spoke these words, with no reproaches addressed to sinful people: "So I saw that Christ has compassion on us because of sin". Every act of human compassion is a part of His compassion for all. Feminine sensitivity, previously centred on compassionate brooding on His suffering, is now transferred onto all "fellow Christians". In her experience sin emerges as nothingness, negation of being, self-annihilation of a kind. Mysterious words of Christ's promising that "All shall be well" brighten her view of the enormity of evil and sin in the world. Her thought is directed towards the work of salvation, whose power is incomparably greater than that of sin. Man is not capable of seeing through the mystery of God's inconceivable intent. He is preparing a surprise for us on the other side of life, which for now remains unknown to us. Christ assures Julian:

I will make all things well.

I shall make all things well.

I may make all things well,

and I can make all things well.

And thou shalt see thyself that all things shall be well.

(XV, shorter version)

The last sentence Julian refers not to herself, but to the whole of mankind which will be saved by the power of the Holy Trinity. God has mercy on us and manifests His compassion. He wants us to live in peace of mind. He does not want human distress. One day all those who are saved will become participants of Christ's joy and fullness of happiness. This happiness is not full yet, as long as we are not with Him, as long as the



history of this world is still happening (this thought was very dear to Origen). For many years Julian was pondering Christ's promise that He will "make all things well". She rejoices in the promise and waited for this mysterious and glorious deed of God on the last day. Her revelations did not show what that deed will be or how it will be accomplished. Human inquisitiveness is good for nothing!

At this point Julian's spiritual experience clashes with traditional Church teaching about damnation and hell. What does she mean by "All things shall be well"? How is it possible? How to reconcile the teachings about hell with the spiritual experience of God's mercy and compassion for human flaws?

And to this I had no other answer as a revelation from our Lord except this: What is impossible to you is not impossible to me. I shall preserve my word in everything, and I shall make everything well. (XXXII)

This is why one must trust the promise. Julian wants to be faithful both to Christ's word and Church's teachings. She is perpetually in the state of inner dilemma, or rather tension, suspension and waiting. Some interpreters have wondered if she can be rated among supporters of the universality of salvation. Not surprisingly, opinions differ<sup>7</sup>. She couldn't have declared a different view if she wanted to be faithful to the Church teachings. She remained in the sphere of hope that the appealing and attracting force of God's love and mercy, which reaches even into the depths of hell will triumph in the end; that all people will turn to Him of their own free will.

One shouldn't attribute to Julian the doctrine of universal salvation. However, one cannot help noticing her hope for the eventual victory of good in the whole of creation. She repeatedly stresses that in God there is no anger or will to punish – those are against His nature. He only wishes to help us and heal our will:

I saw truly that our Lord was never angry, and never will be. Because he is God, he is good, he is truth, he is love, he is peace; and his power, his wisdom, his charity and his unity do not allow him to be angry. [...] God is goodness, which cannot be angry, for God is nothing but goodness. (XLVI).

Anger as an opposite of love, goodness, peace and wisdom is not only on our human side. God perceives us as united with Christ. If he had been angry but for one instant, His anger would have annihilated our life (LXIX). In fact His "sweet eye of pity is never turned away from us, and the operation of mercy does not cease" (XLVIII). It is this mercy that will accomplish the great deed of universal healing and transfiguration, although we do not know how this will happen.

We can only hope, together with Julian, that the promise conveyed by the words "all things shall be well" will be one day fulfilled, to the great astonishment of the whole world. She admits that those words, revealed to her by Christ, became her great consolation. There is great power of inner experience concealed in this unique witness.

Its main features are spiritual sobriety, economy of words, moderation and humility. No trace of pointless curiosity! "It is God's will that you should know in general that all will be well, but it is not God's will that we should know it now except as it applies to us for the present..." (XV, shorter version). The foundation of this exceptional hope are all God's deeds already done by Him, which at the same time are an anticipation of what He will yet do to the sheer astonishment of all. "For just as the blessed Trinity created everything from nothing, just so the same blessed Trinity will make well all things that are not well"(XV).

The singularity of standpoint of this 14<sup>th</sup> century hermit stands out against a background of the folk piety of her times. It was a piety inspired by the fear of God, punishment, death and hell, not by the view of God who loves all people and all creatures. Julian often stresses the great goodness and tenderness of Christ in the process of man's development. Reference to mind and heart helped her to understand the inner content of this development in a more profound way. It is Christ himself that stimulates intellect and enlightens heart. It is He who opens the path to cognition of God, which is always partial on this earth. The goal of this cognition is to awaken the capacity of love for everything that God loves and what He does in order to save people.

The hermit of Norwich was astonished to discover God's presence in all that exists. Analogy with maternity made her connect this presence with His goodness, tenderness and subtlety. Julian's God wishes to be trusted by man, particularly when he experiences his sinfulness.

And though our earthly mother may suffer her child to perish, our heavenly mother Jesus may never suffer us who are his children to perish, for he is almighty, all wisdom and all love, and so is none but he, blessed may he be" (LXI).

These words seem to be an echo of what, centuries ago, prophet Isaiah had said: "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you" (Is 49: 15). In another place the same prophet says: "My burden since your birth, whom I have carried from your infancy. Even to your old age I am the same, even when your hair is grey I will bear you; it is I who have done this, I who will continue, and who will carry you to safety"(Is 46: 3-4).

Julian realizes very well that the immensity of human guilt may frighten and arouse a feeling of shame. Nevertheless escape from God does not lead anywhere. This is when a child-like attitude is most needed - a child who trusts its mother and turns to her for help regardless of how big its fault may be. It is precisely in this context that the contemplative of Norwich uses the phrase that seems to be a paraphrase of the liturgical Kyrie eleison. The innovation of the new version consists, among others, in that it had been formulated under the influence of sensitivity for motherly care and love of Christ: "My kind Mother, my gracious Mother, my beloved Mother, have mercy on me"(LXI). In Julian's mouth this prayer is a call for help. The sense of fall and loss of likeness to God induces her to even greater trust in Him, who, in His compassion and mercy, cares for the

lost like a loving mother. It is He who purifies and heals. "It is his office to save us, it is his glory to do it, and it is his will that we know it; for he wants us to love him sweetly and trust him meekly and greatly"(LXI).

Such are reflections of Julian of Norwich on the universality of hope for the salvation of all. Let us turn now, in search for the same topic, to a contemporary mystic.

## **ESCHATOLOGICAL SOPHIOLOGY OF THOMAS MERTON**

At one point in his life Thomas Merton derived his eschatological intuitions from reflections on the Catholic feast of the Visitation of Our Lady, "Day of Wisdom" (2 July). This truth relating to the cult of the Virgin Mary became for him a starting point for reflections of great depth. In his spiritual experience this American mystic finds the flawless primal beginning of every human being which for him constitutes a mysterious point vierge – *virginal point* – of all creation's roots in God, free of sin or fall. However, it is not only a starting point, but also goal, something like a house made of light to which all human being is to return after their pilgrimage. What the mystic discovers to his astonishment and gratitude is that the beginning finds its counterpart in the final fulfilment. At the end of the pilgrimage everything will be pure, innocent, and unblemished again. This is the basic intuition of Merton's hope for universal salvation.

### **We Are All One**

What is this "virginal point" of all being? In the very centre of humanity the American Trappist discovers the miracle of pure truth, primeval receptivity of created being, the divine spark that belongs entirely to God. It is not our property; we are not free to dispose of it as we wish. The pure and unblemished glory of Creator is reflected in the very centre of our humanity. We are utterly poor on our own. God enters our lives where, despite many falls, there still shines the pure truth of creativity and receptivity.

In this respect Merton's vision reminds me of the sophiology of Russian religious philosophers and theologians (Vladimir Soloviev, Sergius Bulgakov). He, too, develops a distinctive sophiology of creation. Every human being is, to his eyes, a reflection of divine wisdom – *Hagia Sophia* – which radiates incredible inner beauty. It is not the showy wisdom of the world, but the unblemished, quiet, inner truth of every creature made by the hand of God. Divine wisdom penetrates the whole of creation from its beginning to its end. Therefore it is not surprising that, following the great prophets of Israel – Isaiah and Hosea – Merton discovers maternal features in God, the primal source of all the purity and innocence of creation. In his reflections appears a biblical image of Wisdom "playing on the surface of his earth" (Prv 8:31) before the face of Creator. What is Divine Wisdom? The answer, included in the poem devoted to "The Holy Wisdom" (*Hagia Sophia*), is as follows:

Sophia is the mercy of God in us. She is the tenderness with which the infinitely mysterious power of pardon turns the darkness of our sins into the light of grace. She is the inexhaustible fountain of kindness, and would

almost seem to be, in herself, all mercy. So she does in us a greater work than that of Creation: the work of new being in grace, the work of pardon, the work of transformation from brightness to brightness *tamquam a Domini Spiritu*<sup>8</sup>.

This transformation of darkness into light is in itself a paschal event – *Pascha*, Passover – i.e. a passage of creation into another dimension of being. This act of transformation from "brightness to brightness", "from glory to glory", worked by "the Lord who is the Spirit" is a clear reference to Apostle Paul's words (2 Cor 3:18). Merton's vision of transformation allows one to see that everything is suffused with glory, brightness, tender goodness and the mercy of God. The very first words of the poem confirm this:

There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity and Integrity is Wisdom, the Mother of all, *Natura Naturans*<sup>9</sup>.

It is Wisdom which can be compared to sunlight: "The Sun burns in the sky like the Face of God. ... His light is diffused in the air and the light of God is diffused by *Hagia Sophia*"<sup>10</sup>. Wisdom is for everyone, without exception. There is no passivity in it whatsoever. We recognise it by its actions. It is "the candor of God's light"<sup>11</sup>, a sign of His simplicity, mercy and forgiveness.

Thus Wisdom cries out to all who will hear (*Sapientia clamat in plateis*) and she cries out particularly to the little, to the ignorant and the helpless<sup>12</sup>.

The heart of the matter is that "we do not hear mercy", "we do not hear the uncomplaining pardon"<sup>13</sup>. We do not comprehend God who "is at once Father and Mother":

As Father he stands in solitary might surrounded by darkness. As Mother His shining is diffused, embracing all His creatures with merciful tenderness and light. The Diffuse Shining of God is *Hagia Sophia*. We call her His "glory". In Sophia His power is experienced only as mercy and as love<sup>14</sup>.

At this point Merton calls on the tradition of "the recluses of fourteenth-century England", mainly Julian of Norwich, who called Jesus "our Mother"<sup>15</sup>. He adds: "It was Sophia that had awakened in their childlike hearts". He attempts to describe it in insufficient human terms:

Perhaps in a certain very primitive aspect Sophia is the unknown, the dark, the nameless *Ousia*. Perhaps she is even the Divine Nature, One in Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And perhaps she is in infinite light unmanifest, not even waiting to be known as Light. This I do not know. Out of the silence Light is spoken. We do not hear it or see it until it is spoken.<sup>16</sup>

An awareness of the boundaries of human consciousness is clearly discernible here. In the Eastern tradition this attitude is known as apophatism. How else can one speak of "the Nameless Beginning, without Beginning", which we haven't seen? We know only the manifestations of God's deeds. We multiply words without reaching the inner depths of the Unspeakable Reality. A mystic is no exception in this respect. He struggles with the words, too. *Hagia Sophia* is a Gift, God's Life shared with the creatures; it is self-sharing Love and Brightness, which transform and unify all.

Sophia is Gift, is Spirit, *Donum Dei*. She is God-given and God Himself as Gift. God is all and God reduced to Nothing: inexhaustible nothingness. *Exinanivit semetipsum*<sup>17</sup>.

The last words express kenotic wisdom showing through Christ's mystery: "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself (lit. *εαυτον εκένωσε*), taking the form of the slave..." (Ph 2: 6-7). Expressed in the language of emptiness, Paul's brilliant intuition about God who in Christ gave up His divinity, as it were, found unique expression in Merton's mystical reflections. The language of completeness suggests power, glory and richness. The language of emptiness expresses the mystery of God's coming to man through the reversed motion, not by completeness, but by emptying and self-restriction. It is the language of love and invitation to take part in the celebration of unity with God. This is why the motif of the Wedding Feast plays such an important role in Merton's poem.

For him Christ's Mother is the created being which reveals all that is hidden within Divine Sophia - which is why she can be said to be "a personal manifestation of Sophia, Who in God is *Ousia* rather than Person"; "perfect Creature, perfectly Redeemed, the Fruit of all God's great power, the perfect expression of wisdom in mercy"<sup>18</sup>. It is she who gives the Divine Logos "the crown" of His human nature.

She crowns him not with what is glorious, but with what is greater than glory: the one thing greater than glory is weakness, nothingness, poverty. She sends the infinitely Rich and Powerful One forth as poor and helpless, in His mission of inexpressible mercy, to die for us on the Cross<sup>19</sup>.

Thus once more do we turn to a kenotic vision of God's Wisdom. This is the greatest appeal to human freedom. Through reflection on the mystery of God's Wisdom as revealed in the person of Mary a mystic achieves deeper insight into the mystery of humanity and interpersonal solidarity. The figure of the sinless Mother of Christ, herself a part of the immemorial plan of Divine Wisdom, makes this view even deeper. A conviction that we are all one.<sup>20</sup> Soloviov spoke of a mysterious "all-unity" (*vseedinstvo*) of the world. Merton is more specific. He experiences this unity "suddenly", even in the crowd of people, in the very centre of a busy district in Louisville. He recognizes that all people are a sign of Divine Wisdom. He perceives the incredible beauty and shy dignity that shine through them, even though they cannot know who they really are:

[...] I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation. [...]

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are.<sup>21</sup>

Now let us go back to the basic intuition – there is something divine, pure and unblemished in human beings. Traditional Christian anthropology speaks of the image of God present in man. For a mystic man is a real and touchable icon of God, which cannot be lost. Experiencing this truth is a gift, difficult to put into words - "pure truth", "a point or spark which belongs entirely to God", a centre "which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will", "pure glory of God in us". It is precisely this centre of humanity that, according to Merton, is out of reach for sin ("untouched by sin"), not at our disposal, but instead remaining independent and indestructible in a truly divine way.

But this cannot be seen, only believed and "understood" by a peculiar gift. [...] It is, so to speak, His name written in us, as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of the sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely...<sup>22</sup>

In these reflections one may find three phrases very typical of all mystics. The untouched and "virginal point" of humanity becomes a "point of nothingness" and a symbol of extreme poverty in comparison to the Creator of all. One mustn't lose heart because of such paradoxical terminology. Our human "nothingness" is capable of receiving the whole mystery of heaven, which is present everywhere, in man and in the whole nature. The divine primal beginning of creation reveals the miracle of His Wisdom. To come into being – is to go from nothingness to being. Divine beginning connotes the constant fact of originating from the Creator. That is where the beginning is unblemished, pure and free of sin. Man is a creation conceived by God in His image. It applies to every human being with no exception. Everyone carries this divine beginning in the innermost depths of being, even though he or she may not realize it. It resembles an Orthodox theologian – Sergius Bulgakov's category of "certain saintly anamnesis", the concept of "ontological remembering", that is, ontological memory inscribed in the depths of being by the fact of originating from God.<sup>23</sup>

For Merton the truth about the beginning is at the same time the truth about the end of human history. It is connected with hope that the end of human existence will be in accordance with divine beginning, not defiled by erring created freedom. Such a

beginning is a herald and a promise of a good end. Merton refers to words of Julian of Norwich: "Sin must needs be; but all shall be well."

A certain inevitability of sin results from freedom. Sin does not thwart hope. Quite the opposite, it encourages hope that God knew what He was doing when He bestowed this dramatic gift of free decision on man. This is His "secret", which we will know only at the end of human history, when God's mercy will unreservedly shine with the ultimate coming of Christ. Hope is a "key that opens our lives" towards the good fulfilment of human history. Christ is the key and hope. Merton speaks of "a wise heart that persists in hope among contradiction". From this modern mystic's mouth we find out about wisdom that comes from the heart and wholehearted cognition. Thanks to hope and wisdom of heart Christianity recovers its universal nature. It is a religion of encouragement, trust, and overwhelming compassion.

### **Universality of Compassion**

The mystic's faith has liberating powers. He does not disrespect the question of truth. Yet he speaks of it in a way that emanates the spirit of tolerance, sympathy and understanding.

Ghandi once asked: "How can he who thinks he possesses absolute truth be fraternal?"

Let us be frank about it: the history of Christianity raises this question again and again.

[...] God has revealed himself to men in Christ, but he has revealed Himself first of all as love. Absolute truth is then grasped as love [...]. Only he who loves can be sure that he is still in contact with the truth, which is in fact too absolute to be grasped by his mind. Hence, he who holds to the gospel truth is afraid that he may lose the truth by a failure of love, not by a failure of knowledge. In that case he is humble, and therefore he is wise<sup>24</sup>.

Those words are a meaningful indication of the indissoluble bond between truth and love. Christ's figure appears in them as an impersonation of truth and love. True wisdom goes together with humility and consideration. Truth is too great for us to comprehend with our minds. In his further words this modern mystic formulates a warning of the temptation of imposing one's own limited truth on others.

Knowledge expands a man like a balloon, and gives him a precarious wholeness in which he thinks that he holds himself all the dimensions of a truth the totality of which is denied to others. ... How can he "love" others, he thinks, except by imposing on them the truth which they would otherwise insult and neglect? This is temptation.<sup>25</sup>

Merton returned to the same subject once more in *The Asian Journal*. He reminded us that the cultivation of inner awareness involves a danger of self-deception. Our inner, subjective sense may easily turn out to be degeneration. One must not make it an ultimate criterion of judgment.

In other words, the standard temptation of religious people is to cultivate an inner sense of rightness and make this subjective feeling the final test of everything. As long as this feeling of rightness remains with them, they will do anything under the sun. But this inner feeling (as Auschwitz and the Eichmann case have shown) can coexist with the ultimate in human corruption.<sup>26</sup>

In the name of propagated watchwords one may perform actions that are inhuman to the highest degree. It follows that subjective process of getting to know oneself has to be continually confronted not only with judgment of one's own conscience, but also with the experience and judgment of others. Truth and love are inseparable. We need others so that we are not deceived by our sense of being in the right.

While discovering unity and solidarity with all people, mystics opt for the side of compassion and mercy. Capacity for compassion for others is a crucial quality in the ethos of universal kindness and positively understood tolerance. Mystics are able to learn compassion. They are not ashamed of this lesson, which is particularly evident in Merton's case. For two years preceding his death he had kept a lively correspondence with Rosemary Radford Ruether, a writer and a professor of theology.<sup>27</sup> In his letter of July 17, 1967 he wrote her about poverty as "the eschatological lot" and about the illusory promises of eliminating poverty in the world that are being made. Since this poverty cannot be overcome, he perceives yet another eschatological perspective: "to **destroy the wicked society that is so full of contradictions**"<sup>28</sup>. In the same letter Merton goes on to write:

**But the thing is, I think, to realize that this country is under judgment (it is Assyria, no?), and no matter where we go or what we do, we remain Assyrians who are under judgment. I think we have to start from there. Do you agree? And if so, what is it? What does it mean? The Nineties [the people of Nineveh – W.H.] fixed it by putting hairshirts on everyone including the cats and dogs. Is this practical? (Purely rhetorical question)**<sup>29</sup>.

Three days later, in her letter of July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1967 Rosemary reacts to this startling directive: **"Destroy the evil society? or redeem the evil society? I am one of those mad Origenists who believe that when God is all in all, even the last enemy Satan will be redeemed. I believe in giving everyone, even the dogs, not hair shirts (which they already have), but flower power, baby"**.<sup>30</sup>

In further correspondence Merton did not refer to these words of Rosemary. They were consistent with his own spiritual sensitivity. "Great compassion" he mentions at the



beginning of *The Asian Journal*<sup>31</sup> did not become his share until his journey to Asia, when he was standing in front of the Buddha statues carved in rock. One of them presented a seated Buddha in lotus position – one hand pointing to the ground and holding a begging bowl in the other.

Looking at these figures I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things, and an inner clearness, clarity, as in exploding from the rocks themselves, became evident and obvious. [...] Everything is compassion. [...] I know and have seen what I was obscurely looking for<sup>32</sup>.

In the talk he delivered in Bangkok on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1968, the day of his unexpected death, Merton explained this discovery as follows:

The begging bowl of the Buddha represents [...] the ultimate theological root of the belief not just in a right to beg, but in openness to the gifts of all beings as an expression of the interdependence of all beings [...] which are all involved in one another<sup>33</sup>.

Christian teaching about salvation can be experienced and passed on in spirit of dialogue with other religions. However, first of all we have to acknowledge the universality of God's saving power and respect it in other people's distinctiveness. Every religion is a way to salvation. All together, they are, each in its way, mediators in attaining God and salvation. In such an approach Christian identity is not harmed in the least. What is more, it becomes open, tolerant and capable of dialogue. For Christians Christ is the most distinct sign of God's universal saving will, acting through all creation, in all places and at all times. He achieves it by means of the inspiring and transforming power of the Holy Spirit, who incessantly prompts people to search for goodness, beauty, and truth. Christians bear witness to their faith and at the same time ought to stay open to the witness of others. In this way it is possible to discover new, more complete, features of the invisible face of God.

Doesn't such dialogue serve a deeper experiencing of one's own religious life? The Second Vatican Council instructs that "by His incarnation the Son of God united himself in some fashion with every man", and that "the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery"<sup>34</sup>.

None of us can appropriate the gift of salvation to himself, his own Church, or his own religion. It is a truly sovereign and divine gift. Although the teachings of the Second Vatican Council concerning various spheres of being a part of God's People do not suggest that all ways to salvation are equal, they present an opportunity to view this question in a manner that is free of confessional narrowing and exclusiveness. In comparison with the past it is a great breakthrough in thinking, which we must not overlook. In the conclusion of the lecture he gave on the day of his death Merton said:

And I believe that by openness to Buddhism, to Hinduism, and to these great Asian traditions we stand a wonderful chance of learning more about the potentiality of our own traditions, because they have gone, from the natural point of view, so much deeper into this than we have. The combination of the natural techniques and the graces and the other things that have been manifested in Asia and the Christian liberty of the gospel should bring us all at last to that full and transcendent liberty which is beyond mere cultural differences and mere externals – and mere this or that<sup>35</sup>.

The hope for the salvation of all demands an open, tolerant identity, full of understanding for others. Open identity serves best interpersonal communication. The deepest form of communication does not take place on a verbal level. It goes beyond the area of words and concepts; it is a communion of persons, a community where there is plenty of place for otherness and diversity. Authentic communication is communicating on the deepest level of awareness, both human and religious. It requires spiritual maturity without which understanding of identity will remain superfluous and will not influence the shaping of relations between people in any significant way.

An exclusiveness in understanding salvation and the authenticity of one's own religion is one of the motives leading to most obstinate persistence in narrow and closed religious identity. It is also one of the main sources of the historical phenomenon of intolerance and modern fundamentalism.

### **IS IT WORTH READING MYSTICS TODAY?**

The mystics' faith is a liberating one. They are capable of descending into the depths of human misery and destitution; that is why they speak about nothingness. At the same time they detect in man a fragment of a great wholeness; they discover unity and solidarity with all people. They understand that human tragedy is the tragedy of God; that is where they learn compassion and mercy. In Merton's case this lesson of compassion is particularly evident. In a way he married it, just like St. Francis married poverty.

Nevertheless, going back to the great, and often forgotten, witnesses of the past is certainly worthwhile. Julian of Norwich, a woman blessed with extraordinary religious intuition and subtlety of feeling was able to fathom the greatest truths of the Christian religion intuitively. She remained the child of her times, and country, solemn and practical, not without a sense of humour, great of heart and mind. While perusing pages of her writings, I had an impression that today we all need such witness and such wisdom of a loving, intelligent, and sensitive heart. Religious faith is a matter concerning the whole man. It cannot be reduced to the area of reason alone, just as, on the other hand, it cannot involve only feelings and emotions. A healthy religiousness requires a challenging synthesis of mind and heart. Julian's witness helps us to understand in what that harmonious synthesis of man's greatest spiritual endowments consists. It is true that at present both religion of the heart and religion of the mind are equally threatened by modern scepticism, indifferentism and secularism. Many people suppose that neither the

heart nor the mind have anything to say in matters of faith. One must not remain indifferent to this phenomenon. Nowadays Christianity demands an effort at deepening and expressing anew that in it which is most bold and puzzling. This must not happen only on the level of discursive reasoning. A Christian appreciates mind as God's gift, but does not worship it.

Mystics are a good case in point to illustrate that the powers of the human intellect are not based only on the logic of reasoning. Rather to penetrate into the mysteries of faith is a spiritual capability. It is not by chance that in Julian's writings there often appears a phrase that she had found an answer to her question "in her understanding", thanks to the "eyes of spirit", in spiritual contemplation, inseparable from the wisdom of heart. This wisdom requires an ability to listen, a sensitivity to goodness and beauty.

Other things we can learn from the mystics today are the sense of fraternity and solidarity with all people, as well as compassion for their misery and bringing them help. Their faith has become a "wisdom of heart". At the same time it is hope which teaches cheerful optimism in accepting life and reaching out to meet the Invisible.

Is it worth reading the mystics? A careful reading of the writings of Julian of Norwich and Thomas Merton makes it clear that hope for salvation of all was a familiar theme for them. Merton found it in his own unique way, by means of a sophiological view of the history of creation. A good beginning heralds a good end - not only in the Mother of Christ, but also in all people. It is hope that in the mystery, which is hidden from us, there will shine "an eternally new beginning that has no end". He, who is the God of Beginning, is also the God of hope and mercy, more powerful than fragile human hope.

Mystics like Julian of Norwich and Thomas Merton hope for universal salvation. Many believers will ask: If both good and evil people are finally to be saved, what is the real sense of the whole drama of human history? What is the sense of being righteous, of suffering, prayer, ascetic labour? A possible answer seems to be that the experience of God as love teaches us a sort of eschatological disinterestedness. If you do good, do it not for the sake of any future reward. Such self-seeking spiritual attitude may take you away from God and transform you into a "transcendental egoist". When you truly do good you will experience the love and mercy of God. You will not remain unnoticed.

Deep intuition of faith coupled with her feminine sensitivity allowed Julian of Norwich to distinguish motherly features in the love of Christ, the Saviour of all. It is from this motherly love which God has for people that there arises hope that all the lost ultimately will be rescued. God isn't governed by the logic of male justice, which demands infinite satisfaction, but above all by the logic of love, mercy and caring. Based on earthly experiences we comprehend this divine logic by means of analogy with the love a mother bestows on her own child. Thus it is easier to perceive that human failings only serve to make God's motherly care and love even greater. This message is particularly distinct in the writings of the medieval English writer.

One of Jesus' eight blessings in the Sermon on the Mount seems to be particularly important in our reflections: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Mt 5:7). Blessing is bestowed on those who are merciful to others. To scandalized Pharisees, who don't understand how the Teacher can eat together with tax collectors and sinners, He says: "Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'" (Mt 9:13). Those very words were repeated in the answer He gave to reproaching Pharisees, indignant at the sight of hungry disciples who began to pick grain and eat on the Sabbath (cf. Mt 12:7). The unforgiving debtor from Jesus' parable is punished: "Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?" (Mt 18:33). Mercy appears in the Gospel as a pedagogical rule of universal use. As Luke notes Jesus' words: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36), a human merciful attitude is an emulation of God's conduct. This thought had been uniquely expressed already in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in the writings of St. Isaac the Syrian.

Mystics are on the side of mercy. They are not frightened by the abyss of the fall. Their religion is a religion of forgiveness and reconciliation. They are alien to the hellish scenes of Dante's other world, and his appeal to give up all hope (*Lasciate ogni speranza*). They would not agree with the doctrine of eternal hell. They become advocates of hope, which opens the road to noble illumination and the most precious human initiation possible on this earth. Perhaps this is why authentic mysticism can construct bridges of understanding and harmonious co-existence between religions. It is ecumenical and mystagogical by nature. That is why St. Isaac the Syrian in the East, and Julian of Norwich and Thomas Merton in the West are so dear and close.

## NOTES

1 A modified version of a paper published in: „Studia Mertoniana" 2: Collected Papers of the First Merton Conference in Poland, Lublin, Oct. 24-27, 2002, ed. by Krzysztof Bielawski, Cracow 2003, pp. 111-134. Transl. by Anna Muranty and Dr. Paul M. Pearson.

2 Julian of Norwich. *Showings*. Translated from the critical text with an introduction by E. Colledge, OSA and James Walsh SJ, 1987, pp. 123-170 (The Short Text), pp. 173-343 (The Long Text). The short version consists of 25 chapters, the long, 86. Numbers of particular chapters of either version quoted will be given in brackets.

3 *A Shewing of God's Love: The Shorter Version of Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love*, ed. Sr. A. M. Reynolds, CP. London 1958.

4 Cf. Morwena Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*, Oxford 2000, pp. 86-89; W. Hryniewicz. *Nadzieja uczy inaczej (Hope Teaches Otherwise)*, Warsaw, 2003, pp. 142-154.

5 *Homily 51*, in: *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Trans. The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Mass. 1984, p. 244.

6 XIII. The phrase „All shall be well" appears also in other chapters (XIV, XV, XVI) of the shorter version.

7 R. Llewelyn. *With Pity not with Blame. The Spirituality of Julian of Norwich and the Cloud of Unknowing for Today*, London 1982; idem, *Love Bade me Welcome*. London 1984; Grace M. Jantzen. *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*. London 1987, fourth impression 1994, pp.178-179.

8 Thomas Merton. *Hagia Sophia*, in: *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*. New York 1977, p. 369.

9 Ibidem, p. 363.

10 Ibid. 366.

11 Ibid. 365.

12 Ibid. 364.

13 Ibid. 365.

14 Ibid. 367.

15 In the Middle Ages it can be seen particularly with Cistercian abbots (St. Bernard, Gueric d'Igny, Isaac de Stella), who in this manner understood their duty towards the monastic community entrusted to them. Cf. C. Walker Bynum. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Los Angeles-London 1982. More on this subject in: W. Hryniewicz. *Chrzescijanstwo nadziei. Przyszłosc wiary i duchowosci chrzescijanskiej (Christianity of Hope. The Future of Christian Faith and Spirituality)*. Cracow 2002, pp. 299-303.

16 *Hagia Sofia*, p. 367.

17 Ibid., p. 368.

18 Ibid., p. 370.

19 Ibid., p. 370. See also S. McCaslin, *Merton and „Hagia Sophia" (Holy Wisdom)* in: *Merton and Hesychasm. The Prayer of the Heart*, ed. by B. Dieker and J. Montaldo, Louisville, Kentucky: Fons vitae, 2004, pp. 235-254.

20 This conviction is also visible in the reflections of a contemporary theologian, Leonardo Boff (*Welche Hoffnung haben wir?* "Kirche In" 16: 2002 No. 9, p. 48) about hope: "*Alles hängt mit allem zusammen und wir alle sind unter- und voneinander abhängig*". Since we are connected with everyone and everything, even a small gesture may cause a great process of change in human history.

21 Thomas Merton *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, New York: Image Books, 1968, pp. 156, 158.

22 Ibid., p. 158.

23 S. Bulgakov. *Nevesta Agnca. O bogochelovechestve*, chast' III. Paris 1945, p. 574: "ontologicheskoe vospominanie", "nekij sviashchennyj anamnezis".

24 *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, p. 44.

25 Ibid.

26 Th. Merton, *The Asian Journal*, London 1974, p. 352.

27 Cf. *At Home in the World. The Letters of Thomas Merton & Rosemary Radford Ruether*, ed. Mary Tardiff, OP, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1995.

28 Ibidem, p. 83.

29 Ibidem, pp. 84-85.

30 Ibidem, p. 86.

31 *The Asian Journal*, p. 4: "And found also the great compassion, mahakaruna".

32 *The Other Side of the Mountain*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1999, p. 323.

33 *The Asian Journal*, pp. 341-42.

34 *Gaudium et spes*, 22 in: *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by W. M. Abbott, S.J. and J. Gallagher. London-Dublin-Melbourne 1967, pp. 220-221, 222.

35 *The Asian Journal*, p. 343.

## **Chapter IX**

# **THE MYSTERY OF UNITY AMIDST DIVISION<sup>1</sup>**

The split and the perpetuation of the state of schism is one of the most dramatic phenomena in the history of Christianity. Division means impoverishment for each side. The course of this division is characterized by antagonisms and conflicts, by mutual alienation, distrust, or even hostility and hatred. Division destroys a vital exchange of spiritual values, deprives Christians of the possibility to complement each other and correct what is one-sided and overgrown. The mystery of the Church's division is not easy to delve into and to account for. Is it simply a case of human sin and human frailty? Are we going to reach a fuller and more lasting unity through the experience of division? Is there any kind of providential and mysterious meaning in historical divisions? How deep is the Church's division? Does the historical fact of division affect the ontological unity of the Church? Do more things divide or unite us?

In order to answer such questions we must first of all realize that between our Churches the already exists a deep ontological unity, which constantly calls us to overcome the visible results of division.

## **THE ALREADY EXISTING ONTOLOGICAL UNITY**

Many Christians painfully experience the division in the Church. No doubt there is something tragic in it, although it concerns primarily the canonical and institutional dimension of Christian existence. It remains somehow on the surface of church life, without reaching the inner ontological depth of its mystery. Having in mind the fact of division in the Church, we speak sometimes symbolically about Christ's torn tunic. And rightly so. The robe is something exterior with regard to one's body. Division does not reach the deep dimensions of the Church. It remains on its visible surface. One has to make a clear distinction between the ontological unity of the Church and its empirical or visible unity. The former is the most fundamental one. The latter is, so to speak, secondary or derived. The ontological or meta-empiric unity of the Church has never been destroyed. The divided Church is still the only Church of the risen Lord in the history of humanity. Any harm done to mutual relations or even total breaking of them do not destroy the deepest nature of God's gift. They mean only a breaking of the visible ties of communion between Christians. The Church remains one in its ontological or meta-empiric dimension. The division affects its visible historical reality so that communion and brotherhood do not find their visible expression. Human weakness and sinfulness overshadow the full dimensions of the divine-human mystery of the Church.

The lack of visible communion remains only a historical event; it does not destroy the ontological unity of the Church. An ideal and all-embracing unity has never been achieved in the history of Christianity but ontological unity can persist even amidst splits and divisions. Its divine core has never been broken and this remains a bright and shining reality even amidst an imperfect communion of the Churches. In other words, the one and unique Church of Christ subsists in single denominational Churches. None of those, however, should claim to be exclusively identical with the Church of Christ. The whole remains present in the fragment which in turn is always related to this whole. No Church is allowed to ascribe exclusively to itself the full ecclesiality to disadvantage of the other Churches.

The Church in its ontological depth remains one and undivided. Despite the existing divisions, Christians profess in the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed that there is but one Church - holy, Catholic and apostolic. This basic unity has never been entirely lost, it is a gift of God. Division never reaches the innermost roots of the Church's unity. Human sin has no the power to destroy the reality which comes from God Himself and which He sustains. There is only one Church of God - the Church of Christ and His Spirit. The risen Lord of history is its Head. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..." (1 Cor 12:13; RSV). The unity with which God endowed the Church is an ontological reality, rooted in the mystery of the divine life itself. That is why divisions contradict the internal nature of the Church and are contrary to Christ's will.

The belief that the Church has been "one, holy, Catholic and apostolic" throughout the ages constitutes the permanent source of ecumenical efforts at overcoming the division of Christianity. The salvation, of which God Himself is the author, will continue until the end of times. God's promise that the Church cannot be destroyed (cf. Mt 16:18; 28:20) is the foundation of hope that no division within Christianity will ever manage to disrupt the ontological unity of the Church. As the work of God, the Church cannot stop being the only one, since it is kept up by the power of the risen Christ and His Spirit. As God is one, His Church remains by its nature the only one as well. Divisions obscure, impair and distort its visible form; they are not able, however, to destroy the already existing ontological unity of its sacramental nature.

The problem of unity we seek appears only on the phenomenal or visible level. As God's gift, the unity of the Church is stronger than any divisions. It does not need to be restored in the ontological dimension. Ecumenical efforts consist, first, in discovering the already existing ontological unity given once and for all by God in the divided Christianity, and, second, in making that unity visible through the restoration of the full ecclesiastical and eucharistic communion. Both these moments are inseparable from each other. Making the visible unity real through restoring the full eucharistic communion is impossible without a previous recognition of the Church's ontological unity in the divided Christianity. The imperative to strive for the visible unity presupposes the belief in the imperishable gift of unity coming from God Himself. The already existing ontological unity of the Church demands a fuller visible realization. This need is incessantly stimulated by the feeling of guilt and pain because of the division of Christianity. It is also urged by an awareness that more united Christianity would be more credible in the eyes of the world.



In comparison with the eschatological Kingdom of God the Church is an initial and provisional reality. It initiates in human history an eschatological fulfillment which by its very nature transcends history. The earthly "form of this world is passing away" (cf. 1 Cor 7:31). So does also the terrestrial shape of the Church. As a historical and provisional reality, the Church is always on the way towards its eschatological fullness. It anticipates its future fulfillment. In a similar way the unity of the Church remains only an anticipation, an icon of the eschatological unity in the Kingdom of God, where humanity will exist fully in the image of God who is love (cf. 1 Jn 4: 8.16). The fully accomplished unity of the Church is therefore, to a greater degree, a future unity. Its eschatological model is the unity of the Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity. In the course of human history only some distant anticipations, i.e. iconic realities of the future unity in God can be realized. We are urged to do it by the words of Christ: "May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (Jn 17: 21; JB). The authority of Christ's prayer is the highest obligation.

Throughout centuries our Churches have developed different ways of justifying theologically the need for separation. In the Early Church it was motivated by the fact of falling away of some groups from the faith in Christ as the true God and Lord, and the true Man. Later divisions clearly diverged from this christological and trinitarian centre of the Christian faith. To justify a division made on account of various historical circumstances, the opposite side was most often accused of distorting the true faith. The history of Christianity abounds in apologetic and confessional tendencies of that kind. This approach is not able to discover the one Church of Christ in a divided Christianity. Each side would rather be inclined to see the *Una Sancta* exclusively in its own community. This again results in a tendency to build walls and not bridges, to become self-centered and develop one's own confessional traditions.

## **TOWARDS A MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF THE IDENTITY OF**

### **FAITH AND THE SACRAMENTS**

The Second Vatican Council in its *Decree on Ecumenism* assumes that, in spite of a bad past record in mutual relations, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church have preserved the same faith. The basic unity in faith has never been destroyed. One must first overcome the existing dogmatic differences and eliminate misunderstandings in order to acknowledge each other as "Sister Church". The ecclesiology of Sister Churches respects the right to a legitimate diversity<sup>2</sup>. Thanks to that diversity the Churches can complement and enrich each other. The fundamental faith living in them is the same.

The Orthodox frequently emphasize that the apostolic faith was reflected in the tradition of the undivided Church of the first millennium. It is worth recalling, however, that even in that period of history there was no full agreement in all doctrinal and practical matters. Already then the Christian East did not share some exaggerated tendencies in the Roman way of understanding the primacy of the Pope. The main differences concerning the way and time of administering the sacraments of Christian initiation also go back to the period

when the Eastern and Western Churches were still in communion. That was a time of the common ecumenical councils and common profession of the apostolic faith. Both sides believed that it was one and the same faith uniting them, and that the sacraments administered in both Churches were the sacraments of Christ and Holy Spirit.

This implies that the already then existing differences in doctrine and practice were not considered a sufficient reason for a separation. They were thought to be compatible with the unity of the common faith. It was, however, a time when a deep awareness of the transcendental character of the mysteries of faith and the apophatic character of theological statements still allowed for a legitimate diversity and a sound pluralism within the Church. The tendency to identify the faith and its formulations with a specific theology and philosophy had appeared much later.

Both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church believe in the same God and Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour acting by the power of the Holy Spirit for the salvation of all. The Orthodox and the Catholics agree in confessing the basic revealed truths contained in the Holy Scripture, in the early symbols of faith (especially in that of Nicaea-Constantinople, which is the confession of faith of the undivided Church), and in the consonant faith of the Church Fathers expressed above all in the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. The role of these fundamental truths of the faith is well expressed in the very idea of the "hierarchy of truths"<sup>3</sup>. This by no means signifies an arbitrary selection of certain truths at the cost of others, but rather the principle of interpreting the faith of the Church in full awareness of the importance of differentiation in its very content.

When Churches share the same faith in all fundamental Christian truths, then the identity of faith may go well with a diversity of theological views and formulations. One Church does not need to accept all the doctrinal views specific to the other one. It will be enough to consider them a possible or acceptable expression of one and the same faith. Besides all differences have to be interpreted in the context of what is common and most fundamental. If our Churches were converted to each other sincerely, it would be possible to say together with St. Cyprian of Carthage: "One can think differently, preserving the right of communion", *licet diversum sentire, salvo iure communionis*.<sup>4</sup> This is possible because the Churches wish to communicate the same intention of faith - the intention to do what the Church should do for the salvation of the world.

The Churches should give up their maximalistic claims. An ecumenism based on the idea of simply returning to the position of one of the partners of the dialogue is bound to fail. The lasting reunion cannot consist in one Church going back to the other and being absorbed by it. It is possible only through an act of recognizing each other as a Sister Church within the communion of the Churches which serve people and give witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The communion of the Churches should be based on the most elementary and fundamental formulations of the faith. An example in this respect has been given by the early Christian confessions of faith, focused on the person of Christ. He is the personal truth to all Christians, the truth shared by all Christian Churches. The communion of the Churches requires that each one of them should acknowledge the

fundamental identity of faith in a reconciled diversity of views and practices. Mutual acceptance would open up the way for the exchange of charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, given by the Lord of history to each Church. This sort of mutual interpenetration of the charismatic gifts (*perichoresis ton charismáton*) is a crucial condition of the Christian ecclesiology of communion. Unity is possible. It should be based on the most necessary truths: "*in necessariis unitas*".<sup>5</sup>

## **THE HOPE TO OVERCOME THE SCHISM BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

The Christian East and West began to fall away from each other in the long process of mutual alienation which lasted entire centuries.<sup>6</sup> It was first of all a process involving the disintegration of a common tradition and also the absolutization of individual local traditions. The basic ecclesiological differences had become more and more conspicuously outlined. In that process not only theological, but also cultural and political motives played an important role. The spirit of exclusiveness had an extremely strong impact on the history of mutual relations. This led to the lack of understanding for different elements of the other's traditions as well as to the disappearance of tolerance. Each often showed a tendency to ascribe an absolute and universal value to its own traditions. Mutual cultural isolation and the lack of a vivid exchange of thoughts fostered that process. The Byzantines condemned Latin customs as contrary to the spirit of true Christianity. The Latins did the same, especially after the conquest and brutal sack of Constantinople in 1204. They demanded that the East should accept the Roman doctrine of the papal primacy and liturgical rites. In this way the centuries old split and division in Christianity were brought to their tragic dimensions and intensified psychologically in the minds and hearts of believers.

Today we have learnt to think more ecumenically. Not only everything which unites, but also that which diversifies can be of a charismatic nature. Would it be too bold to think that the division of the Church has been a difficult, painful pedagogy in order to protect the Church from an impoverishing uniformity? Does not this reflect a kind of the providential meaning of the schism? This does not, however, change the fact that the division, because of its negative consequences, is primarily a heresy of life, a lack of spiritual culture, an existential opposition to the commandment to love one another. Every Christian has to overcome the state of the inner division and separation first in oneself.

The order of the human world is not only fragile and transient but also heavy, ponderous and contrary to the breath of God's Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life. The weight of this situation on the human level, affects also the Church so that often it only reluctantly receives the Spirit's inspirations. There are situations in which a gesture of some prophetic impatience is needed, which would be a protest against the situation of the permanent division within the Church. Such an act happened precisely in the case of Vladimir Soloviov's intercommunion, when he confessed and received the Holy Communion from the hands of a Greek-Catholic priest, Nicolai Tolstoi (February 19, 1896).<sup>7</sup> It was not an act of conversion to Catholicism, but rather an expression of his

religious doubts about the empirical reality of both divided Churches. He discovered that their sacramental reality was incomparably more important than historical quarrels and divisions. This resulted from the conviction that the ontological and mystical unity of the two separated Churches had not been destroyed in its deepest nature. There was, in this exceptional act, something of a prophetic impatience and protest against the schism between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. One can see in it a bold personal judgment of the existing Church reality – a judgment dictated by Soloviov's conscience. Such an act was obviously not devoid of paradox and hence was subject to misunderstandings.<sup>8</sup>

A brief mention in this context should also be made of the inspired pages which were written more than 60 years ago by Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, one of the most perspicacious Orthodox theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote that the division of the Church did not reach deep because "the Church remained one in its sacramental life".<sup>9</sup> This applies specifically to the Orthodoxy and Catholicism. The division in the canonical and dogmatic sphere cannot destroy the true reality of the sacramental life in both Churches, especially the celebration of the Eucharist. It is generally believed that agreement in the dogmatic teaching is a prior condition for the reunion in the sacramental life. Bulgakov did not hesitate to deny this view. According to him, one must look for the ways of overcoming any dogmatic divergence in the already existing unity of sacramental life.

Why not to seek to overcome doctrinal heresy through overcoming *the heresy of life*, which is the division? Don't contemporary Christians sin by not listening to a universal Eucharistic call and by not following it, preoccupied as they are with their passions and divisions?<sup>10</sup>

The way to reunion of Catholicism and Orthodoxy leads through an active participation in the sacraments. One has to be open to the breath of the Holy Spirit which surpasses all divisions and shows the unity which already exists. So far the Churches have not been brave enough to take that step. They have not managed to forget their past and to seek together a new future.

The way towards the reunion of the East and the West does not lead through the Union of Florence or through tournaments between theologians, but through a reunion before the altar.<sup>11</sup>

In the other words, reunion on the dogmatic level may result from reunion in the sacraments. The unity which already exists, forms the sufficient basis for it. History has deeply furrowed the soil of our Sister Churches already. Some new experiences have been gained. We live no longer in the period of the dominating tendencies to remain in mutual separation of particular denominations. The age of ecumenism has implanted a strong desire for reconciliation and reunion. Among the new historical experiences there begins to appear a new face of the Christian world. More and more we feel the need for a new style of being a Christian today. We are ready to say that our divisions do not reach to heaven. We are more and more conscious that incomparably more unites than divides us. We begin to cherish unity as the gift of Christ and His Spirit. With more and more

understanding we repeat the prayer of St. Basil the Great from his Eucharistic prayer (*anaphora*): "Put an end to schisms of the Churches, O Lord!", *Pauson ta schismata ton ekklesiōn*. This prayer coming to us through centuries is only an echo of the prayer of Jesus himself shortly before His death and resurrection. We are witnesses of the growing force of mutual intercession and of ecumenical *epiclesis* invoking the Holy Spirit to come down on spiritual spaces of Christianity and on its striving for unity, as the same Spirit comes down on the Eucharistic gifts and changes them into the greatest gift of the glorified Christ.

The ultimate source of Christian unity is the Divine Trinity acting in the history of humankind and communicating divine life to all. The earliest Christian confession of faith was expressed in the conviction that God had raised Jesus from the dead and sent His own Spirit. Thus at the very core of the Christian unity there are Easter and Pentecost, the proclamation of the resurrection of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These are the deepest realities which build our unity despite all institutional and canonical divisions. The time of the Church is the New Covenant brought about by Christ's death and resurrection, the new epoch of the presence and action of God's Spirit. This is the presupposition for all the rest, the criterion of the very essence of Christianity.

The real danger seems to be that we are trying too much to create unity to our own image and likeness, instead of accepting it as God's gift already existing. We cannot create unity, but only find ways of expressing it in a visible way. The unity grows out of the discovery that we share a common experience of the risen Christ acting through the power of the Holy Spirit. This paschal experience initiated already in the Baptism is our common bond, a common reliance on life, forgiveness and unity which come from God himself.

Uniformity is not only unfeasible but also wrong theologically. It would result only in a new schism. That is why each concern for unity must respect its necessary and legitimate diversity. The diversity is as crucial for the unity as it is for a living body. Perhaps one of the main reasons for schism and divisions in the Church have been the attempts to enforce a rigid and too narrow unity. Unity can never be imposed from above. It has to grow out from the very depth of the Church's consciousness. The lesson of historical "uniatism" may be very significant also in this respect.

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To end our reflections let us recall the words of an ancient alternative version of the beginning of the Lord's prayer: "Father, let your Holy Spirit come down upon us and cleanse us!" This parallel invocation replacing the words "Your Kingdom come" in the Gospel of St. Luke (11:2) has a very clear pneumatological content. It certainly deserves to be restored to the living consciousness of our Churches. It is not only a prayer asking for purification, but also for the transformation of our lives. It expresses the great confidence in the transforming and uniting power of the Spirit, the Creator and the Giver of life who renews the face of the earth.

## NOTES

1 An abbreviated and improved version of a paper read during an International Seminar "Millennium of the Russian Church" in Joensuu and Hainävesi, Finland, September 22-24, 1988, published in: "Roczniki Teologiczne" 41 (1994) No. 7, pp. 19-28.

2 Cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, No. 17. See also No. 14.

3 Ibid., No. 11. See my article: *La hiérarchie des vérités. Implications œcuméniques d'une idée chrétienne*. „Irénikon" 51 (1978) No. 4, pp. 470-491.

4 CSEL 3/1, p. 435. This was a statement made by St. Cyprian at the synod of Carthage, reported so by St. Augustine (*De bapt.* III, 3, 5: PL 43, pp. 141-142).

5 Cf. Ac 15:28.

6 See Y. Congar, *Neuf cents ans après. Notes sur le "schisme oriental"*, Chevetogne 1954; English translation: *After Nine Hundred Years. The Background of the Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches*, New York, 1959.

7 Cf. A. Walicki, *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska (Russia, Catholicism and the Polish Question)*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 183, 232.

8 A Polish Orthodox theologian, J. Klinger (+1976) tried to draw attention to this fact. See his book: *O istocie prawosławia. Wybor pism [On the Nature of Orthodoxy. Selection of Writings]*. Warsaw 1983, pp. 291-294.

9 *U kladezja Iakovlia (Jo 4: 23). O real'nom edinstve razdelennoj Cerkvi v vere, molitve i tainstvakh*. [At the Jacob's Well: On the Real Unity of the Divided Church in Faith, Prayer and Sacraments]. In: *Christianskoe vozsoedinenie. Ekumenicheskaja problema v pravoslavnom soznanii [Christian Reunion: The Ecumenical Problem in Orthodox Awareness]*, Paris 1933, pp. 9-32, here p. 29.

10 Ibid., p. 31. Underlined by the Author himself.

11 Ibid.

## Chapter X

### **Towards A Paschal Christianity<sup>1</sup>**

The Christian faith, lived and experienced through the centuries can assume a variety of "incarnations", "inculturations" and interpretations. In this paper, my attention will be directed to a systematic reflection on the very foundations of Christian life and spirituality. This kind of reflection may be called christianology. I am convinced that the future belongs to a truly paschal vision of Christianity and its spirituality of transfiguration. Such spirituality must take into account more seriously the Christian message of the resurrection of Christ. What ultimately counts is not refusal, abnegation, suffering, destruction or death, but transfiguration, a new life, a new reality. What we need is a paschal christianology based on the central truths of the Christian faith. Our Christianity should become a more paschal one. Are we able to discern the main features of such spirituality? How to understand its paschal sources, especially in relation to anthropology?

To answer these questions, we must first take a fresh look at the spiritual challenge of our times, and meditate on the destiny of human existence. In this way, I hope, one can revive the vision of a Christianity more sensitive to the light of the Resurrection. It is not possible to outline all the possible aspects of a paschal christianology in this paper.

The choice is inevitable. In this sense, my presentation will have a subjective character depending on a personal theological sensitivity, predilection and predisposition.

## **THE SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE OF OUR TIMES**

Many people suffer today from a loss of meaning in their lives. They are unable to tolerate feelings of loneliness and inner emptiness. Human life deprived of a positive orientation, is exposed to the danger of discouragement, indifference, nihilism, cynicism and despair. The rhythm of our life undergoes constant acceleration. We live in a world of rapid urbanization, industrialization and the contamination of our natural environment. The psychological resistance of people has diminished considerably. Success, efficacy and profit dominate everyday life. Metaphysical questions are discarded or simply forgotten.

It is not enough to heal the manifestations of the disease. One has to look for the roots of the illness itself. Some describe this as an overgrowth of mobility, a "kinetic utopia" understood as "being-towards-movement" (*Sein-zur-Bewegung*)<sup>2</sup>. It is, in fact, the continuous pressure to increase the ability to surpass existing achievements and possibilities. Mobility demands a continuously accelerated rhythm of movement. Paradoxically, this pressure of success produces only more fatigue with life, disenchantment with progress, hopelessness and the feeling of approaching catastrophe. What was meant to be a blessing often reveals itself as a malediction.



In this situation, there resounds an appeal for a new rhythm of life, for appeasement, self-limitation and reflection. The "disease" of activity and mobility requires a proper antidote, a new way of living, tranquility, self-control and the ability to journey to the inner self. Some speak of the need for "euro-taoism" i.e. seeking medication in the spirituality of the Far East<sup>3</sup>.

Such an appeal reinforces the conviction that, as a society, we truly need a new form of global spirituality which would better serve the instinct of survival, and deepen the feeling of responsibility for the destiny of the world. The greatest enemy of such spirituality is a thoughtless inability to perceive the deeper level of existence. Trees wither away and die when they are deprived of water and sunlight.

Human beings also diminish, in a spiritual sense, when touched by the sickness of inner disintegration. How can we discover anew the depths of spiritual life? How can we revive in ourselves the sense of wonder at the very gift of existence?

### *Paschal Spirituality Needs Mystical Experience*

The face of the world is shaped more and more by the process of secularization and indifference. Many things seem to indicate that we hasten away from the spiritual zeal of past generations of Christians. One has to begin to long for the light, when the darkness lasts too long. The spiritual need for the light may then become stronger than the experience of God's absence. Not without reason, Louis Dupré compares the situation of contemporary people with the dark night of the mystics: "Women and men of our

time, although so much lost in religious matters, are not wrong when they discover a certain kinship with those, who seem to be the most away from them. For this reason they approach for illumination rather mystics than moralists and theologians"<sup>4</sup>.

Contemporary interest in mysticism is one of the signs of our times. Mysticism may serve today as a useful hermeneutic key for understanding our spiritual situation and our tasks in regard to the future. It is able to meet human needs for the deeper meaning of life. It can also become a meeting place of different religions and traditions. Mysticism opens the way to the renewal of Christianity at the present time, as it faces challenging ideas and the growing cultural pluralism of the world. One cannot deny the role of mysticism in the ecumenical dialogue among the Christians, in the dialogue with non-Christian religions, with new currents of spirituality and with secular culture of today's society.

Nowadays, many people feel a strong need for serenity and inner peace. Some look to the specialized methods of inner concentration which originated in India, especially in Buddhism. They sometimes succeed in regaining an inner harmony due to a transforming meditation. In this respect the Orthodox Church may also offer its own spiritual wisdom. The tradition of *hesychasm* dates back to the time of the undivided Church of the first millennium. The word *hesychia* refers specifically to an inner peace and calm. *Hesychasm* has ascetical practices similar to those known in Asia. They help to purify the human mind and, above all,

unite the intellect with the heart, taking into account the rhythm of the human body. "Direct your mind to your heart and then pray" – advise *hesychasts*. An exchange of spiritual experience is possible in a fruitful dialogue with other traditions. Christian *hesychasts* speak about their experience of the inner light coming from the transfigured humanity of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mystics have their own experience of God and the world. They have often been treated with suspicion and mistrust. In our present situation we need their witness, perhaps more than ever before. Christian Churches undergo a serious crisis as they face, on one side, a growing secularization of modern society and, on the other, the new types of religiosity and spirituality inspired often by non-Christian traditions. Generally, people look for a direct religious experience. If they do not find enough openness and readiness to understand their religious needs, they begin to look for new sources of inspiration. Where there is no dialogue, the Church slowly loses her credibility and becomes more and more a marginalized community of believers. The future of the Church will depend more and more on a personal decision and orientation of life.

In the age of modernity or post-modernity Christians have a very delicate and difficult task to accomplish: to help people overcome the wide-spread feeling of absurdity and nothingness, showing humbly their faith that human existence has transcendental meaning. This can be done most convincingly, I think, through our witness to the resurrection of Christ. He has opened to the world a new

space of existence without death and corruption. The risen Christ, therefore, stands between every human being and nothingness. We believe that He has overcome death, sin and Gehenna forever.

### *The Paschal Gift of Divine Therapy*

Paschal spirituality requires a deeper understanding of salvation. The patristic tradition of the Eastern Church can offer, in this respect, valuable insights. Sin is considered as a "sickness of the spirit". Jesus prayed on the Cross: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Lc 23:34). Not to know one's own actions is a sign of sickness, a symptom of being blind or deaf. For this reason Jesus is shown in patristic writings as the "Divine Healer", restoring health. One can conclude that a sinner is a sick human being not knowing the dangerous nature of his existential state. Salvation (in Greek: *soteria*), therefore, is the elimination of the cause of corruption – the process of coming back to the ontological health of the spirit: "It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick" (Lc 5:31). In the New Testament, the adjective *sos* means "healthy". When Jesus declares: "Your faith has saved you", the expression is the equivalent of saying: "Your faith has cured you" (cf. Mc 10:52; Lc 17:19; 18:42).

In this perspective, one can better understand the purpose of the Church and of her sacraments. The Church could be described as "a place to revive", i.e. to become healthy again or to come back into existence. The images of medical treatment and of different medicines often recur in the patristic writings. St. Ignatius of Antioch refers to the

Eucharist as "the remedy of immortality", *phármakon athanasías* (φάρμακον αθανασίας)<sup>5</sup>. In this context, the very notion of salvation has nothing juridical in it. Rather, it has an ontological character, and means a new way of existence, an inner resurrection. The risen Lord is present in the dark of our infernal solitude and isolation caused by our sins.

Sin separates and isolates; salvation creates a bond of communion. St. Macarius the Great's (died 300) parable illustrates prisoners whose backs are chained to one another in such a way that they can never see their faces. This is an antithesis of salvation, an imaginative description of the inner disaggregation of the human being, desperately in need of the divine therapy. Human faces turned towards one another are a symbol of mutual responsibility and communion. Sin poisons human relationships, whereas salvation restores encounter and communion, overcoming an egoistic concentration on one's own "small eternities of pleasure", not allowing other human faces to be seen. To recover sensitivity to the existence and to the needs of other human persons means, at the same time, to retrieve the grace of the inner personal resurrection. Within the Christian tradition, there is a very courageous idea that the process of inner cure will continue also after death for many people, in the expectation of the *Parousia*. Salvation is the gift of divine therapy, which restores our humanity to its original vocation so that in the end God could be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

In this context, we can already see that paschal spirituality means above all a therapeutic process of gradual transfiguration and transformation of human existence. It is both a personal and ecclesial spirituality, able to integrate and to enlighten the whole human being, both spirit and body. The reality of sin has now assumed more subtle, diffused forms of inner disintegration. Very often it is present in a culpable feeling of boredom, of *acedia* or in the temptation of nothingness and despair. To moralize in this situation would do no good. One must simply give witness to a better quality of life, not through a doloristic asceticism, but by a spirituality of paschal dedication and confidence. The risen Christ can reach the depths of human despair, radiating calmness, love and beauty.

## **TOWARDS A CHRISTIANITY MORE SENSITIVE TO**

### **THE RESURRECTION**

A long tradition of Christian wisdom closely associates the vision of the human being with the mystery of Christ. He is the best Interpreter of human destiny. St Irenaeus wrote in the second century: "The Lord has entrusted man, his own good (*suum hominem*), to the Holy Spirit"<sup>6</sup>. The human being is a paschal being. An unceasing Passover takes place in the very depth of one's humanity. This is a very rewarding approach to Christian spirituality as well, not sufficiently taken into the account in our thinking. A vision of such a *homo paschalis* will inspire also our short outline of a paschal Christianology.

Today, man needs a special defense. An Orthodox theologian spoke immediately after the Second World War about the "heresy of inhumanity" and about the "crime of the offended humanity" (*crimen laesae humanitatis*)<sup>7</sup>. This means that humanity is threatened by the "dehumanization". The bright side of its history is so often overshadowed by the darkness of crime, sin, annihilation, suffering and absurdity. Whosoever reflects on this issue sees a striking paradox of the two possibilities of human life.

### *The Paschal Law of Life*

Christ is the first *Homo Paschalis*. It is his love and dedication "to the end" (Jn 15:1) which attracts human freedom. A human being bears in oneself an ontological call to break the barriers of his or her own inner self. It is a call to "pass over", to broaden the inner space of freedom and to overcome the meaninglessness of a self-centered existence. Egoism and self-centeredness destroy human life. Human freedom is fulfilled in love, dedication and self-transcendence. Our existence, therefore, has a paschal structure and its authenticity depends on a paschal order of self-transcendence. The Passover of Christ reflects the fundamental law of human existence, which I would refer to as a paschal law of life, or a paschal order of existence. This has been fully revealed by Christ's death and resurrection: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). Christ Himself was that very grain of wheat.

The human being is dialogical, ecstatic and relational. To be truly human implies openness and relationship. There is, within us, a wonderful ability to transcend the closedness of our nature, to exist with others and for others. For this reason, one can speak about an anthropological "Passover", taking place within our own being.

The decisive factor in shaping our humanity is not only our attitude towards other people, but also our attitude toward truth and goodness. The joy of finding the light of truth has in itself something similar to the joy of Easter morning. The very choice of good and truth is, in fact, a paschal event. By every free decision to do good we enter the "sphere" of the active power of the resurrection of Christ. Our human option becomes, so to speak, a threshold of the supernatural presence of the risen Christ – a kind of "personal Passover". Such is the natural and supernatural logic of the paschal option for true values. Human freedom plays a decisive role in this process of self-transcendence.

The fundamental option for truth and goodness determines the genuineness and the quality of our human existence. This option concerns every human being, no matter who he or she is, or whether they believe in God. While serving truth and goodness, man attains a real participation in the grace of salvation and becomes a friend of God. This happens through the saving power of goodness, whose primary source is God himself. Through the mediation of goodness and truth, Christ's Passover becomes thus the Passover of a concrete man or woman.



A certain degree of incomprehensibility belongs to the very nature of human existence. This mysteriousness seems to many people so provocative that they prefer to call it absurd. The ability to perceive this absurdity is already an indication that we can transcend and overcome this feeling. The absurdity present on the surface of our lives tells us, in its own way, about a mysterious call which arises from the very depths of our being.

The Christian experience of Easter is also an experience of the happiness because of man, and an experience of the joy of God's image restored by Christ. Without taking the connection between Easter and the iconic dimension of man into account, one can impoverish a very important spiritual source of Christian life. Man's iconicity restored by Christ constitutes the very mystical depth of paschal experience. Easter recalls the mystery of man's creation to the image and likeness of God. For this reason, it is not only the solemnity of Christ's death and resurrection, but the feast of pure joy and happiness because of man also. This joy cannot be taken away by the dark sides of life, which deform the true face of man. This paschal joy, a true *gaudium paschale*, has its foundation in the liberating power of Christ and of the Holy Spirit; it is stronger than all human failures. This joy is a Christian answer to a human cry: *L'enfer c'est les autres* (J.-P. Sartre), "Hell, it is the others".

*Paschal Christianology and a Contemporary Mentality of Success*

A mentality shaped by science and technology elevates effectiveness, profit and success to the rank of the ultimate criterion of life. Thus, effectiveness and usefulness become a sort of moral demand. Religious life has to prove that it is a useful lifestyle as well. People aim, therefore, at achieving something significant in their life. They want to fulfill their role in society, find recognition and self-realization. Achievements, successes, career, consumption and higher standards of life, simply become the most meaningful justification of human existence.

The meaning of life seen in these categories becomes a serious challenge to Christian spirituality. Higher values cease to count. Striving for success and all-present competition and rivalry deprive people of their inner freedom and plunge them into a net of dependences. Life may then become similar to a record-seeking sport, in which one success immediately demands another. Man is subject to the pressure of success, which slowly overpowers and alienates him. Success often justifies indecent means and an egoistic form of existence. Thus, we remain far from the paschal freedom of self-dedication to serve others and focus on true values. The demand for success has become a contemporary form of "the curse of the law" (Ga 5:15).

Christian paschal consciousness reveals the insufficiencies and the limits of the mentality of success. What appears to be a failure can prove, in God's eyes, the greatest achievement. The paschal mystery of Christ illustrates, in a very radical way, that the greatest victory may take place,

so to speak, at the bottom of what is called failure and defeat. We simply do not know the criteria of true achievements and of real efficacy. These achievements are neither an ultimate justification of life, nor a decisive measure of the realization of our own humanity.

It is true that the Gospel requires from the disciples of Christ to develop the talents entrusted to them (cf. Mt 25:14-30). It does not deny human effort, ingenuity and good actions. On the other hand, it warns against the tendency to regard those achievements as a measure of human and Christian fulfillment. It liberates from the pressure of success. Before God, no one can boast of his or her own justice. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector clearly states this (cf. Lc 18:9-14). Man is not justified through his merits, but through his faith and confidence in God's mercy.

Not only does human life display its meaning when it is full of successes and achievements, but also when it seems to be of no greatness and outward splendour. The crucified Christ forever remains a living proof that salvation is a gift from God, "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom 4:17). The meaning of life is God's gift to be received in humility, responsibility and confidence, which gift precedes all our achievements.

Neither a resigned pessimism nor a naive optimism can be reconciled with the inner logic of the Gospel. We believe in man's dignity, in his iconic likeness to God. The main source of the tragic character of life continues to be a

human freedom. Hope does not suppress suffering and the tragic nature of life, but instead gives it new sense. The paschal wisdom is no expression of passiveness and dolorism. It urges one to oppose evil and overcome suffering in all their manifestations, although it knows also the limits of human efforts and possibilities. Christian optimism is based on confidence in God – the ultimate source of love, goodness and meaning. The paschal mystery of Christ is a mystery of love.

*Paschal Nature of Love: ubi caritas et amor, ibi Pascha est*

In the history of Christianity, there has been much mistrust and suspicion towards the human *eros*. A French Orthodox theologian, Olivier Clément, is right in saying that before being left to the traders of sexuality, *eros* often had been profaned by Christianity itself.<sup>8</sup> Christians were contaminated by stoic, gnostic and manicheian views. The *eros* was rather negated than transfigured. Protecting the mystery of the human person and the institution of the family, Christianity displayed a tendency to deny the nuptial mystery of the *eros* – restored, in fact, by Christ to its original beauty and nobility.

Christian tradition knows the concept of a "chaste marriage" which could be traced back to the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325). That Council defended the dignity of Christian marriage and confirmed that married men could be ordained to the priesthood. In this context, "chastity" refers to the integration of the *eros* into a personal relationship. This integration has its own paschal implications. The human "I" has to transcend itself,

to become relational, and thus to find one's own self anew in the relation to another human being. In a personal encounter with another, the human *eros* can experience an unusual energy, a profound transformation, which allows one to discover the very content of a true love. Love brings joy and celebration, enabling the process of common creativity. This kind of the so-called "ethics of the transfigured eros" was once put forward by the Russian philosophers and theologians, Boris Vysheslavitsev, Paul Evdokimov. It brings new and fresh insights to the contemporary debate about human sexuality.

When human *eros* is negated or profaned, it provokes revolt. This revolt is present today, to a full extent. In the encounter of man and woman (in erotic experience) secularized society is inclined to see, perhaps, the only mystical experience. For many young people, *eros* remains their last sacredness. At the same time, however, despite the existing traps of pornography, they long for tenderness, true friendship, faithfulness and belonging. The Church has, in her message, to unite *eros* with tenderness and responsibility. The human eros manifests, in its depth, the breath of the Creator himself. Contemporary pornography distorts and violates this hidden quest for God at the very sources of human life. Our Christian task in this situation is not censorship. The world does not require new taboos, which could only raise protest and revolt. Instead, it needs creative Christians, not those who lament over the evil of our civilization. Our task is to bring light and meaning, launching an appeal to replace the relation of possession by the relationships of reciprocity, mutual respect and

communion. Otherwise, women will be reduced to the condition of an erotic object, and the human body will be treated solely as a mechanism to produce pleasure. This is a direct example of depersonalization, contrary to the whole logic of the paschal mystery of the human being.

The Christianity of the future will have to discover, more creatively, the meaning of the human *eros*. It has yet to learn how to appreciate the personal and ennobling love between man and woman, the *eros* fully integrated into the encounter of the two persons, into tenderness and faithfulness. Every pleasure is by its nature ambivalent: it combines both joyful celebration and temptation to "instrumentalize" another human person. The pleasure, when isolated, risks the disaggregation of human beings, and possible addiction. Constantly facing innumerable human weaknesses in this respect, the Church must learn to act according to the ethos of mercy and compassion, specifically addressing those who "grope" their way through the passionate excitement of their youth. This is their blind quest of the Absolute.

Love belongs to the category of pre-original words of humanity, which are the most exposed to deformation and profanation. One of our tasks today is to deepen the understanding of this fundamental human experience. All true human love has a paschal and "resurrectional" nature. Here I would like to concentrate on its two constitutive paschal dimensions.

The first or kenotic dimension finds its basic expression in the affirmation of another person. Denying one's own self-

sufficiency (*kenosis*), a human person finds the way to a new existence. Much courage is needed to leave oneself and to trust in another person. Whoever loves, exposes oneself to the risk of being hurt, misunderstood, affected by fault, suffering and death. Sacrifice and renunciation are, however, relational categories. Their value depends on the measure of love and concern. The paschal wisdom of Christianity teaches us how to pass over (a paschal event again!) from love directed by the desire of one's own happiness (love as need) to love experienced as a gift to the others.

The second or "resurrectional" dimension of love demonstrates its own creative power: it is a resuscitating love. A disinterested and non-egoistic love, which may seem powerless and ineffective only to the cynics, is in fact the most fascinating ideal of humankind. Its transforming and transfiguring power has no equal to itself. This intuition has found an incomparable expression in F. Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*, in which Sonia voluntarily shares Raskolnikov's punishment – a seven-year sentence in Siberia. He suffered because of his wounded pride, though after having committed the crime of murdering an elderly woman, he did not feel any repentance. His crime, he thought, was only in the fact that he had broken down and acknowledged that he had committed the crime. He was ashamed of this weakness, and continuously tortured himself – he who believed himself to be a man to whom more was allowed than others. This kind of suffering cannot change a man's heart. The regeneration comes when he becomes aware of his

love for Sonia. Until then, he had treated her quite roughly, with irritation and almost with aversion, although he knew what she had done for him. At the end of his novel, Dostoyevsky shows, in a masterly manner, the effects of resuscitating love – in a paschal context. [Everything happens in the time following Easter]. During Lent and Holy Week, Raskolnikov became ill. Within the second week, following Easter, Sonia too became ill. When she feels able to visit him again, everything has changed. Sonia has unexpectedly brought the grace of awakening and regeneration. The last pages of the novel are worthy of profound reflection: They show clearly the face of the man, resuscitated from inner death.

This spiritual resurrection is a true Passover, similar to "passing from one world to another". What the convict's punishment of hard labour had failed to do, what empty suffering could not change, has been brought about by the resuscitating love. Only love can overcome spiritual death. Dostoyevsky's pages, devoted to this truly paschal transformation, have no equal in the world of literature. They portray a very profound theology of an existential resurrection.

The human person is able to realize itself in love and outgoing concern. Love gives intensity and depth to human life. The loss of the ability to love leads to inner emptiness, disillusionment, fear, loneliness and feeling of meaninglessness. Whoever has no one to live for, feels that his or her own existence has become barren, empty, unhappy and fruitless. An inability to love is a sign of a



slow degradation of one's own humanity. St. Augustine stated long ago: "*Pondus meum, amor meus*", "My weight is my love"<sup>9</sup>. What a striking and profound expression! One could paraphrase it as follows: "*Pascha meum, amor meus*", "My Passover is my love".

## **TOWARDS SPIRITUALITY ABLE TO HEAL AND TRANSFORM**

Ours is not a world of lengthy, slow, or quiet processes of transformation. Instead, it is the world of fast changes, nervousness, noise, tension and conflict. In such a world, it is not easy to find a deeper dimension of life. We need, therefore, a new type of asceticism, able to restore inner calm, concentration and the ability to pray. It should be an asceticism of open eyes and of a compassionate heart – an asceticism of sensitivity to other people and to the fate of nature.

Christian paschal spirituality teaches us how to disclose the hidden beauty of human nature and how to liberate it from an egoistic self-centeredness. This is a truly paschal wisdom. In the development of one's own personality, an important role is assigned by modern psychology to an ability for empathy, which allows one to become sensitive, caring and compassionate being. A good relationship between people is impossible without empathy, understanding, friendship, benevolence and outgoing concern. Love, friendship and compassion are paschal gifts. Elder Zossima, a Russian monk in Dostoyevsky's novel,

*The Brothers Karamazow*, speaks about the universal friendship:

Brothers, have no fear of men's sins. Love a man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth. Love God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. (...) Love children especially, for they too are sinless like the angels; they live to soften and purify our hearts and as it were to guide us. (...). Brothers, love is a teacher; but one must know how to acquire it, for it is hard to acquire, it is dearly bought, it is won slowly by long labour. For we must love not only occasionally, for a moment, but for ever<sup>10</sup>.

This passage seems to be a distant echo of other words, which derive from a mystic of the seventh century, St Isaac the Syrian, whom Dostoyevsky once read in Russian translation:

I advise you this also, my brother: let the scale of mercy always be preponderant within you, until you perceive in yourself that mercy which God has for the world<sup>11</sup>.

And what is a merciful heart? It is the heart's burning for the sake of the entire creation, for

men, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. From his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear or to see any injury or a light sorrow in creation. For this reason he offers up tearful prayer continually for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God<sup>12</sup>.

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I would be inclined to describe spirituality as an inner culture of human freedom. From another point of view, it is a therapeutic process of the transformation of our humanity, an answer to the temptation of despair, indifference, cynicism and nihilism. Spiritual life is a constant effort of inner transfiguration. The struggle with human weakness and fault remains, at the same time, a struggle with one's own solitude and sickness of the spirit, which can negatively affect all inter-human relationships. The way of spiritual resurrection is a lifelong paschal task.

Christians learn to understand God's drama not only in the history of humankind, but also in every individual life. God's love is humble and patient. He can wait infinitely long for a free answer of His own creature. God does not order. He invites us to a relationship of reciprocity. To

leave the space of freedom, He limits His own omnipotence. In a sense, not ceasing to be all-powerful, He can become all-powerless. Once again, the biblical theme of Christ's *kenosis* is present here: God in Christ "emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave" (Phil 2:7). Here we see an unusual intuition, which evokes God not in a language of perfection and fullness, but preferring the category of emptiness. According to St. Clement of Alexandria, "the Saviour is polyphonic and acting in many ways" (πολύφωνός γε ο σωτηρ και πολύτροπος).<sup>13</sup> This extraordinary text deserves profound meditation.

Fullness implies richness, abundance and power. Emptiness and void express the mystery of love. God transcends Himself towards humanity in an inverse movement. He becomes, so to speak, the humble self-effacing God. This is not the God who, in all His fullness and might, would crush and overwhelm a human being. This is the God who "emptied Himself" and thus is able to expect our free answer. The truly paschal God! Remaining incomprehensible, He permits a space for human freedom. His silence, referred to at the beginning of our reflections, has indeed a most profound meaning.

Paschal Christianology makes us more sensitive to the resurrection of Christ and, at the same time, to the spirituality of transfiguration and transformation. This spirituality requires an integral knowledge of the mind and heart, a heartfelt knowledge which combines the demands of intellect with the wisdom of the heart. The world does not need the lament of Christians, but their inspiration,

witness, creative efforts and new incarnations of the Gospel. There is no need to close our eyes to the infernal dimension of the world. It does exist! But the destinies of the *inferno*, which has grown up within human hearts, may be overcome by the compassion and liberating love of many.

God loves this world, in spite of the overwhelming amount of human faults and sins. Christ, "our Passover" (1 Cor 5:7), remains its Saviour and Healer forever. Salvation is the divine therapy of the world. God cures the sick freedom of His creatures. He will never stop doing this. The infernal abyss of the human heart can always become a place revisited by Christ. He is the Conqueror of hell and of all dark powers. It is never too late to call Him by His own name. An English historian and antiquarian William Camden (1551-1623) wrote centuries ago: "Betwixt the stirrup and the ground / Mercy I asked, mercy I found". Our Saviour is truly polyphonic! Christianity is a paschal religion of hope, confidence and encouragement, able to heal and transform human life.

## NOTES

1 A shortened version of a paper read at the Third European Catholic China Colloquium", published in: *Papers and Materials of the Third European Catholic China Colloquium 'The Catholic Church in China: Message, Response, and Commitment'* (Krynica Morska, Poland, 15-18 September, 1999) and *the Fourth European Ecumenical China Conference 'Spirituality and Values: An Exploration of Chinese and European Perspectives'* (Dalgan Park,

Ireland, 13-17 June, 2002), Sankt Augustin: China-Zentrum 2003, pp. 35-50.

2 Cf. P. Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoism*. Frankfurt/M, 1989.

3 Ibid.

4 L. Dupré, *The Deeper Life: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism* (1981); Polish trans.: *Głębsze życie*. Kraków 1994, p. 17.

5 Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep. ad Ephesios* 20, 2. Sources Chrétiennes (SCh) 10, p. 76.

6 Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adv. haer.* III,17, 3. SCh 211, 336.

7 Archimandrite Kiprian (Kern), *Tema o cheloveke i sovremennost'*. "Pravoslavnaia Mysl' " 6 (1948), p. 128.

8 Olivier Clément, *A propos de l'érotisme*. «Service Orthodoxe de Presse» (SOP), janvier 1976, No. 4, p. 7-8; idem, *Rome autrement. Une réflexion orthodoxe sur la papauté*. Paris 1997, p. 124.

9 Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 13,10. PL 32, 849.

10 F. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Transl. by C. Garnett. New York 1950, p. 382-383.

11 Isaac of Niniveh, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Transl. by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery. Boston, Mass. 1984, p. 312 (=Homily 64).

12 Ibid., *Homily* 71, pp. 344-345.

13 Clement of Alexandria, *Protreptikos* I,8,3. SCh 2, 62.

## Chapter XI

### ECUMENISM AND KENOTIC DIMENSIONS OF ECCLESIOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

The ecumenical efforts of the last decades have brought some welcome results and events. One can only be grateful to the Lord of the Church for these new signs of hope. But many things are still limited to the sphere of words, without practical consequences. The reception of many statements agreed to in bilateral and multilateral dialogues still remains unsatisfactory. Some dialogues experience serious difficulties and do not proceed. Many ecumenically-minded people have become tired and discouraged. The majority of Christians, especially in Eastern Europe, simply lack interest in ecumenism, which can indeed lead to resignation and discouragement. However, are not the Christians those who have to learn to hope "against hope" (Rm 4:18)?

What we experience today is mostly labour and hope, *labor et spes*. Ecumenical *gaudium and spes*, joy and hope – to allude to the first words of the well known constitution of the Second Vatican Council – happen from time to time, but the enormous task of reconciliation remains still to be accomplished. The very fact of different dialogues going on is a blessed and joyful event – dialogue gives joy and raises hope. Still as we cannot see many decisive results, I would prefer to speak about ecumenical labour and hope.

Christians quarrel among themselves, while faith and hope die out in human hearts, in both the West and the East. Christianity is devastated above all by a heresy of life, i.e. by a heresy of mistrust, lack of mutual respect and understanding for the others and their otherness. This is surely a part of the legacy of the past. Our Churches declare their readiness to do everything possible for the work of reconciliation and unity, but very often they rather hesitate and lack courage. Confessional identity continues to be in higher esteem than the Christian identity we have in common. An old temptation to live complacently within confessional boundaries has not yet been overcome. The newly born brotherhood of Churches is still fragile and exposed to the danger of breaking down at any moment of conflict and controversy. After many years of ecumenical dialogues there is a clear need to discuss the ecumenical method and doctrine of our Churches, to overcome the tendency to compare agreed statements to defined teaching of the past.

We need today a paschal "christianology" based on the central truths of the Christians faith. Our Christianity has to become more paschal. The paschal mystery of Christ is the very core of the Christian message of hope. The drama of the Cross is one of human freedom. Though this crucified Jesus, God respected that freedom, but has manifested Himself victorious. The greatest crisis in the world's history has found its divine and unexpected solution. Indeed, the history of human freedom is dramatic. In spite of this, God has proved to be stronger than all the forces of evil. For this reason Christianity will

always be drawing strength and inspiration from its eschatological hope whose ultimate source is Christ's resurrection.

Are we able to discern today some main features of a more paschal Christianity? How to understand its paschal dimension in relation to the unity of the Church? In the following reflections I will try to outline a vision of the Church more sensitive to the kenotic and paschal ethos of Christianity.

## IN SEARCH OF A PASCHAL PARADIGM

Christian Churches undergo today a serious crisis as they face, on one side, a growing secularization of society and, on the other, new types of religiosity and spirituality inspired often by non-Christian traditions. There also appear strong doubts about the institutional dimension of the faith and, at the same time, about institutional religiosity as such.

Modern critics of religion have involuntarily contributed to the purification of the Christian faith. Today we perhaps better realize the need for a deeper interpretation of Christianity and its universalism. Friedrich Nietzsche reproached the Christians that on their faces one could not see the joy and the new quality of being redeemed. Jesus' disciples should look more redeemed: "*Erlöster müsstest mir seine Jünger aussehen!*"<sup>1</sup> He proclaimed the „death of God" thus provocatively naming a deep experience of many people living in modern times. It is an experience of God's silence, of His absence, a kind of experience of Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

It is precisely here that mystics can offer a valuable hermeneutic key which enable one to understand the challenge of the contemporary experience of God's silence. Mystics speak about "the dark nights" of the spirit on the road towards God. It is a very powerful symbol which could be applied not only to an individual human life, but also to the history of the divided Church. There are, indeed, periods of time when God seems to absent Himself, to recede from human perception and to keep silence in the face of various historical dramas and tragedies. This experience can be understood as a collective night of the spirit. It comes close to the description of the time which in Nietzsche's terminology was an epoch of the death of God, an era of nihilism.

It is easier for us to understand the basic intuition hidden in this kind of interpretation. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought an unusual amount of destruction and suffering. But at the same time it was also a time of human solidarity and better understanding of the unity of humankind, a time of ecumenism of the heart. Many of those who were plunged into the darkness of the night and struggled with the feeling of nothingness have experienced also a sort of inner liberation, a transfiguration of their whole existence. Some have lost their faith passing through the torments of that historical Good Friday.

But there are two successive days to the paschal drama. To the excruciating experiences of our century belong not only the agony of Good Friday but also the silence of Holy Saturday. This is the day of Christ's descent into hell. It is there that He has overcome the



power of death and destruction. It is the beginning of His resurrection which is God's answer to the cry of the Forsaken Son. The silence of Holy Saturday on the surface of the earth covers the event of Christ's encounter with the fallen humanity – His presence in the anthropological depth of human hearts. This is the lowest point, if one may say so, of the divine *kenosis*: God in the hell created by human sins, trying to attract and to transform every sick human freedom. The divine *kenosis* is not annihilation, but transformation, the beginning of Christ's resurrection.

The silence of Holy Saturday may serve as a paradigmatic symbol for every situation of human hopelessness. However, the lesson of the mystics should not be forgotten. In spite of the state of forsakenness they remain confident that God speaks also in the darkness, in all personal and historical situations of crisis. God's silence constitutes an integral part of His divine pedagogy. God himself accompanies people through the difficult experience of hopelessness, division and disunity. He gives a chance to grow, to purify our concepts, images and representations of Him. He remains close to every human being. Both personal and historical dark nights of His silence may become a difficult lesson of inner freedom and courageous confidence in His unfailing love.

All this could also be applied to the life of the divided Church of Christ struggling for reconciliation and unity. My long studies in Christian paschal theology make me believe that through painful lessons of disunity, through the experience of labour and of the cross, God leads us patiently to the joy of the resurrection, to better days of the reconciled diversity among Christians.

### **THE DIVINE *KENOSIS* AND HUMAN FREEDOM**

God does not order, he invites to a relationship of reciprocity. To leave the space of freedom He limits His own omnipotence. In a sense, without ceasing to be all-powerful, He can become all-powerless. This is the biblical theme of Christ's *kenosis*. God in Christ "emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave" (Ph 2:7). This is an unusual intuition which evokes God in a language of emptiness. Here the words of St. Clement of Alexandria chosen as motto of this paper come particularly true: "The Saviour is polyphonic and acting in many ways for the salvation of people" – *Πολύφωνός και πολύτροπος*.<sup>3</sup>

There is a clear mystic touch in this approach. God who "emptied Himself" is able to expect our free answer. Remaining incomprehensible, He leaves thus a free space for human freedom. His silence has a very profound meaning. The work of redemption was carried out by Jesus in humility, weakness, love and dedication. The liberating love of God is self-emptying. The salvific *kenosis* of Christ is the opposite of any self-centeredness and self-interestedness. It means a disinterested dedication to the salvation of all and has permanent significance for the whole Christian existence, for particular Churches, individuals and for the work of reconciliation as such. *Kenosis* understood as disinterestedness, self-restriction and confidence judges our self-centeredness and self-satisfaction. The entire kenotic and paschal logic has been revealed in Christ's words: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains

alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn. 12:24). Christ himself was first this "grain of wheat". This is the fundamental paradox of Christian identity and Christian life<sup>4</sup>.

### *In the Captivity of Doctrines*

Let me recall the very beginnings of the official theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman-Catholic Church. It was on May 29, 1980, at the Patriarchal Monastery of Saint John the Theologian at Patmos. In his inaugural address, metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon (S. Hakis) described our ecclesiological situation as follows:

According to tradition, John the Apostle and Evangelist came to Patmos by order of emperor Domitian, as exile and prisoner. It was under those conditions that he came. Apparently, and according to secular criteria, we have come to Patmos under different conditions: free and not enchained. Yet, in essence, we too have come as exiles and prisoners.

Let me make myself clear: We also have come as exiles, not because of the ruler of this world, but banished by the lost peace between the Churches of the East and of the West, and as prisoners not of the emperor but of our own errors ... We too have come together as brethren alienated from one another, not in a geographical sense nor by imperial order but alienated in spirit and by human errors...<sup>5</sup>

Those were very courageous and sincere words. In fact, we are all, till now, prisoners of our own errors, alienated from one another in spirit. I would be inclined to say even more: we are above all prisoners of our doctrines, denominational differences and divergences. It means that there exists a sort of ecclesiological captivity of doctrine.

I do not hesitate to think that during the past centuries Christianity was becoming more and more doctrinaire. The care for integrity, coherence and identity of doctrine often overshadowed its appropriateness and the most vital purpose of religion as such. Unending conflicts and controversies over salvation and truth, appropriated exclusively by the Churches are the most dramatic evidence of this.

In my own country, a Bishop of the Evangelical-Reformed Church, Zdzislaw Tranda, put forward a very challenging interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 30-37). Usually one sees in it just a warning against the lack of sensitivity to the situation of a human being in need. Bishop Tranda draws attention to the Old Testament regulations which forbade the priests to approach the dead body for fear of a ritual impurity. "None of them shall defile himself for the dead among his people" (Lev. 21:1; cf. Num. 5:2-3); "they shall not defile themselves by going near to a dead person ...; after he is defiled, he shall count for himself seven days, and then he shall be clean" (Ezk 44:25-26). Only a ritually clean man could enter the temple and perform his duties there. Let us suppose that the priest and the levite mentioned in the parable were going to the temple in Jerusalem. A wounded man lying by the roadside could seem to be already

dead. To approach him meant to be defiled and not to be able to perform respective functions in the temple. A ritual purification should then last for seven days.

One can reasonably assume that when the priest and the levite were passing by and saw the wounded man, they were not motivated by callousness, soullessness or sheer fear. They could experience a profound conflict of conscience. According to the Mosaic Law they were not allowed to approach the man and to help him. Could they easily risk the act of mercy? What about their holy duties in the temple then?

For this reason it is not so much the priest and the levite who should be blamed but rather the religious system which exposed them to the dilemma whether not to help and be able to serve, or to help and not to be ready for the temple service. They were connected with this religious system, with its doctrine and regulations. Because of this they took their decision rather than its opposite. They were, so to speak, prisoners and slaves of this system. Mercy was shown by the Good Samaritan, a schismatic and heretic.

The meaning of Jesus' parable is therefore more profound than it could seem at first sight. It shows His opposition to the captivity of doctrine and numerous regulations. Hereby we touch a very delicate and important issue. It is not enough to repeat doctrinal formulations and in this way to justify one's behaviour towards people, especially those in need, "the least of these" (Mt 25:40.45), who have their own difficulties and anxieties. A rigid adherence to doctrine and its regulations can overshadow things much more important in religion. We stand face to face then with a certain form of captivity. The conclusion of Bishop Tranda deserves special consideration:

And today, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world is not free of the captivity of doctrine. On the contrary, one can have the impression, that it is even more enslaved. One could give many various examples of people or of whole social groups who live in the captivity not only of a religious doctrine, but also of their own party, politics and society. It is worth asking the question: Am I, in my own life, free from the captivity of doctrine and regulations which limit in an unwise way the possibility to act for the good of others?<sup>6</sup>

There is no need, I think, to comment on these words. Their relevance for the present-day ecumenical situation is clear. In this context I would rather say a few words about Daniel Oswald Rufeisen (1922-1998), a Jewish Carmelite who lived in Haifa. During the nazi occupation in Poland, as a young Jew he managed to survive, thanks to the help of courageous Catholic nuns. He decided then to become a Christian, was ordained a priest in 1952 and seven years later emigrated to Israel. There he began his long-term work of discovering the roots of the primitive Hebrew Church of the Apostle James. His basic idea was that Christianity had lost its Semitic background and become too intellectual within the Greek-Latin world. Our task today is to restore what had been lost in the universal Church, which during the past centuries was undergoing a process of "de-hebraization", followed by hellenization and latinization.

Fr. Daniel criticized a doctrinal type of Christianity in which the faith had been submitted to the logic of doctrines.<sup>7</sup> He appealed for another type of religiosity and another model of Christianity. Without Israel there is no true catholicity of the Church. The faith should be understood above all as confidence in God, always faithful to His promises. Man has to cling to Him and in this way to know Him. The early Judeo-Christian Church of James offers some new possibilities also for ecumenism. Instead of stressing unceasingly the importance of the dogmatic statements we should devote more attention to the biblical concept of faith and truth, which allows for more pluralism of interpretation.

The early Jerusalem Church was able to distinguish between essential elements of the Christian religion and the secondary ones, which should not be imposed on all believers (cf. Ac 15). The Apostle Paul cared very much about unity with the Jerusalem community of Judeo-Christians. The "contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem" (Rm 15:26) is a remarkable expression of this bond of unity. The mother Church of Jerusalem cannot be forgotten. The drama of division of the Church should make us more sensitive to this dimension of our ecclesiological thinking.

The risen Christ ordered his disciples to "stay in the city" of Jerusalem (Lk 24:49). These words could be understood, in a certain sense, as a commandment given to them not to move away from the Jewish roots. Our search for deeper foundations of unity among Christians has to take into consideration the very origins of Christendom and its Semitic background prior to the first division between Jews and Christians. The Hebrew Bible, as Gabriel Josipovici stressed some time ago, is characterized by its open character and richness of views, often contradictory. The reader himself has to reconcile them or simply to live with them.<sup>8</sup> This openness and variety of religious perspectives is one of the main striking features of Judaism.

### *The Need for Doctrinal Rectifications*

As said above, Christianity has become too doctrinaire. It has run away from the doxological understanding of dogma in the ancient Church. Our ecclesiastical doctrines are in need of significant corrections. At the beginning of the new millennium one speaks willingly, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, about the need to confess faults concerning wrong attitudes of the past, contradicting the Gospel of Christ. One should not forget that those wrong attitudes were based on theological doctrines and principles. They have to be examined more deeply in order to correct our attitude towards the other Churches, faiths, different cultures, women and the rights of all peoples to freedom and human dignity. Many traditional interpretations were claiming a monopoly of the truth and of being the unique, necessary and only means of salvation. We need today to rethink profoundly the prevailing theologies used by the Church to justify even the right to invade, conquer other peoples and destroy their "pagan" religions. Thus for many centuries Christian theology was a powerful ideological support for the Western colonialism. It understood the mission of the Church as the salvation of the "infidels" by converting them to the Church even with the help of the colonial conquerors.

Raising such issues is an expression of faith and loyalty to the Church. They must be answered, clearly and quietly. All the present-day efforts related to a necessary "purification" and conversion of the Church remain till now on the level of ethics. They do not touch ecclesiastical doctrine as such. It is clear that an ethically orientated self-criticism is a very important step, but for ecumenism it is not sufficient. Ecclesiastical doctrines also need correction and rectification. This belongs to the ecumenical *desiderata* and remains an important task of ecumenical hermeneutics. As long as self-criticism and self-purification are limited only to the ethical area, they will remain partial and insufficient, without decisive influence on ecumenism. The debate about the ministry of Peter and the primacy of the Pope has already shown this quite clearly. There exists a constant tension between the normative beginnings and all that today is taught by the Church, very often far away from the real "hierarchy of truths", proclaimed by the second Vatican Council (Decree on Ecumenism, No. 11). The very idea of hierarchy of truths is one of the most challenging concepts for ecumenism.

In 1990 the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches published an important study document entitled: *The Notion of "Hierarchy of Truths": An Ecumenical Interpretation*.<sup>9</sup> It touches also on the question of the hierarchy of the councils:

One sees several kinds of 'hierarchies' in relation to the authority of the church councils and to their contents. Most Christian traditions give special priority to the seven ecumenical councils of the early church. Some see also a 'hierarchy' among these seven councils, inasmuch as those which have formulated the doctrine of the mystery of Christ and of the Spirit within the communion of the Holy Trinity should as such hold a pre-eminent position in comparison with other councils (No. 12).

This is a very cautious statement which leaves open the whole question of the "ecumenicity" of Western councils of the second millennium. What value do they have? What is their rank in comparison with the seven councils of the first millennium? The problem is not a new one. More and more often it comes under consideration among theologians of different denominations. It may become one of the most decisive ones for the future of ecumenism. The first step was made already by Pope Paul VI. In his letter to cardinal Johannes Willebrands (October 5, 1974) he termed the second council of Lyons as "the sixth of the general synods held in the West"<sup>10</sup>, avoiding thus to call it "ecumenical". This was a very significant precedent. One can see in it a clear sign for ecumenism.

The distinction introduced by Paul VI urges further ecumenical investigations. The reconciliation of the Churches requires such an ecumenical re-reading of what they have done in the situation of separation. An essential part of such a re-reading would certainly be to distinguish clearly the general synods held both in the West and in the East after the symbolic date of the Great Schism (1054) from the ecumenical councils received by both sides.

It is not easy to justify the fact, that the Western Church recognized for more than two hundred years the so-called Photian Synod (879-880) as an ecumenical council. It was a "successful council of union" and reconciliation between patriarch Photius and Pope John VIII.<sup>11</sup> Only after the schism was this recognition withdrawn for the benefit of the Ignatian synod (869-870) which until today is considered in the Catholic Church as an ecumenical council. It would be a great encouragement for ecumenism, especially for the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, if the Photian Synod were recognized anew, through a common ecumenical decision, as the eighth ecumenical council. The problem of the *Filioque* dealt with successfully during that synod could then also be solved in a better atmosphere.

An important feature in the Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue in the 1980s was the admission that the unity of the basic faith can exist in a diversity of traditions, customs and practices. The principle of a sound pluralism was found precisely in the decisions of the Photian Synod. It determined that each See would retain the ancient usages of its tradition.<sup>12</sup> Many unhappy events and controversies would have been spared, had the Churches followed that rule in subsequent ages. True unity does not mean uniformity, but rather requires respect for a legitimate diversity.

This challenge is a vital part of the kenotic vision of a more paschal ecclesiology. The fear of losing prestige and authority continues to paralyze unduly our ecclesiological thinking. Christ's *kenosis* becomes at present perhaps the greatest challenge to us all. The kenotic ethos applies above all to the question of universal primacy.<sup>13</sup>

New encouraging insights and impulses are possible. An example of this can be the document "*The Gift of Authority*" (1998) agreed upon by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. It stresses the need for a common exploration of the way in which the ancient Church managed to maintain her unity. One has to be realistic however. We live today in different circumstances. Ancient structures cannot simply and automatically be re-created as such. Faithfulness to the past must take into account the present situation. One can only hope that growing patiently in the ecumenical *koinonia* the Churches will be able to discover the appropriate new structures of primacy and collegiality.

A significant role in this process belongs to the principle of ecumenical subsidiarity. The very word "subsidiarity" derives from the Latin word *subsidium* which means support or help. So far other Christians do not believe that synodality, collegiality and subsidiarity are being practiced in the Catholic Church in a sufficient and effective way. In his encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* (No. 87) Pope John Paul II himself declared unambiguously: "We must take every care to meet the legitimate desires and expectations of our Christian brethren, coming to know their way of thinking and their sensibilities."

### *How to Overcome the Hermeneutics of Suspicion?*

The meager reception of the documents agreed upon in dialogues indicates how difficult it is to overcome mistrust, fears and negative memories of the past. Reception requires an

experience of a true encounter, a new thinking and a new mentality. The true encounter influences the very way of understanding, broadens horizons and becomes a learning process. In this way the process of reception launched by dialogues may contribute to a new shape of ecumenical spirituality which takes into account the whole of the Christian experience. It is a spirituality of the whole, frequently demanding a correction of our confessional ways of thinking.

The dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches has contributed during the last years significantly to broadening the very understanding of the expression "Sister Churches", used so far only in relation to the Orthodox Church. In mutual relationship between the Catholics and Lutherans this expression has become almost a self-explanatory concept.

The clarification and reinterpretation of doctrines is surely necessary, but it cannot be done hastily on the way of pure relativism and liberalism. The first step would be to cease to suspect that others live in the state of permanent errors and distortions of the Christian faith. One can only support those who stress today the urgent need to develop a positive hermeneutics of confidence and trust which paves the way for mutual recognition. The one who acknowledges others in their otherness stands on the side of a personalistic conception of the truth which is to be found above all in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Ecumenism is a matter of confidence. Christ and the Holy Spirit are present and active in other Churches. The hermeneutics of suspicion is easily inclined to judge that others do not live in truth. It leads to the doctrinal fundamentalism and exclusivism in understanding truth and salvation. The hermeneutics of confidence, on the contrary, dares to affirm that other Churches are Sister Churches, in spite of various differences.

The division in the Church has something tragic in it, especially when it causes mutual alienation, distrust, conflict, hostility and hatred. But it remains only at the surface of Church life, and is concerned primarily with canonical and institutional dimensions of Christian existence without reaching the inner ontological depths of mystery of the Church<sup>14</sup>. The risen Christ and the Holy Spirit remain on both sides of each division in the Church. Doctrinal errors ascribed to the others do not prevent Christ from being present and acting in their Churches. God is no prisoner of doctrines and liturgical rites. Christ and his sovereign Spirit will never be at our command.

The late Father Jerzy Klinger (+1976), a Polish Orthodox theologian, often pointed to the extra-discursive and non-intellectual character of our personal contact with the truth of Christ. In his study devoted to the problem of intercommunion he asked pertinent questions:

But are the ideas of the members of the Orthodox Church always sufficiently informed? How much ignorance can hide in the individual consciousness of every man! But this will not prevent him from having access to the sacraments, because the Church makes up for the deficiencies of an individual conscience. Could not the Church,

understood in a broader sense, make up for the deficiencies of entire communities...?<sup>15</sup>

According to this opinion, the entire Church can make up for the insufficiencies and defects of our communities. Personally I would rather say that it is Christ himself who does it in his divine freedom and goodness. In the same study Fr. Klinger referred also to the Holy Spirit and to the miracle of unity that already exists:

If we honour the Holy Spirit..., the eucharistic *epiklesis* should bring us out of the narrow limits of the static language of our liturgy, show us the real presence of Christ wherever He is to be found... Then, in the fire of the real presence of Christ all excommunications between the Churches melt away wherever they still exist.<sup>16</sup>

There is one possible benefit of the present ecumenical crisis: it forces us to reconsider seriously the very foundations of the dialogue. If it is to be a meaningful dialogue, it should reconsider the ecclesiological roots of the crisis and rediscover the living sense of the Holy Spirit acting in all Sister Churches. With this sort of approach it would be much easier to overcome the separation of the existing denominational Churches without wishing to suppress them. The only realistic way to visible unity of the Churches leads through the mutual recognition of Sister Churches.

This concerns also the issues of evangelization. Ecumenism and evangelization are closely linked. They cannot be treated as alternatives. A competitive kind of evangelization which has no real concern for the reconciliation among Christians is simply dishonest and false. With our proclamation of the Gospel we are not allowed to export our division and rivalries. Evangelization should serve all God's people, who are not simply a property of the Church. The true evangelization brings hope and gives courage to overcome fear. As St. Clement of Alexandria said long ago, "The whole of religion is protreptic (προτρεπτική γὰρ ἡ πᾶσα θεοσέβεια)", i.e. it gives confidence and encouragement<sup>17</sup>. One has to give up an exaggerated tendency towards Church-making. Evangelization should be understood within a broader perspective, that of the Kingdom of God. His Kingdom is the ultimate horizon of the evangelization. Such an approach can help to overcome the mentality of proselytism and competition.

## **ECUMENICAL APORETICS AND PASCHAL SPIRITUALITY OF HOPE**

Difficult situations are a constant feature of human existence. They determine the dramatic or even tragic character of human life. In this context one has to speak about the Christian "aporetics", expressed in a dialectical way by St. Paul in two words difficult to translate: *απορούμενοι ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐξαπορούμενοι* (2 Cor. 4: 8). Their meaning is clear: we are perplexed, but not driven to despair; perplexed, but not absolutely with no way out; we see no answer to our problems, but never despair. To put it more descriptively: we do not know what to do, the situation seems to be desperate, we worry, there is no solution to our difficulties, but nevertheless we do not give up. In a nutshell: we are helpless, but not desperate; full of doubts, but not plunged into grief.



The Apostle characterizes in this way his own missionary situation. He does not think it is only a short and transitional one (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8). His words show an essential element of Christian existence as such, a dialectical coexistence of helplessness and courage to hold on, which could be applied to ecumenism as well.

Ancient stoics used to see *aporía* in all questions and for this reason they were called aporetics. *Aporía* means an apparently insurmountable difficulty or contradiction<sup>18</sup>. The Apostle did not hesitate to apply this term to himself (*aporoúmenoi*). Christians everywhere know difficult situations from their own experience. In this sense they really are *aporoúmenoi* – perplexed, but not in a situation with no way out. On the other hand they trust in God, believe in the power of Christ and His Spirit. They know that Christendom is not only the religion of the Cross, but also the religion of the Resurrection, hope, courage and joy. The experience of difficulties and dark sides of existence may lead to pessimistic feelings indeed. Ecumenism is no exception in this respect. Christians know that there will be here on earth no total victory over evil and helplessness. This consciousness warns them against a naïve and false optimism which overshadows all the bitter realities of life. The ecumenical aporetics is an integral part of the kenotic dimension of ecclesiology.

Only God can solve the ultimate aporetics of our existence. For this reason pessimism has to cede to a difficult paschal optimism. The paschal spirituality is a spirituality of hope. It looks not only at the crucified Jesus, but also at the risen Christ who is the only source of our hope and confidence.

Today we are more aware that the ecumenism of the mind is not enough. We need also the ecumenism of the heart, and that is not possible without a sincere and true compassion. The Papyrus Oxryrhynchos 1224 quotes a little known apocryphal *logion* of Jesus in reference to Mk 9:40: "Who is today far away from you, tomorrow will be near".<sup>19</sup> Nobody is lost for God and his Kingdom. A truly paschal hope does not forget about the tomorrow of God's Reign, which has no limits.

The soteriological universalism of hope requires a new pedagogy. Christendom contains in itself a vast and creative potential which has so far not been fully discovered and appreciated. Christ himself remains the greatest hope for every human being. The Christianity of the future will find more eschatological optimism in understanding the final destiny of humanity. It will become a more paschal Christianity of hope – of a truly universal hope which brings joy and confidence.

In our Churches there is still too much tactic and diplomacy, which overshadow the kenotic ethos of Christianity. This tactic manifests itself in paralyzing caution, in passing things in silence, in waiting and delaying. Perhaps it is motivated, behind all appearances, by fear that one has to recognize the fundamental identity of the faith and life of other Churches. Who understands his or her own identity in opposition to the others, will always hesitate to acknowledge and to accept their full Christian identity.

I am no pessimist. One century of ecumenism cannot heal what many centuries of mutual alienation have separated. I believe however that it is possible to overcome at least the greatest historical schisms among the Churches. The controversial differences can be dealt with through a patient and persistent dialogue, in such a way that they lose their dividing character. The example of the common Catholic-Lutheran declaration on the doctrine of justification signed at the end of October 1999 in Augsburg is an encouraging sign of hope. God himself will not cease to urge us to be more courageous. Our Saviour is "polyphonic and polytropic" indeed.

The future destiny of the ecumenical dialogue depends on our readiness to proceed on the way of the kenotic ethos of the Christian message. We have been shaped by the history of confessional divisions. The time has come to think more in terms of the future. The roots of our confessionalism are to be found in the past. But as long as we remain prisoners of the past, there will be no real advance towards reconciliation. Our ecclesiologies remain under judgment of eschatology. The memory of the future (*memoria futuri!*) is therefore an indispensable dimension of a more paschal Christianity. Knowing our human weakness and sinfulness we have to invoke the Holy Spirit in a truly ecumenical *epiklesis*. At the beginning of the third millennium we may do it in a way similar to St. Symeon the New Theologian, a Byzantine mystic at the turn of the second millennium: *Ελθε το φως το αληθινόν, ελθε η αιώνιος ζωή* (Come, true Light, come, eternal Life ... ).<sup>20</sup> In the last resort it is He who renews and changes the face of the world and the face of the Church of Christ. I am inclined to think that Christendom is still rather ahead of us than behind us, still very young, increasing slowly in wisdom, learning how to cherish unity in diversity.

## NOTES

1 A shortened and modified version of a paper read at a Symposium "Die Einheit der Kirche – Utopie oder Notwendigkeit? Ekklesiologische Perspektiven an der Jahrtausendwende" in Bern/Switzerland (November 19-20, 1999), published in: "Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift" 91 (2001) Heft 1, pp. 22-43.

2 F. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra* (II, Von den Priestern; III, Vom Gesicht und Räthsel; Vom Geist der Schere), in: *idem, Werke*. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, hg. von Giorgio Colli /azzino Montinari. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967ff.

3 Clement of Alexandria, *Protreptikos*, I,8,3 (SC 2, p. 62).

4 More about the issue of *kenosis* in the ecclesiological context in my essay "The Cost of Unity" published also in this volume.

5 The text of this address was distributed to all the members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

6 Z. Tranda, *W niewoli doktryny (In the Captivity of Doctrine)*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" January 4-5, 1997, p. 17.

7 Kinga Strzelecka OSU, *B'rit Przymierze (B'rit - Covenant)*, Warsaw 1995, pp. 117-136 [interview with Fr Daniel]; D. Corbach (ed.), *Daniel - der Mann aus der Löwengrube. Aus dem Leben von Daniel Oswald Rufeisen*, Köln: Scriba, 1993; J. Turnau, *Daniel od Jakuba. Ojciec Oswald Daniel Rufeisen (1922-1998)*, „Wież” 42 (1999) No. 7, pp. 60-65.

8 Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.

9 The Notion of "Hierarchy of Truths: An Ecumenical Interpretation." "The Church: Local and Universal." Two Studies Commissioned and Received by the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (Faith and Order Paper, 150), Geneva: WCC, 1990, pp. 16-24.

10 AAS 66 (1974), pp. 620-625.

11 Cf. Johan A. Meijer, *A Successful Council of Union: A Theological Analysis of the Photian Synod of 879-880* (Analekta Vlatadon, 23), Thessaloniki 1975; Alexis van Bunnem, *Le Concile de Constantinople de 879-880*, "Contacts" 33 (1981), pp. 6-40, 211-234; 34 (1982), pp. 47-61; W. Hryniewicz, *Focjanski Synod*, in: Encyklopedia Katolicka, vol. V, Lublin 1989, col. 353-356.

12 *An Agreed Statement on Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church*, Bari 1987, No. 53. See also the statement on *The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church...*, Uusi Valamo 1988, No. 52.

13 More about this issue in the essay "*The Cost of Unity*" published also in this volume.

14 See my essay "The Mystery of Unity amidst Division" published in this volume.

15 J. Klinger, *Le problème de l'intercommunion: point de vue d'un orthodoxe*, in: Max Thurian (ed.), *Vers l'intercommunion*, Paris: Mame, 1970, pp. 69-118, here 92-93.

16 Ibid., p. 111, 114.

17 Clement of Alexandria, *Paidagogos* I,1,3 (SC 70, p. 110).

18 Greek word *απορία* means, as far as places are concerned, a difficulty to pass to the other side, to cross a stream or river (*póros* = ford, passage, bridge, way, road, trail, travel, expedition); *aporía* = with no crossing or passage, with no way out, something

difficult to attain. In a broader sense it means any controversial issue difficult to deal with.

19 Cf. *Synopsis quattuor Evangeliorum*, ed. K. Aland, Stuttgart 1985, p. 248.

20 *Oratio mystica*, PG 120,507-510; SCh 156, pp. 150-155.

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## Chapter XII

# **RELIGION, IDENTITY AND OPENNESS: DILEMMAS OF POLISH IDENTITY TODAY<sup>1</sup>**

In the period of transition one feels today in Eastern Europe the need for a deep reflection on national and religious identity. Some people fear also in Poland that the access to the European Union will damage the very foundations of our cultural heritage. In their view, all "Euro-enthusiasts" do not yet realize the scale of the danger. Those who favour membership in the European Union would reply that this argument is not at all valid. The development of electronic means of communication, satellite TV and internet already have significantly changed the entire scene. The heritage of the national culture should, of course, be preserved and promoted, but it has its own dynamic, and must openly face the present realities of the world. This is inevitable.

So reflection on the present status of the "Polish soul" is strongly recommended. The period of transition and transformation has brought new challenges. One has to ask about the present and the future. Poland has again become an independent and free state. This happened first in 1918 and then in 1989. What about Polish patriotism and Polish national identity? What part has religion to play in the new historical context?

These are some of the main questions often asked today by many Poles. They may sound provocative to some people who constantly stress the historical factor of Polish identity shaped during the past centuries. They would argue that the nation which forgets about its past has no future ahead of it either. The regained independence and freedom should therefore be carefully protected and wisely developed. Nevertheless, doubts and fears come quite often to the surface. Free from the dependence on Moscow, some are afraid of the "dictate of Brussels". They are frightened by the mere possibility of losing once again our sovereignty amidst the invasion of Western mass culture contributing to the erosion of national identity. In the name of patriotism they call for its defense against foreign capital, against Germans, Jews, masonry and God knows whom else.

This is, of course, an exaggeration. The national version of Polish patriotism may be inspired by a long tradition and have some good intentions. This reaction has to be taken seriously. The nation which was for such a long time deprived of its own sovereign state has the right to be particularly sensitive to any danger of losing this sovereignty again. National fears constitute a kind of a mental barrier which has to be overcome. The second factor seems to lie simply in an existential insecurity of many frustrated Poles with their syndrome of "post-communism" and "wild capitalism".

The Polish scene has become very diversified today. It is probably an irony of history, that Poland has again become independent at the moment when the very idea of national state undergoes a serious decline. Thanks to the progress of science and technology the world has shrunk to the dimension of a "global village", although it is still divided by disproportions, tensions and cultural differences. One should not forget that Europe has experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century two world wars and two genocidal totalitarianisms. The philosophy of the balance of power was unable to forestall the catastrophe. Today we have adopted a philosophy of solidarity, integration and success.

For Poland it is a huge challenge.<sup>2</sup> How can this country find itself in the light of this new philosophy and at the same time preserve its own national and religious identity? Has the Church a special role to play in this situation? In what does it consist?

### **A POLE - A CATHOLIC?**

To better understand the problem of the Polish identity today requires some information about the ethnic and religious minorities living in this country. There are about 350-450 thousand Germans, 250-350 thousand Byelorussians, 250-300 thousand Ukrainians, 23-30 thousand Slovaks, 15-20 thousand Lithuanians, 10-25 thousand Gypsies and 5-15 thousand Jews. The overall population amounts to about 40 millions. The ethnic minorities constitute about one or 1,3 million, i.e. ca. 3-4 per cent of the entire, mostly Roman Catholic population.

Religious minorities have the following number of their members: 700-850 thousand Orthodox, 80 thousand Lutherans (before 1939 there were about 500 thousand), about 4-5 thousand Reformed Christians, ca. 6.500 Methodists, ca. 40 thousand Polish-National Catholics, about 25 thousand Old-Catholic Mariavites, 3.500 Catholic Mariavites, ca. 3 thousand Baptists, about 10 thousand Adventists of the Seventh Day Adventists, ca. 30 thousand Pentecostals.

The identification "A Pole - a Catholic" has its long history on both the Orthodox and the Protestant side. During the time of partitions (1772-1918), the Orthodox stood on the side of Russia, whereas the Protestants on the side of Prussians, either of their own will or under pressure. Polish national identity had been preserved by the Roman Catholics. This fact remains still in the memory of many Poles.

Within the borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom the Orthodox constituted one third of the whole population. After the fall of the state at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Orthodox dioceses had been incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church, which in turn was an instrument in the process of russification. During that period of time Orthodoxy was perceived as the state ideology of Russia. In the popular view "the Moscovite Church" served the purpose of the Russian policy which wanted to subjugate a Catholic country and justified its behaviour as a necessary measure for the preservation of Orthodoxy. Catholic Poles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century felt that they were living under the tsar regime as an oppressed minority; Orthodoxy seemed to be a "Russian faith". The identification "Russian = Orthodox" was a reflection of another equation: "Polish =

Catholic". The destruction of hundreds of Orthodox churches in the 1920s and 1930s in Eastern Poland could be understood as a violent reaction to the russifying activity of the Orthodox Church during the time of partitions. People feared the Orthodox and thought they would be dangerous to the newly independent Polish state. The destruction of churches contributed to subsequent confessional tensions and animosities which still remain in the memory of many Orthodox in Poland.

During the communist period the feeling of mutual alienation was considerably deepened, as the Orthodox showed loyalty to the regime on a much greater scale than the other Christians. In reality the Orthodox also had many difficulties with the communist authorities. After 1989 they were distrustful of the new political situation. The "Solidarity" movement was perceived by the majority of the Orthodox as being "ultra-Catholic" and holding no good promises. When the new president was being elected (1995), many Orthodox voted for the post-communist candidate, Alexander Kwasniewski, fearing the national and aggressive orientation of the right wing political parties. There was also much disappointment caused by the fact that in previous years some promises made to religious minorities had not been fulfilled. Only the post-communist candidate showed some interest in their situation and guaranteed their rights. For this reason many Orthodox voted for him. Today the Polish language is more and more in use in Orthodox churches. This could contribute to the better image of Orthodoxy in public opinion and contribute to mutual understanding.

Some past experiences during the period of partitions had also led to another identification: "German = Lutheran or Protestant". The Lutherans were favoured by the Prussians. The time of the so-called "*Kulturkampf*" was marked by an intensive germanization in schools and churches. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed, however, that the identification "German = Lutheran" did not correspond to reality. The synod of the Lutheran Church in 1917 wanted to achieve full independence from the Polish authorities, but the project, strongly supported by Germans, had been rejected by the delegates of communities from all over the country. During the Second World War Polish Protestants faced severe oppression. In the concentration camps 27 pastors were killed, including Bishop Julius Bursche. Today Germans are only a minority within the Protestant communities in Poland. The identification "German = Lutheran or Protestant" has become therefore anachronistic, offensive and abusive.

The equation "Polish = Catholic", although historically justified, needs today a decisive and far-reaching correction. During his pilgrimage to Poland in 1991, Pope John Paul II himself reminded his compatriots of the changes that had taken place and warned against any hasty identification. He called Bishop Julius Bursche "a great Christian and great Polish patriot who preferred to give his life in a German prison than to renounce his feeling of being a Pole". Another Lutheran Bishop, Zygmunt Michelis also has been called "a great Christian and Pole". Both, through their life and death, said the Pope, "contested a widespread conviction, that a Lutheran has to be a German, and a Pole should be a Catholic".<sup>3</sup>

## **TOWARDS A QUIET VIRTUE OF PATRIOTISM**

Nowadays the most prominent among our intellectuals speak about a significant change of quality of the Polish patriotism. In the time of partitions it was fed by romanticism, messianism and mysticism. During the twenty years of restored independence (1918-1939) its shape was slightly altered, as it passed from elite to become a more general feeling. It was still noisy, often over-sensitive, declarative and religiously motivated. The second world war brought a new epoch, already free of romantic and messianic overtones. It was the time of a "quiet virtue of patriotism"<sup>4</sup> developed in the situation of skepticism, mistrust, suspicion and shaken faith. People tried to survive and rescue a sense of their own dignity. Our patriotism has become indeed more quiet. The noisy and declarative patriotism of the old days is no longer needed. This is a positive phenomenon. We are not the most beloved of God's nations. Catholic Poles begin to learn not to look upon others with mistrust and feeling of superiority. They also learn humility in understanding patriotism and distinguishing it from superficial forms of pseudo-patriotism and nationalism. True values need tranquility and in depth penetration in order to mature and bear good fruit.

Czeslaw Milosz (+2004), Nobel Prize winner in literature (1980), did not hide his aversion to that type of Catholicism which developed in between the two world wars in Poland and was permeated by nationalist tendencies. He wrote: "I cannot like Polish Catholicism as an intellectual formation which distinguished itself by not understanding what it really was, i.e. proceeding in such a way, that it could never see its face in the mirror".<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, he added, after the Second World War a group of intellectuals tried to renew Polish Catholicism from the inside and have achieved some success in this adventurous task. The word "Catholic" has ceased to signify a political opinion. A certain pluralism of attitudes has been born which meant understanding in a different way the very fact of belonging to the Church, in spite of the old mentality and popular ceremonial religiosity.

Recent sociological inquiries into national self-identification have revealed that its predominant element in the whole society has been a psychological factor, namely, the feeling of being a Pole (86,3%). This is the most valid criterion of Polish identity in public opinion explored in 1988, 1991 and 1998. It is followed by some other cultural criteria, such as knowledge of our history, culture and language. In all the groups studied the Catholic faith comes in at the lowest place (9,2%). Taking into account the results of the three inquiries carried out within those ten years one can see a growing tendency to pass from a substantial conception of Polish identity (common biological and ancestral origin; place of birth, education and living, citizenship; some specific hereditary features) to conventional criteria (psychological and cultural factors). The most decisive criterion appears to be a psychological self-inclusion among Poles. For the majority of young Poles their national self-identity constitutes the most important factor of their collective identity. Self-identification in confessional categories becomes more and more rare.<sup>6</sup> This is a very significant change.

What is the "hard core" of the pro-European option in Poland today? For the younger generation it is no doubt the philosophy of individual success. They learn it very quickly. More and more young people begin to appreciate the value of education and professional



skills. They try to find their place in the new reality. They hope that the integration of Europe will bring considerable advantages. The old ethos of struggle for independence, supported in the past by intellectuals, is slowly replaced today by the ethos of work in the new mass society. This is a change in the cultural substance of Polish national identity which may contribute positively to the process of integration. Poles want to become competent, solid and credible partners in this process, and thus to gain respect. To be a respected partner, means to have a basis for reasonable satisfaction of being a Pole. It is an important motive for preserving one's own national identity, and for a healthy patriotism consonant with the spirit of times. One expects a new and happier chapter in the history of Poland.

Would this attitude be an expression of a "quiet virtue of patriotism"? One may think so. Our achievements can find resonance and recognition, but we surely do not need empty patriotic declamations. For the time being, however, there are not many reasons for an excessive optimism. Many people understand already that ruthless philosophy of success implied in the ethos of work should not endanger the need of solidarity with poor people lost in the turmoil of the free market. We still lack respect for law and basic honesty and the criminal margin is growing all the time. Not without influence is the fact that in the past the law was constituted by occupants and invaders or imposed from the outside by an unwanted power. When this law infringed upon national dignity or interests, its trespassing could even be reckoned as a patriotic deed. Today we feel the consequences of that situation. New educational measures are badly needed.

Precisely here religion has to play its educating and transforming role. The Church has considerable influence on public life through its preaching of the Gospel, moral teaching and promotion of honesty. Do Christian Churches live up to this task? There is no easy answer to this question. The Roman Catholic Church is at the moment seriously divided from within. The attachment of people to the Church has different shades of loyalty. Besides the religious zeal of many people there is also a growing indifference. Some, disappointed, leave the Church, adhere to new religious movements or look for different sects.

#### *Polarization within Polish Catholicism*

The Roman Catholic Church in Poland reached the highest point of its authority in 1989. Only a few years later one could see, however, a clear fall of public confidence and of Church influence. What are the reasons for this change? Surely, not only secularization, permissiveness, religious indifference or a general crisis of values and authorities, but above all the wrong attitudes of the official Church towards a new democratic order of freedom; many mistakes have been committed. The result has been critical voices among many faithful, anticlerical reactions and fear of a denominational or confessional state spread mostly among liberal humanists whose views may be described as open or closed humanism, but also among critical Catholics.

Catholicism in post-communist Poland is deeply divided. There are various currents and different types of its development:

- a. Traditional Catholicism remains strongly attached to the pattern of religiosity inherited from the past.
- b. A so-called "closed Catholicism" displays the mentality of a besieged fortress.
- c. A so-called "open Catholicism" attempts to understand the signs of the time, to practice dialogue with the world and adapt itself to the new situation.
- d. A so-called "comprehensive (or integral) Catholicism" tries to bridge tradition and modernity.

Thus Polish Catholicism finds itself in a situation of serious crisis<sup>7</sup>. A predominant "popular religiosity" undergoes a period of changes. New groups arise who stress their own personal choice of religion and conscious decision to believe in God. There is also a trend towards deepening the faith and bringing it into touch with everyday life. New demands appear: separation of the Church from the state, less involvement of the Church in politics. Some Catholics protest sharply against hasty decisions of the hierarchy in the area of politics and public life.<sup>8</sup>

Nationalist tendencies are very sharply criticized today by those who favour an open and comprehensive model of Catholicism. "Idolatry of the nineties" - reads one title in the influential weekly from Cracow "*Tygodnik Powszechny*".<sup>9</sup> It is a very pertinent diagnosis of the mentality of those Polish Catholics who after 1989 have lost confidence, become disappointed, full of nostalgia and regret. Idolatry means here an escape from the uncomfortable and unforeseen present. Confidence in God has been replaced by seeking visible human security. The situation is indeed not an easy one. Our national Passover which began with enthusiasm, soon was marked by mistrust and escapism. Both clergy and lay people did not sufficiently try to cool down emotions and quarrels among different political fractions, but often contributed to intensifying them.

This is indeed an idolatry! God's logic is the logic of mercy, and not of retribution and punishment. Those who have lost hope and confidence in the new situation started looking for enemies, accusing other people and fighting them. Polish national idolatry of the 90s reached many church pulpits and Catholic media. One could get the impression that some Catholics have an exclusive monopoly for truth, salvation or even God himself. This kind of national idolatry is a dangerous sin and a paralyzing deviation. It destroys the very nature of the faith understood as trust in God in every situation. Particularly dangerous is an excessive tendency to sacralize external signs and symbols (be it the cross itself!), which become even more important than God and the Gospel of Christ itself. The temptation of self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency obscures the right understanding of the new God-given opportunity to give witness to His presence in human history.

*Learning from Our Own History*

Christianity in Poland still lacks a deeply rooted ecumenism. We need a creative theology which could become a source of inspiration for necessary changes. The world needs creative Christians, and not fearful and frightened ones, possessed by a narrow mentality. The greatest enemy of an open religious and national identity is still anti-Semitism and militant nationalism, surviving in certain circles within the Church and society. The work of the Church in educating people to broadmindedness, peaceful coexistence and openness is still unsatisfactory. This is particularly true in relation to national and religious minorities. In everyday life people lack respect for others, for their views, for work and honesty, for those who think and believe in a different way.

More and more often, however, there come under discussion some historical facts and patterns of thinking. The golden age of religious tolerance in Poland deserves in this respect a special attention. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of king Casimir the Great (1340-1366), the Red Ruthenia (Halič - Vladimir) had become part of Poland. The Ruthenian Orthodox population constituted then one third of the entire population of the Polish Kingdom, which had, thus, become the frontier between the Latin West and the Orthodox East. The king supported the Orthodox Church and wanted to create even an independent Orthodox metropolitanate in Halič. In 1385 the Polish state entered into personal union with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, whose nobility was in majority Orthodox. This gave rise to problems of practical coexistence of different denominations. A similar situation was unknown at that time to other Western countries like France, England and Italy. In Poland there were no persecutions. Some restrictions and discriminations concerning higher state offices were gradually removed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century or not put into practice at all. For instance, the prohibition of building new Orthodox churches was in fact never observed on the Ruthenian territories (to some extent in Lithuania, but not in Vilna itself).

After the formal union of the two states in Lublin (1569), Poland-Lithuania became truly multinational. Besides three basic nations - Poles, Lithuanians and Ruthenians - there were many other minorities like Jews, Armenians and others. A popular poem from the 17<sup>th</sup> century which presented the country as hell for peasantry and heaven for nobility, called Poland at the same time "an asylum for heretics".<sup>10</sup> Polish, Lithuanian and Ruthenian nobility, independently of their languages and their denomination enjoyed the same privileges. For the Ruthenian and Lithuanian boyars the state union with Poland meant a social promotion. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century waves of refugees were arriving to Poland from Western Europe whence in the time of religious wars they could find secure asylum and avoid persecution. This fact scandalized, however, some prominent personalities in Rome, Geneva and elsewhere. Some would even condemn this "diabolic freedom of conscience" as a "satanic view" (Theodore Beza).<sup>11</sup>

The voice of those who stress the need of learning from our own history has to be taken seriously. The healing of memories is an indispensable process in the rediscovering the open character of the roots of our true national and religious identity. The lesson of the past can be very fruitful.

The first theologians of the faculty of theology at the Jagiellonian University of Cracow six centuries ago created an original theological school of thought. One can admire today their courage. Their reflection included such delicate issues, for example, as the fate of those who did not believe. Pawel Wlodkowic, the rector of the Cracow Academy, expressed at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century an exceptional intuition, which preceded more than five hundred years the teaching of the Second Vatican Council:

Although the non-believers are not from the flock of the Church, all of them are undoubtedly the sheep of Christ because of creation (cf. J 10): "And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold". And therefore the successor of Peter ought not only to feed them, but also to defend them...<sup>12</sup>

This was the first conclusion of Wlodkowic's work *On the Authority of the Pope and the Emperor towards Pagans*. Taking part in the Council of Constance (1414-1418) he was promoting this idea, unusual at that time, that all people are in principle equal, because they have their own dignity based on the law of the nature. According to Wlodkowic, those who were born and grew up outside the Church belonged in fact to Christ in some manner. God finds his way to them outside the church order and they respond to God in their own way. For this reason also Christians may learn something positive from them. "It is not allowed," he wrote, "to force the non-believers by arms or pressure to embrace the Christian faith..."<sup>13</sup> Such behaviour does harm to people who are our neighbours. The only acceptable means is to persuade pagans or non-believers to accept Christianity. Hostilities and atrocities can only repel them; love is more effective than force. Instead of dominating over people, one should take care of them, respecting the rules of the divine law.

In today's discussion on national and religious identity some voices urgently recalling this precious lesson of our past. The historical tradition of tolerance is still held in high esteem not only by Christians belonging to religious minorities, but also by "open Catholics". Today more and more Christians become aware that religion does not educate to a mysticism of closed eyes, but to a mutual understanding, openness and friendly pro-existence. Still the divided Churches have not succeeded in overcoming fear of the others, in spite of all ecumenical progress. This applies also to Poland.

### *Back to the Forgotten Model of the Past*

In the discussion on the future of the Church and the nation, some prominent personalities stress the fact that our Christian education is still influenced by the spirit of the period of Counter-Reformation, marked by continuous struggle among different denominations. For this reason we have to discover the values of an earlier historical model, shaped by the Jagiellonian tradition (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c.) of multinational state and multi-religious national identity. This is not only because it was a unique federal conception, but because at that time Christianity was not yet involved in religious wars and rivalries. Polish history shares the vicissitudes of the Christian faith in Europe. The Counter-Reformation period in Poland, with such influential figures as Peter Skarga, a Jesuit preacher at the king's court, was in fact not consonant with the time of the Jagiellonian

dynasty. It is not without reason that one speaks today more and more often about some lofty ideals of the Jagiellonian "golden century" and about a remarkable Polish tradition of human tolerance and coexistence. What mattered at that time could become also a future possibility for Europe in the process of integration.

What are those ideals of the Jagiellonian tradition? In the multinational Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth people of different nations, denominations and religions could live together in peace and harmony, enjoy true freedom of conscience and confession of their faith. The Ten Commandments were their common moral code. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, when somewhere a new town was about to be erected, one had to build first three separate temples: a Catholic church, an Orthodox church and a Jewish synagogue. The king used to make a solemn promise to respect the freedom of conscience of his subjects.

One could be inclined to compare that period of Polish history with an unusual phenomenon of tolerance and coexistence in 12<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Toledo, where Christians, Jews and Muslims could live in peace and contribute to each other's spiritual and cultural enrichment. Arabic culture was at that time on a very high level of development. It had preserved for future generations a very large part of the heritage of ancient philosophy. Without Toledo of the 12<sup>th</sup> century one could hardly imagine, for example, the *Summa theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas. We owe to the Arab scholars the knowledge of the writings of Aristotle, translated at that time into Latin, thanks to the collaboration of Christians, Muslims and Jews. One must not forget that this cultural exchange took place at the time of global confrontation between Islam and Christianity, which makes the phenomenon of Toledo even more astonishing.

The Jagiellonian vision may be considered an expression of similar sensitivity. People can live together and feel well within one comprehensive state organism. This vision of human coexistence and pro-existence contradicts all contemporary nationalist tendencies. Nationalism becomes the greatest sin of our times. The case of Bosnia and Kosovo shows abundantly the tragic consequences of nationalism and all "ethnic purges". This is an antithesis of the spirit of Toledo and of the Jagiellonian tradition. The new vision of the world requires that the lessons of the past should not be left to oblivion. There is no other way out of the present-day danger of the revival of nationalism.

A great theologian and writer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Stanislas Orzechowski, wrote about himself and the inhabitants of the Eastern lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom: *natione Polonus gente Ruthenus*. In fact, *Res Publica Polonorum* was at that time a community of peoples living on its territories. Jews could remain Jews, Lithuanians could be Lithuanians and Ruthenians could remain Ruthenians. This variety and plurality was not considered to be a danger to the integrality of the *Res Publica*. The very concept of the nation and its identity had at that time no nationalistic connotations; these appeared quite late, mostly during the period of partitions, starting at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. "Jagiellonian ideas were splendid, said professor Stefan Swieżawski (+2004), a well-known historian of philosophy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but they had been badly carried out: the later, the worse. But it is very rewarding to go back to them, as to the Gospel itself".<sup>14</sup>

Culture and art turned out to be the most resistant area to the consequences of division between the Churches. The best illustration of this fact is the history of Byzantine-Ruthenian paintings in Poland. The traces of the activity of Ruthenian craftsmen may still be seen in different places (Sanok, Lancut, Przemysl, Posada Robotycka, Cracow, Wislica, Lublin, Sandomierz). The Byzantine-Ruthenian wall-paintings coming from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries are in fact an expression of personal predilection of the two Polish kings, Ladislas Jagiello and Casimir the Jagiellonian, for Eastern Christian art and spirituality. It is worth recalling that both of them inherited this liking from their Orthodox mothers. The Byzantine-Ruthenian polychromies appear later to be more and more isolated on the Polish territories which underwent a strong influence of the Western Gothic art. Nevertheless they bear clear witness to the long coexistence of the two great Christian cultures in the Polish borderland. Each of these cultures kept its own distinctive character, without being truly assimilated by the other side. The well-preserved Ruthenian wall-paintings (1418) of the Gothic Holy Trinity chapel in the castle of Lublin seem to be at once a monument of the most advanced Eastern art in the West, and, at the same time, the most advanced object of Western art in the East.

The most important factor in the Jagiellonian tradition is the ideal of the Commonwealth (*Res Publica*!) of many nations. It was neither a denominational nor a national state, but truly multinational and multi-confessional. In our history we have therefore a concrete model which could become an inspiring example for the united Europe in the future as well. This historical model seems to deserve more and more attention today. Are there similar models in the history of Western countries? I ask this question being at the same time well aware of our own inability to put this inspiration into practice in our own country. So often, because of our own faults, history couldn't be a true *magistra vitae*. This is the case also in contemporary Poland. Many people think that if they are not nationally-minded, Poland will perish. As history shows, this is a great mistake! Because the Jagiellonian tradition was forgotten, we had to experience a tragic period of disasters and partitions. Saying this I am far from all kind of megalomania. What matters today is not the future of my own country, but the future of the united Europe and of the world. Europe needs that friendly pluralism and peaceful coexistence of diversity, which was to be seen during the Jagiellonian period of Polish-Lithuanian and Ruthenian history.

Today we need people with great vision and courage, wise and good people who keep their faith not only in God, but also in humanity, in human dignity, goodness and ability to change. We need the Church which is open, poor, full of understanding and compassion for human weakness, ready to truly serve the needs of the people. Only such a Church, of freedom and responsibility will be able to lead the country out of petty quarrels and inner divisions. The third millennium is a challenge for all of us. Very often in the past Poland pretended to play the role of the so-called *antemurale christianitatis*, a rampart defending the Christian world against all danger coming from the East.<sup>15</sup> This kind of defensive mentality, although sometimes still echoed, already belongs to the past. People realize that the best way to overcome the danger of secularism and practical materialism is to deepen and broaden Christian attitudes, to adopt the vision of an "integral humanism" (J. Maritain), to open themselves to new forms of spirituality, to the process of reconciliation and ecumenical concern.

All Christian Churches in Poland are maturing slowly to the attitude of dialogue and openness. They realize more and more that we are not the exclusive owners of the truth, but pilgrims to its final manifestation in the Kingdom of God. There are many ways to the same God of all of us. Who believes in the Gospel and its transforming power should not be afraid of contact and dialogue with other people and other cultures. More and more, people become aware that ecumenism is no threat to our Church and our culture. This conviction was expressed long ago by Albert of Saxony (+1390): *Omnibus conformari et se ipsum non deformare*, i.e. to adapt oneself to all without deformation of oneself. Professor Swieżawski used to recall these wise words written by an educated man who was the rector of the Sorbonne and of the university of Vienne, before he became (1366) Bishop of Halberstadt.

## **NEW THINKING ABOUT NATIONAL IDENTITY**

The process of the integration of Europe continues to advance. In the epoch of globalization it would be a nonsense to build walls of separation. This is well understood by millions of Poles looking for their own place in the new reality. They have not ceased to feel themselves to be Polish. They are aware that "Europeanness" is a call to inter-human solidarity, community of the spirit, to reconciled diversity and unity in Christian roots. This new dimension of the Polish discourse on Europe was introduced by John Paul II in Gniezno, during his pilgrimage to Poland in 1997. In this debate some would go so far as to deny any value to the Polish national tradition. They are inclined to see in it only a cause of our national calamities and a source of all threats. In fact, it is not a national tradition as such which alienates us from Europe, but xenophobia, anti-Semitism, instrumentalization of religion for political reasons, empty ritualism and false prophets of the distorted national idea. Some nationalist groups would proclaim themselves to be the only defenders of the truth of Catholicism, but in reality they lack Christian virtues of mercy and compassion.

There is a growing awareness that the feeling of national identity is no obstacle to a European self-identification and that, on the other hand, "Europeanness" cannot become a justification for the lack of an authentic patriotism and of the feeling of solidarity with Polish national community all over the world.<sup>16</sup> Patriotism should be understood as a shape of a true love which does not exclude anyone and feels responsible for the other people. It is the opposite of militant nationalism. Both nazism and communism were in this sense anti-European and anti-Christian.

The criterion of our European self-identification is not a rejection of national tradition, but willingness to include what is the best part of it into the main stream of the European culture. To do so requires however a creative and open understanding of our national identity. This means that we have still to learn a lot from other countries, from which we were separated for a long time by communism. To learn what? Above all an ability to accept otherness, respect for law and the rights of an individual, acting in common, rejection of all manifestation of anti-Semitism, racism and violence. Polish national tradition can, on the other hand, also become a general European value if it means openness, love of freedom and tradition, creative faithfulness and devotion to one's

ideals, readiness to a heroic struggle and ordinary work. Today Poland has become, at least to some extent, a synonym of success because of such features of its inhabitants.

An example of this could be the fact that some young Poles who spent most of their life abroad have now decided to come back to Poland. This is no sentimental decision and no expression of patriotism in the form of previous generations. Poland has become an attractive country because of its dynamic development, readiness to learn and to work hard. It can provide young, ambitious and educated people with attractive possibilities. Many feel they can be proud of being Polish today. They are attracted by the living religiosity and tolerance in the Polish society<sup>17</sup>.

In 1998 the two hundred year anniversary of the birth of the greatest national poet, Adam Mickiewicz, was celebrated. Already earlier some attempts were made to awaken interest in his religiosity, which could be described as a "Catholicism of the heart". Mickiewicz understood his religious and national identity in broad and dynamic categories. He spoke about "broadening our souls". He was contrary to any form of anti-Semitism. In his view Israel deserves respect and help as our "elder brother" in the faith.<sup>18</sup> Today his views could also shape the mentality of Poles and become a good basis for a fruitful dialogue with the Jews.

We realize, that in the future religion and faith are going to become above all a personal choice, and not an inherited evidence. People become more and more indifferent or have their own "selective religiosity". One can see already both the opportunities and dangers of the present situation. It is a huge challenge to all, amidst dramatic tensions and conflicting interpretations of the role of religion in shaping the national identity. Danger lies not so much in contemporary pluralism, post-modernity and growing secularism as such, but within internal destructive processes damaging the Church and its image in the world.

### **Patriotism versus Nationalism**

A healthy national identity requires that religion should overcome such temptations and excessive substitutes as integration of the nation and an active role in politics. It has to concentrate on its proper role: to be a true ferment or leaven within culture and society. This can be achieved by credible preaching of the Gospel, serving the needy (*diakonía*), deepening religious formation of the faithful, inspiring smaller communities of Christian life, warning against the danger of militant nationalism.

It is true that traditional patriotism based on blood and soil slowly loses ground or simply becomes less noisy. But it does not mean that human attachment to one's homeland should cease to exist. The main task today is to prevent patriotism from becoming nationalism which makes one's own homeland the measure of everything and opposes it to all other countries.<sup>19</sup> Remaining a patriot, I have to develop in myself the ability to treat all other people as if they belonged to one big family. The best prophylactic against nationalism is a transnational ethos which acknowledges a global responsibility for all people. Our basic identity results from the fact of being human.



Every human being has been created in God's image and likeness. This is our highest dignity.

Such a transnational ethos is inspired by the Bible. The Churches should promote it, whereas in fact they often act as agents of nationalism. This is a huge challenge to all Churches in Europe. Religion should not become part of the nationalistic movements. Nationalism, chauvinism, ideological and religious fundamentalism all betray the same mental syndrome which is in deep contradiction to the teaching of Christ. They all belong to the primitive identification pattern based on a collective superiority-feeling or collective fear of other people. Next comes an attempt to justify these attitudes by stressing historical and national rights or historical necessity.

The appearance of nationalism always casts a long shadow on patriotism and leads some people to adopt simply a cosmopolitan ideology of a "citizen of the world". But cosmopolitanism is rather, even in the age of "globalization", only a lofty moral ideal, unable to overcome the danger of nationalism. In many countries there is also a clear tendency to develop the concept of "Christian nationalism", but this seems to be a kind of sophistry or even an abuse. One cannot justify various national egoisms.

The ideal of cosmopolitanism does not, however, exclude an authentic patriotism. There is no need to choose only one part of the alternative: either patriotism or cosmopolitanism. This kind of an unfortunate opposition should be avoided. Where the Churches are able to promote a transnational ethos based on the Gospel, this becomes a powerful prophylactic against the virus of nationalism. All Churches and religions share today the responsibility for peace and progress. The dialogue between them can prevent nationalistically-minded madmen from stirring up hostility and hatred. It is also necessary to educate people to a sound patriotism which is no threat to others.

## **RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND A NEW EVANGELIZATION**

It will be more and more difficult to permeate secular culture with the spirit of the Gospel. This requires new methods of evangelization, which should be truly ecumenical. What is needed is a more flexible morality of love, forgiveness and mercy, and not a rigid morality of prohibitions. Christians need a more optimistic spirituality, a more paschal one based on the central truths of the faith. Shaping an open national and religious identity demands also a new language, more positive and affirmative, not negative and castigating.

There are in the New Testament (Ac 16-17) two different accounts of the first contacts of Christianity with Europe. During the second missionary journey of the Apostle Paul, the Gospel first reached Macedonia (A.D. 50-52). One can almost feel the atmosphere of that encounter, when Luke, the Greek, gives his account in the first person plural ("we"), perhaps stressing in this way that in Europe the faith should be proclaimed and witnessed to not only individually, but also collectively. We may accompany the Apostle of the nations in Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea, Athens and Corinth. The encounters in Philippi and Athens are of particular importance. In Philippi the conversation with women takes

place in an atmosphere of spiritual openness and religious dedication. The evangelization seems to be here an easy task, accompanied by human warmth, cordiality and friendship.

The meeting in Athens is much more difficult. The Areopagus stands almost for free market ideas; its climate recalls the Hyde Park corner. The Apostle is not a welcome guest here. To find a common language he quotes a Greek poet. The task of evangelization requires much more invention, energy and experience of one's own faith. But it is precisely here that Paul was forced to discover a new expression of his faith in God: "He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move, in Him we exist" (Ac 17: 27-28). Without this demanding, distrustful and difficult audience shaped by a democratic society of Greece, he would probably have never uttered words of such wisdom and freshness. There was born, in the atmosphere of discussion, a simple but revolutionary idea which had never before been formulated in this way in human words. Europe has in a way forced the Apostle to give a very humanistic description of God in a new, personal and comprehensible language. This was not a language of rebuke and condemnation, but of understanding, friendship and compassion.

The contacts of Europe with Christianity can be seen as having two facets and two attitudes. One portrays the priority of the human heart, the other the priority of critical intellect. Each one of them has its own value. It is not enough to open human hearts. One has to offer convincing arguments as well. Even if they fail to bring a desirable effect, the preacher is nevertheless rewarded by a new experience and a new understanding of his or her own identity.

The encounter with a democratic, pluralistic and critical mentality requires a new language, able to convey the wisdom of the Christian message. Secularized society of today does not accept easy explanations. The critical mind has to be convinced and profoundly touched. This kind of encounter is difficult indeed.

In Poland we seem now to find ourselves in the situation somewhat similar to that of St Paul before the whole council of the Areopagus. We are looking for a more profound understanding of our national and religious identity. Future generations will judge whether we accomplish this task responsibly and courageously.

## NOTES

1 An abbreviated version of a paper delivered at an international symposium "Religion and National Identity in Eastern Europe" in Majvik/Helsinki, June 4, 1999, published in: "Reseptio" (Helsinki) No. 1, 1999, pp. 45-61.

2 Cf. W. Wiczonek. *I co dalej? (And What Next?)* "Wież" 41 (1998) No.11, pp. 71-77.

3 *Wobec braci sama tolerancja to jeszcze za mało (Tolerance Alone Is Not Enough Towards Brothers)*. "L'Osservatore Romano", Polish edition, a special number, June 1-9, 1991, p. 107.

4 G. Herling-Grudzinski, *Cicha cnota patriotyzmu (The Quiet Virtue of Patriotism)*, "Wież" 41 (1998) No. 11, pp.15-19; Archbishop J. Zycinski. *Polskie kolory ciszy (Polish Colours of Tranquility)*, *ibid.*, pp. 19-28.

5 Cz. Miłosz, *O Turowiczu (About Turowicz)*. "Tygodnik Powszechny. Apokryf" No. 12, December 1997, p. 4

6 Ewa Nowicka, *Jak być Polakiem (How to Be Polish?)*, "Wież" 41 (1998) No. 11, pp. 49-60.

7 More about this in my paper "The Challenge of Our Hope - History and Eschatology: An East European View" included in this volume.

8 See Jarosław Gowin, *Kościół po komunizmie (Catholicism after Communism)*, Cracow-Warsaw 1995, pp. 219-284.

9 Tomasz Słominski, *Balwochwalstwo lat dziewięćdziesiątych (Idolatry of the Nineties)*. "Tygodnik Powszechny" No. 30, July 26, 1998 p. 10.

10 See Janusz Tazbir, *Dzieje polskiej tolerancji (History of Polish Tolerance)*, Warsaw 1973, p. 57.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

12 Cf. G. Rys, *Od balwochwalców do "innych owiec". Z dziejów stosunku chrześcijan do pogan w starożytności i średniowieczu (From Idolaters to "Other Sheep": On the History of the Attitude of Christians to Pagans in Antiquity and Middle Ages)*. "Znak" 50 (1998) No. 515, pp. 15-21, here 21.

13 Cf. G. Rys. *Odwaga pytań (The Courage of Questions)*. "Tygodnik Powszechny" No. 4, January 26, 1997, p. 11.

14 *Tylko drogi są różne. Z profesorem Stefanem Świeżawskim rozmawia Paweł Gozłinski (Only the Ways Are Different. Interview with Professor Stefan Świeżawski)*. "Magazyn Gazety Wyborczej" No. 24, June 12-13, 1998, pp. 30-35, here 35.

15 See Janusz Tazbir, *Rzeczpospolita i świat. Studia z dziejów kultury XVII w. (The Res Publica and the World: Studies from the History of Culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> c.)*, Wrocław-Kraków-Warszawa-Gdańsk 1971, pp. 63-78.

16 See Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska, *Polskość i europejskość. Kilka uwag na marginesie nie rozpoczętej debaty ("Polishness" and "Europeanness": Some Remarks on the Margin of a Non-Initiated Debate)*. "Wież" 41(1998) No. 11, pp. 78-81.

17 See Bartosz Iłowiecki, *Dlaczego jestem Polakiem? (Why Am I Polish?)* "Wież" 41 (1998) No. 11, pp. 82-85.

18 See Abraham G. Duker, *The Mystery of the Jews in Mickiewicz's Towianist Lectures on Slavic Literature*, "The Polish Review" 7 (1962) 40-66; Jadwiga Maurer, "Z matki obcej..." *Szkice o powiazaniach Mickiewicza ze swiatem Zydow* ("Out of Alien Mother...": *Essays on Mickiewicz's Connections with the Jewish World*), London 1990; Maria Janion, *Legion zydowski Mickiewicza* (*Mickiewicz's Jewish Legion*). "Midrasz" (1998), No. 4, pp. 27-36; Stefan Schreiner. *Die Idee des polnisch-jidischen Messianismus. Zum 200. Geburtstag des polnischen National-Dichters Adam Mickiewicz*. "Orientierung" 63 (1999) No. 8, pp. 92-96.

19 About patriotism and cosmopolitanism see the discussion of some American intellectuals, published in the collection: *For Love of Country. Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, Boston 1996.

## **Chapter XIII**

# **BETWEEN TRUST AND MISTRUST: ECUMENICAL RELATIONS AND THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH<sup>1</sup>**

The relationships between Eastern and Western Christianity have always been difficult, full of misunderstandings, tensions, conflicts and disappointments. The present-day situation is nothing new in this respect. Many studies devoted to the history of the schism of the eleventh century show that it was an outcome of a long process of mutual estrangement between the two Christian traditions<sup>2</sup>. Many factors contributed to the development of this alienation: cultural (the use of Latin and Greek), political and theological. On the theological level one can observe the differences already in the Trinitarian teaching, later on in the centuries-long disputes over the *Filioque* clause, and some ecclesiological issues such as the role of the Bishop of Rome. No wonder that theological controversies were so often permeated with many reproaches of a cultural and political nature. It was easy, in this context, to regard even small differences as serious deviations from the true faith.

The second millenium brought such painful events as the Crusades, the sack of Constantinople and the establishment of parallel hierarchies in the East (the Latin Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Constantinople). Only on May 4, 2001, during his visit to the Archbishop of Athens, Christódoulos, did Pope John Paul II ask God for forgiveness of the past sins:

Some memories are especially painful, and some events of the distant past have left deep wounds in the minds and hearts of people to this day. I am thinking of the disastrous sack of the imperial city of Constantinople(...). It is tragic that the assailants, who had set out to secure free access for Christians in the Holy Land, turned against their own brothers in the faith. The fact that they were Latin Christians fills Catholics with deep regret. (...) To God alone belongs judgment, and therefore we entrust the heavy burden of the past to his endless mercy, imploring him to heal the wounds which still cause suffering to the spirit of the Greek people. Together we must work for this healing (...).<sup>3</sup>

These words came eight centuries after those events – better late than never. The subsequent centuries were marked by the attempts to heal the schism by the unsuccessful

church "unions" of Lyons (1274), Florence (1438-45), Brest (1596) and some other. The Catholic Church proclaimed its own dogmas, deepening thus the process of theological estrangement. Only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did there emerge an ecumenism that could finally bring the rapprochement of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. At last there came the time for a real dialogue between the two "sister Churches". This was due mainly to the ecumenical openness of the Second Vatican Council and to the Pan-Orthodox Conferences (1961, 1963).

## **THE CHURCH, SACRAMENTS AND UNITY: THE YEARS OF THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE (1980-1990)**

This period of time may be characterized as the most promising in the official dialogue between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches which began in 1980 on the Greek islands Patmos and Rhodes. The dialogue was made possible on one side by the decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Conferences and, on the other, by the Second Vatican Council. It began with a positive method of reflecting upon the sacramental nature of the Church. The intention was to discover jointly the salvific reality which unites our two Churches. The first eight years of theological discussions brought three important agreed statements which identified above all what we have in common: *The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity* (1982), *Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church* (1987), *The Sacrament of Order [Ordination] in the Sacramental Structure of the Church* (1988). All these documents deal with theological issues. It has become clear that the unity of the basic faith can exist in a diversity of traditions, customs and practices. They have created a solid basis for discussion of such dividing ecclesiological issues as authority and synodality in the Church, and the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

I have elsewhere characterized the hermeneutics of this period of dialogue, its biblical, patristic and liturgical language, its Trinitarian perspective, an iconic mode of thinking, the category of *koinonia*, the principle of a sound pluralism in the variety of traditions, customs and practices<sup>4</sup>. There is no need to repeat it here.

The dialogue is a blessing for the Churches. Being personally involved from the very beginning in the work of the Joint Catholic-Orthodox Commission I have to confess that this difficult dialogue has been for me above all an unforgettable experience of hope. The dialogue gives joy and raises hope which is born in hard efforts of thinking with the others and gives meaning to those efforts. The dialogue with the Orthodox teaches how to become more and more sensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the world. The agreed statements abound with the witnesses of this sensitivity. Dialogue is a mutual learning process, a kind of reciprocal *perichóresis*, i.e. interpenetration of consciences. With the progress of years the dialogue with the Orthodox has become an experience of the inevitable choice between ecclesiology of Sister Churches and ecclesiology of conversion. Dialogue requires a tremendous amount of effort to understand the position of the other and to do everything which promotes the spirit of reconciliation.

The official Catholic-Orthodox dialogue was accompanied by a persistent work of joint local commissions in different countries, especially in the United States<sup>5</sup>. The Americans responded both positively and critically to each document of the international Commission. It was a promising sign for the reception of the results of the international dialogue.

Unfortunately, the promising period of theological dialogue on the international level was to come to an abrupt end after political changes in Eastern Europe and in Russia. The newly won freedom of religion in the countries of the former Soviet block brought unexpected new tensions and conflicts between the two Churches. The theological issues had to be postponed until the burning problem of the co-called "uniatism" and proselytism was first dealt with and satisfactorily resolved. This has not been achieved until now.

### **THE YEARS DOMINATED BY THE ISSUE OF "UNIATISM" (1990-2000)**

A rapid deterioration of relationships was due mainly to the emergence of the Greek Catholic Churches<sup>6</sup>, especially in the Ukraine and Romania, which were banned by Stalin (1946 and 1948 respectively). The Greek Catholic Church was declared illegal and many churches and ecclesiastical belongings were given to the Orthodox. After the turn of 1989 the Greek Catholics began to demand their former property at the expense of the Orthodox who were expelled from many churches. At the beginning violence was also used in seizing of Orthodox churches<sup>7</sup>. Thus began a period of conflicts between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. The progress in theological dialogue was halted. The "uniatism" was declared by the Orthodox a dangerous form of proselytism and a source of divisions.

In this situation the Joint Catholic-Orthodox Commission had to suspend the discussion of theological issues and to concentrate on the problem of "uniatism". This was done during the session in Freising/Munich (1990) and in Balamand/Lebanon (1993) in the statement *Uniatism, method of union of the past, and the present search for full communion*<sup>8</sup>. The Balamand statement rejects uniatism as a method considering "opposed to the common tradition of our Churches" (No. 2), but acknowledges that the Eastern Catholic Churches "have the right to exist and to act in response to the spiritual needs of their faithful" (No. 3). It says (No. 12) more explicitly in reference to ecclesiology of Sister Churches:

Because of the way in which Catholics and Orthodox (...) discover each other once again as Sister Churches, this form of 'missionary apostolate' (...) which has been called 'uniatism', can no longer be accepted either as a method to be followed or as a model of the unity our Churches are seeking.

While stressing the respect for freedom of conscience, the same statement categorically excludes all forms of proselytism, understood as "conversion of people from one Church

to the other", as desire for expansion by Catholics "at the expense of the Orthodox Church" (n. 15, 22, 35).

Religious freedom would be violated when, under the cover of financial assistance, the faithful of one Church would be attracted to the other, by promises, for example, of education and material benefits that may be lacking in their own Church (No. 24).

That is why every form of assistance and philanthropic activity must be organized "with common agreement so as to avoid creating new suspicions". Pastoral projects should be consulted with pastors of the other Church (No. 25, 29). The document calls for reciprocal exchanges of information about various pastoral projects and for mutual collaboration (n. 22, 29). It urges the Churches to condemn the use of violence against the communities of a Sister Church and to follow the evangelical ethos (Nos. 27, 28).

These are only some of the ecclesiological principles and practical rules contained in this wise document, which was supposed to open a new chapter in the Catholic-Orthodox relations. Unfortunately, negative reactions among the Greek Catholics and within some Orthodox Churches (five of them did not take part in the plenary session of the Joint Commission in Balamand) prevented a breakthrough taking place. Although the document was not able to change the situation in the areas of conflict between the Orthodox and the Greek Catholics, it has become a source of inspiration for some significant local initiatives.

In 1992 *The Kievan Church Study Group* began its work composed of hierarchs and theologians of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. They aimed at restoring full communion between the Kievan Church as a whole (both Orthodox and Greek-Catholics!) with the mother Church of Constantinople without breaking communion with Rome. The Group managed to discuss the most controversial theological issues, including the Roman primacy<sup>9</sup>. What the Joint International Commission was not able to do so far, became a topic of reflection within a local bilateral dialogue.

Another example of important local initiatives fostered by the Balamand statement has been the dialogue of Orthodox and Melchite Greek Catholic Christians in the Patriarchate of Antioch. This bold initiative deserves a special attention and a more detailed presentation<sup>10</sup>

The ecclesiological and canonical consequences of uniatism were further debated within the Joint International Commission. The Coordinating Committee was able to draft a short statement during its meeting in Rome (1997) and in Ariccia near Rome (1998). It admitted that the very existence of the Eastern Catholic structures parallel to those in the Orthodox Church is something "abnormal", which calls into question the salvific character of the Orthodox Churches, contradicts an ancient ecclesiology (one local Church – one Bishop) and presupposes the concept of the universal jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome.



So, finally the plenary session of the Joint Commission in Emmitsburg/Baltimore faced a difficult task of finding a solution to the problem of uniatism. It failed for various reasons. The Catholic side was not able to agree that the ecclesiological situation of the Greek Catholic Churches in communion with Rome was "abnormal". Some unsuccessful attempts had been made to overcome the crisis in the discussion<sup>11</sup>, but no common position was found. The initiative of further step in the dialogue was given to the ecclesiastical authorities of both Churches. Fortunately the work of the Coordinating Committee of the Joint Commission was resumed again in December 2005.

## **TWO DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF "PROSELYTISM":**

### **THE PRESENT CONFLICT BETWEEN ROME AND MOSCOW**

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) had a relatively long and good experience of bilateral dialogue. It started 1967, shortly after the Second Vatican Council. The topics of mutual interest discussed in it were of a theological and pastoral character: Church and salvation, Christian message of salvation in the changing world, pastoral care today, some contemporary issues. The striking fact was that during Soviet times the relations between the two Churches were quite friendly and fruitful. When the communist regime had weakened at the end of the 1980s, the problems with religious freedom soon began to appear, especially in those countries where the Greek Catholic Church had emerged after a long period of catacomb existence (Ukraine, Romania). The main source of conflict in Russia turned out to be the presence and activity of the RCC, considered by the ROC as proselytism.

In 1991 the RCC established in Russia four "apostolic administrations" (not formal dioceses), thus wanting to avoid parallel structures in relation to the Orthodox "sister Church". Those "apostolic administrations" corresponded in fact to ecclesiastical structures of the ROC in the West. The document issued soon after by the Pontifical Commission "Pro Russia" *General Principles and Practical Norms of Coordinating Evangelism and Ecumenical Work of the Catholic Church in Russia and Other CIS Countries* (June 1, 1992) encouraged collaboration with Orthodox hierarchy, urged the Catholics to avoid any "parallel structures", to cooperate with the Orthodox Bishops and to inform them about "all important pastoral initiatives". In the meantime the parochial, educational and charitable activity of the RCC began to cause problems in the mutual relationships of the two Churches. The ROC saw in this development a missionary strategy of the gradual "conversion" of Russia. The memory of the past centuries of Catholic expansion aroused new fears. In the 1880s Vladimir Solovyev wrote in his *Lectures concerning Godmanhood*: "Catholicism at all times has shown itself the arch-enemy of our [Russian] people and of our [Orthodox] Church; but it is precisely on this account that we ought to be just toward it"<sup>12</sup>.

In February 2002 the Vatican decided to create four fully-fledged dioceses in Russia. This step has provoked a deep crisis in the mutual relationship, which till now remains unsolved. Let us look at it in the light of an exchange of statements between the high-ranking representatives of both Churches.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, the Chairman of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, published a long article on the theological roots of the conflict<sup>13</sup>. He finds in ROC some signs of return to Slavophile traditions, linked with "chauvinism of the Russian nation". He complains further that the ROC does not regard the Catholic Church present in Russia as an interlocutor and "sister Church". According to him, proselytism consists in gaining someone for another religion or denomination by using methods which are incompatible with the Gospel and human freedom. Meanwhile the Orthodox consider proselytism every evangelizing activity directed towards the numerous non-believers in present-day Russia, and also every form of pastoral presence which could attract non-believers. This conception of proselytism unduly extends its meaning. The ROC feels her own "pastoral weakness" (*la propria debolezza pastorale*) and "is afraid of the Catholic presence, which is essentially more effective on the pastoral and evangelizing level" (*teme perciò una presenza cattolica essenzialmente più efficace a livello pastorale ed evangelizzatrice*). The Cardinal thinks that the debate on proselytism and the principle of canonical territory conceals in fact, on the Orthodox side, arguments of ideological nature (*le argumentazioni ... sostanzialmente di natura ideologica*). The ROC wants thus to secure its hegemony at the expense of the RCC and of personal freedom, not acknowledging the right of an individual to conversion. Some statements even sound harsh: the ROC uses a double measure because she accepts financial help from the West and has Orthodox dioceses in Western countries, but does not recognize the missionary dimension of the RCC. All this is a mere consequence of the identification of ROC with a determined ethnic culture. Precisely in this Card. Kasper sees an "ecclesiological heresy" (*un'eresia ecclesiologica*).

The answer came first in an open letter written by Metropolitan Kyrill, the Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate<sup>14</sup>. He stated that all good intentions officially expressed by the RCC have not been followed by concrete actions. The RCC declares her readiness for dialogue with the ROC in public statements, but acts in Russia in such a way as if no dialogue had ever existed. The decision to establish the four dioceses in Russia was kept secret and there was no preliminary consultation or negotiation with a "sister Church". It is not the absence of the dialogue itself which causes serious problems. The attitude of the Catholic side simply "destroys this dialogue". The new church structures have been created with the intention to provide "a space for growth", with the hope to augment considerably the number of Catholics. For this reason the ROC regards the Catholic mission in Russia as proselytism<sup>15</sup>.

The Metropolitan explains that there is no comparison between the Orthodox presence in the West and the current Catholic presence now in Russia: "We have not divided any country into dioceses as has been done by the Catholics in Russia". There is no Orthodox "mission" towards people in Western countries. No local Church parallel to the existing structures has been created there. The titles given to Orthodox Bishops abroad (Bishop of Surozh, Korsun, Sergeevo, Kerch) do not double the titles of local non-Orthodox Bishops. The parishes and dioceses of the ROC in foreign countries have been established only for pastoral care of the Russian-speaking diaspora, for people rooted in the Orthodox tradition, and not for a missionary work among the local population. This

fully contrasts with Cardinal Kasper's statement that the Catholic Church has the right to her "mission" in Russia.

Many Catholics do not at all understand this difference. They often argue that the existence of the Orthodox dioceses and parishes in the West does not substantially differ from the existence of the Catholic dioceses and parishes in the East. One has to be very careful with such statements. The Orthodox dioceses were established by and for the Russian emigration.

To my mind, the basic questions to be answered now are the following ones: Was it truly necessary to create four dioceses in such a difficult time of transition? Are structures more important than peace and cooperation among the Churches? Is it really so, that the Catholic structures in Russia have been created in order to attract the Russian population to Catholicism? Is it true, that the Catholic Church has developed a far-reaching "missionary strategy" in the East? These questions need clarification in a sincere and honest dialogue. The situation will not change until convincing actions truly match verbal declarations.

One can already see from the above two statements that there is no agreement between the Catholics and the Orthodox concerning the notions of proselytism and "mission". The Catholics interpret the term "proselytism" as enticement of people from one Christian community to another through dishonest means. They emphasize the necessity of preaching the Gospel not only to their faithful, but also to non-believers and non-baptized people who freely choose the Catholic Church. Should they remain atheists rather than become Catholics? This conception justifies then the Catholic mission in Russia flowing out of the "missionary nature" of the Church. This is a central point of the present-day debate.

On the other hand, the Orthodox understand by "mission" a missionary activity of a particular Christian Church in its own "canonical territory" or in those places where Christianity was not preached before. If, therefore, missions are carried out by Christians in places where there exists already a local Christian Church, this mission should be fulfilled in collaboration and in close contact with the local Church. Consequently, by "proselytism" the Orthodox side understands missionary activity in the territory which traditionally belongs to another Christian Church, to the detriment of this Church.

The official response to the issue of "proselytism" came from the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate itself. The document entitled *Catholic proselytism among the Orthodox population in Russia* (dated June 25, 2002)<sup>16</sup> presents in a detailed way the problem of proselytism, canonical territory and "missionary" activity of the RCC. In the Orthodox view the problem of proselytism is even more aggravated by the fact that the Catholic side denies its very existence. This devalues the RCC's attitude to the Orthodox Church as her "sister Church" declared by Vatican II. The document raises objections to the Catholic understanding of mission in an Orthodox country. It states that the object of this mission becomes the traditionally Orthodox population having spiritual, cultural and historical bonds with Orthodoxy.

Catholic clergy come to "a country with millennium-old Christian culture imbued with the Orthodox tradition", to people who do not have any historical or cultural relation to the RCC. Those people lost their Orthodox roots during the time of the atheist regime, but most of them return gradually to the Orthodox faith of their ancestors. What matters is "the traditional nature of Orthodoxy for Russia". Therefore Russia is no missionary field for competition and confrontation in "evangelizing" the local population. The Russian document sends back, with some irony, the Catholic missionaries to a West which becoming more and more secular and atheistic. This is precisely, it says, their "canonical territory".

The decision of the Vatican to establish full-fledged dioceses and to form thus a "church province" headed by a metropolitan has been assessed by the ROC as "a system of competition". In the Orthodox view, acting without any dialogue, Rome "has fundamentally changed the nature of the Catholic presence in Russia". What does it mean concretely? The document on proselytism says in concluding remarks: "Rome has declared the existence of a Russian Catholic Church understood as a church for the Russians whatever their cultural and ethnic roots may be. (...) The Catholic Church in Russia has ceased to be a pastoral structure for ethnic minorities linked with the Roman Catholic tradition and declared itself a church of a given place whose duty and responsibility is mission towards all the people living in Russia".

Thus the problem of proselytism is now far from finding a solution which could make the continuation of the dialogue possible. In the post-Soviet space, the ROC finds itself now in a very difficult situation with regard to the Catholic Church. Russia is still recovering from many decades of persecution of religion. Some high representatives of the ROC reassure that freedom of conscience is to be respected, that they do not oppose individual cases of conversion to Catholicism. However, those who are spiritually uprooted need time to rediscover their own roots before they are able to make a free choice of religion. The strongest opposition comes against what is called "a missionary strategy", developed in order to attract an Orthodox (even potentially such!) population to Catholicism.

One has to take seriously into account all this context, so different from the situation of Christian Churches in the West. Otherwise stereotypes will prevail and there will be no chance to find peace and reconciliation between the two Churches.

## **THE NOTION OF "CANONICAL TERRITORY"**

The Orthodox Church claims to be "Catholic" in the original sense of this word, i.e. universal. Its ecclesiology has a universalist character. The ROC regards itself, therefore, as a local expression of the world Orthodoxy, and not as an ethnically Russian Church. It is not only the Church of Russia and Russians, but an integral part of Orthodox Christianity in general.

How in the light of this claim is one to understand then the controversial expression "canonical territory"? It certainly needs clarification. The Russian document on proselytism points out that it is not an ideological invention of the ROC, but "follows

from the canonical tradition of the Early Undivided Church". According to an ancient rule observed in both Eastern and Western Churches, a territory where one Bishop exercises his jurisdiction cannot be administered by another legitimate Bishop. An exception is the pastoral care of a confessional diaspora. This arrangement makes the peaceful co-existence of various Christian communities possible.

In fact, the notion of territorial jurisdiction of the local Churches is common to East and West. In the ancient Church jurisdiction had a strictly territorial character, regardless of the Greek or Latin rite. During the time of the pentarchy (five patriarchates), the borders between the Greeks and the Latins were not identical with those between jurisdiction of the Pope and of the patriarch of Constantinople. For this reason some Latins lived under the Greek jurisdiction (on Sicily and in South Italy under the Patriarchate of Constantinople), and some Greeks under the Latin one (in today's Greece which belonged for a long time to the Western Patriarchate). In the 9<sup>th</sup> century Popes Nicholas I and John VIII pointed to the territorial jurisdiction in their dispute with Byzantium about Illyricum. This kind of territorial jurisdiction was still in practice in the Middle Ages<sup>17</sup>. But personal jurisdiction was also known in church practice. The council called *Trullanum* or *Quinisextum*<sup>18</sup> (692) decided that the geographical church structures have to be modified, once the social conditions of life undergo a change. When some Bishops were expelled from their own diocese, they could fulfill their episcopal duties elsewhere (also to ordain clergy) and care for their faithful who followed them to a new place (can. 37 and 39: the case of an Archbishop of Cyprus who fled with his faithful to Hellespont). This recalls the cases of the contemporary emigré Churches in diaspora.

The time of confessionalism came practically in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with an ecclesiology of exclusiveness. The Latins and the Greeks began to consider themselves as two separate confessional Churches: one Catholic, the other Orthodox. This was a real turning point in the history of mutual relationships of the two Churches. In 1729 the Roman Congregation *De Propaganda Fide* forbade all the faithful under the Pope's jurisdiction to have any spiritual communion (*communicatio in sacris*) with Orthodox Christians. In reaction, the Greek Patriarchs acknowledged in 1755 the Latins as "non-baptized and not sanctified". This sad confessional turn, in spite of a strong resistance to it within the two Churches, changed the development of ecclesiology and contributed to subsequent controversies<sup>19</sup>. No faithful was allowed to ask for pastoral care outside his or her own community. On the same territory Catholics and Orthodox needed their own Bishops and clergy, separate altars and churches. Today we are heirs of this historical change. How to overcome this confessional perspective and to rediscover a true ecclesiology of "Sister Churches"?<sup>20</sup>

But let us return to our main subject. The concept of patriarchal canonical territory appears in the recent Catholic code of canon law. The new code of canons of the Eastern Catholic Churches (c. 146-150) forbids a patriarch to create exarchates outside his territory and appoint Bishops. The present conflict between the ROC and the RCC concerns the creation of a full ecclesiastical province on the territory of the Moscow Patriarchate. In view of the Orthodox, this is tantamount to claiming the same rights and obligations they have in their country concerning evangelization.

I would agree with those who see in the present conflict between Rome and Moscow a sort of clash between the two universalist ecclesiologies (S. Huntington spoke of "the clash of civilizations"). Can these ecclesiologies be reconciled with each other? If they lead in church praxis inevitably to a conflict, one has to review critically their presuppositions. This should be done in a constructive dialogue. The Early Church knew a wise rule called *regula veritatis and pacis*<sup>21</sup>. The truth demands peace, they go inseparably together. This rule is of a particular importance in times of conflict and dissent.

One has to be realistic. It is a historical fact that different countries have different religious backgrounds. Not all of them were from the very beginning multiconfessional and multireligious like the United States. There are many countries whose history was marked by Christianity and where most people still identify themselves, at least in a broad sense, as Christians. The dominant religion or denomination in such countries has no doubt to be respected by other religious communities. In countries like Russia, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Serbia, the Orthodox Church is regarded as "national" by their population. For this reason the Orthodox demand that their country with centuries-old Orthodox tradition should not be proselytized by missionaries from other Christian confessions. The case of Russia requires a thorough ecumenical reflection.

So, if there are countries and regions which traditionally belong to the Orthodox or to the Catholic sphere of influence, this reality has to be acknowledged also in practice. Already the statement of Balamand (No. 29) suggested that:

(...) to avoid all misunderstanding and to develop confidence between the two Churches, it is necessary that Catholic and Orthodox Bishops of the same territory consult with each other before establishing Catholic pastoral projects which imply the creation of new structures in *regions which traditionally form part of the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church*, in view to avoid parallel pastoral activities which would risk rapidly degenerating into rivalry or even conflicts<sup>22</sup>.

Had this advice been put into practice before taking important decisions, the present conflict between Rome and Moscow would have been spared. The same Balamand document (No. 22) declared:

Pastoral activity in the Catholic Church, Latin as well as Eastern, no longer aims at having the faithful of one Church pass over to the other; that is to say, it no longer aims at proselytizing among the Orthodox. It aims at answering the spiritual needs of its own faithful, and it has no desire for expansion at the expense of the Orthodox Church.

On April 22, 2001 the presidents of the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences signed in Strasbourg the *Charta Oecumenica*. One of the commitments (II,2) reads: "We commit ourselves to discuss our plans for evangelization with other Churches, entering into agreements with them and thus

avoiding harmful competition and the risk of fresh divisions". As there was no discussion and no consultation before establishment of the four Catholic dioceses in Russia (February 11,2002), we now experience the risk of fresh divisions.

One would also like to know how many of those Catholics who work in Russia have really tried to contact Orthodox clergy. This was one of the important guidelines determined in 1992 by the Commission *Pro Russia*. How can the ROC sincerely believe that the Catholics reject proselytism, when they simultaneously claim the right to accept those Orthodox who spontaneously come to them? The Commission just mentioned (I,5) imposed a duty on Catholic clergy to pay more attention to the motives of those people and to make them more conscious of their obligations towards their community of origin. There is no chance to be believed, if religious freedom is elevated to the rank of the central problem in mutual relationships between Catholics and Orthodox<sup>23</sup>. What seems natural now for the Latin mentality can be incomprehensible to the Orthodox. After all, the principle of religious freedom was accepted by the RCC only after the Vatican II.

## **TO BE MORE CHRISTIANS THAN CATHOLICS**

Mutual contacts, information and consultation between the Churches have an important symbolic value. Our attitudes create symbols which remain in the memory of people. If the unfortunate decisions to strengthen the Catholic presence in Russia (by transformation of the apostolic administrations into dioceses headed by a Metropolitan) were concealed from the ROC, it was done not in accordance with the moral commitment expressed both in the document of Balamand and in the *Charta Oecumenica* (not to mention also the guidelines of the document issued in 1992 by the interdicasterial Commission *Pro Russia*). Here one sees the big hiatus between the requirements of the canon law and the moral ecumenical commitments.

Hervé Legrand has rightly observed recently that to the Roman Curia with its "juridical culture", it seemed only "natural" to keep silence on the question of the dioceses in Russia. According to an accepted language, the Pope is free in such matters and has no duty to inform "non-Catholic authorities" about the nomination of Bishops. Legrand writes:

Attitudes juridically correct, caring about the sensibility of the Catholics, have ended in a symbolically unfortunate conduct. As the secret was revealed, one has involuntarily strengthened the suspicion, because of the promise to inform. One has failed to make oneself the sister of the Russian Church. (...). Even if the final implications of the ecclesiology of "sister" Churches remain to be made more precise, as Christians we have, from now on, to *make ourselves the sister* of another Church, preventing its apprehensions, improving our diverse conduct towards it, understanding its language and improving the symbolic meaning of our language. It will not be enough, but by doing this we will reinforce the hope of reconciliation. (...). Nobody would gain by a new estrangement between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, by return to

confessionalism. And surely the Gospel, in Europe, will lose considerably. Christian witness and ecumenism are inseparably linked<sup>24</sup>.

If their "canonical territory" is not respected, the "sister Churches" will easily become rival denominations. We would then go back again to the time of confessionalism. The Orthodox Russians do not intend to evangelize the Western patriarchate or to create local Churches there with full-fledged dioceses. So, was it necessary to create an ecclesiastical Catholic province in Russia? One should be honest in answering this question. The choice is inevitable between the ecclesiology of "sister Churches" and the slippery ground of confessionalism. Once a competitive logic is introduced, it would destroy the logic of "sister Churches". Without respecting "canonical territory" one risks only an endless quarrel in the Church. There is no other way to avoid the accusation of proselytism.

A few years ago I read an unforgettable and truly prophetic testament written almost fifty years ago by a Jesuit, Fr. Philippe de Régis<sup>25</sup>. It contains a vision of the future work for the reconciliation of the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. At the same time this spiritual will is a forceful warning against the irremediable losses which can be caused by a missionary over-zeal of the Catholics when the hour of freedom comes to Russia. A French Jesuit strongly opposed "an army of Don Quichotis" who would be willing to go for the "conquest" of Russia. This would only compromise once again the holy task of reconciliation. He wrote:

The temptation could be great, the day Russia opens itself, to rush to this vast field of apostolate (...). This activity will provoke a violently hostile reaction of Orthodox circles. The clergy will feel threatened. They will speak about fidelity to the faith of their forefathers, to the holy Orthodoxy, to Russia. (...). And behold the Catholic Church appearing in the eyes of the Russian people (...) as an implacable enemy of the national faith. (...) And who knows whether one ever will succeed in filling the psychological and sentimental gap, aggravated from then on by faults committed and repeated to the point of satiety? May God protect us from such an action! (...) May God give us then leaders sufficiently perspicacious and wise to put an end to the advocates of conversion and direct the vital forces of Catholicism towards the conception of a less noisy apostolate which requires more understanding, more self-renouncement, more humility and more true love<sup>26</sup>.

Fr. de Régis hoped that the common sufferings of both Churches would profoundly purify them, teach them humility, forgiveness, tolerance and brotherly co-operation. It would be the first step towards reconciliation. That is why the evangelization should be disinterested, not motivated by one's own confessional advantages: "We should be more Christians than Catholic."<sup>27</sup>

## **SOME NEW SIGNS OF HOPE**



A deep crisis in the relationship between Catholics and Orthodox may turn out to be the deepest one in the history of Christianity during the last centuries. It is difficult to say whether we face now a real interdenominational deterioration of relationships between Catholicism and Orthodoxy on the world level, or only a transitional crisis between Rome and Moscow. How far are we now from the times when the ROC opened in 1969 to the Catholics in need the possibility of receiving there the sacraments, inspite of the protests of other Orthodox Churches!<sup>28</sup> How far are we now from the perspectives created by the agreement of Balamand! It sounds almost like an irony of history that the present crisis takes place after ecumenical journeys of the Pope to predominantly Orthodox countries, especially to Romania (May 1999) and Greece (May 2001).

A new sign of hope was the visit to Rome of Patriarch Teoctist of the Romanian Orthodox Church (October 6-13, 2002). He was repaying the visit Pope John Paul II made to Romania in 1999. At the beginning of this historic visit the Pope himself described it as "an act of purifying our memories of division, of too-often open confrontation, of actions and words which led to painful separations". And he added: "The future, however, is not a dark and unknown tunnel. It is already illuminated by the grace of God"<sup>29</sup>. The Pope and the Patriarch acknowledged the difficulties in Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, but at the same time also committed their Churches to continuing the search for unity. Teoctist said in his homily during the Liturgy of the Word at the beginning of a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica (October 13), that the way forward must begin with "recognizing our faults and asking each other for pardon". Both hierarchs spent several hours together. They listed controversial points that have become the source of tensions between Catholics and Orthodox in several countries, particularly in Russia. Patriarch Teoctist rejected any hidden or open form of proselytism, and recruitment of the faithful between the Christian confessions. He criticized Catholic activity that did not take into account the traditional Orthodox identity of many East Europeans. According to him, missionary activity is the competence of the local Church to which the majority of the population belongs and which is the traditional Church of the nation. He said:

Other Churches, coming from other places, which want to participate in the missionary work of the Church are welcome, but only alongside of, and in full collaboration with, the local Churches.

Patriarch Teoctist defended also the principle of "canonical territory", which is not only a juridical requirement of the past, but has a fundamental ecclesiological value. He spoke of the "parallel ecclesiastical structures established precisely by those Churches from which fraternal assistance was expected". The Pope tried to reassure the Romanian Patriarch that "the Catholic Church recognizes the mission which the Orthodox Churches are called to undertake in the countries where they have been rooted for centuries"; that it wants to help and collaborate in this mission (and in fact has helped the Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe), but at the same time must be able "to fulfill its pastoral obligations to its own faithful and those who freely turn to it". He also emphasized the necessity of "a fraternal and frank dialogue", when problems arise.

It is worth noting that in one of his addresses to Teoctist the Pope expressed the readiness of the Catholic Church to make some sacrifices for the sake of peace between the Churches: "The peace of the Church is such a high good, that everyone should be ready to sacrifice for its implementation"<sup>30</sup>. This is an important statement, perhaps a distant echo of the ancient *regula veritatis et pacis*. The future of relations between Catholicism and Orthodoxy will depend in great measure on the practical realization of such declarations.

In their joint declaration (October 12, 2002), the Pope and the Patriarch said concrete instruments must be found to ensure regular consultations and exchange of information so that through dialogue "no difficult situation is destined to remain beyond redress"<sup>31</sup>. Such words as peace, reconciliation and hope appear several times in the declaration. This applies also to the work of evangelization:

We agree to recognize the religious and cultural traditions of each people, and religious freedom as well. Evangelization cannot be based on a spirit of competition, but on reciprocal respect and cooperation which recognize the freedom of each person to live according to his own convictions in respect for his religious belonging<sup>32</sup>.

The joint declaration urges that the international Catholic-Orthodox commission for theological dialogue should take up its work again after a decade of starts and stops. It is also significant that both hierarchs were able to say together about the Orthodox Church of Romania and the Church of Rome:

In accord with the traditional beautiful expression, the particular Churches like to call one another "Sister Churches". To be open to this dimension means collaboration to restore to Europe its deepest ethos and its truly human face<sup>33</sup>.

To sum up: such visits are indeed a clear evidence that God makes us more aware of that which unites us, of the common roots of our faith. He pushes us towards unity despite discouragement and weariness. Ecumenical friendship between the high leaders like John Paul II and Teoctist makes it possible to write a new chapter of ecumenical dialogue even in the time of tensions with other Orthodox Churches.

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In an interview published in the autumn 2001 in the French newspaper *La Croix*, Olivier Clément was a bit pessimistic about the future of the official dialogue between the two Churches:

I expect nothing from official ecumenism. I think that, at present, what remains and what engages the future is friendship, small groups of friends gathering Orthodox and Catholics, sometimes also Protestants. This is what counts. The ecumenism of tomorrow is worked out there<sup>34</sup>.

I think he is right when he counts more on the changes underway above all in the young generation of believers. When young people meet together they discover for their own that other Christians are not heretics, but have the same problems as themselves. One has to be patient. Orthodox Christians in Russia and in Eastern Europe need time to recover after the sober years of painful experience under the Soviet atheism. First of all, one has to overcome a deep-rooted fear in the Orthodox world. It is a fear of proselytism. According to Clément, there is however in it rather "a mythical element". One should peacefully discuss the existing problems instead of lamenting and refusing dialogue.

I would agree with Clément, that today we need mostly concrete acts, better communication and more healthy mutual relationships. One has to go back to the language of the Balamand document, to its mutual recognition as "Sister Churches", and to its insistence also on the principle of freedom of conscience, which in fact is hardly acknowledged by many Orthodox Bishops.

Many speak today about an ecumenical winter again. The present-day situation in the Catholic-Orthodox relations is a challenge for all of us. We are not able to speak with one voice in the face of the growing secularism and the evident loss of Christian values in modern civilization. Our quarrels, conflicts and animosities undermine the credibility of the Christian message in the eyes of many people. Any competitive kind of evangelization, which has no real concern for reconciliation among Christians is simply dishonest and false. We still seem to be too pusillanimous and helpless in the face of our divisions. This diminishes our abilities to proclaim the Gospel together, to move towards one another, to pray and act together, to reach a consensus in faith through patient dialogue. The European *Charta Oecumenica* (No. 2) urges all Christians to proclaim the Gospel together:

The most important task of the Churches in Europe is the common proclamation of the Gospel, in both word and deed, for the salvation of all. The widespread lack of corporate and individual orientation and falling away from Christian values challenge Christians to testify to their faith, particularly in response to the quest for meaning which is being pursued in so many forms.

More cooperation is needed, above all, on a local scale between Catholics and Orthodox. The already existing contacts have to be developed, in spite of the difficulties on the official level. Honesty, perseverance and patience are true, long-distance ecumenical virtues.

## NOTES

1 A lecture given at the Faculty of Theology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven/Belgium, December 9, 2002 within the frame of the programme Socrates/Erasmus, published in: "Exchange. Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Studies" (Utrecht) 32 (2003) No. 2, pp. 168-187.

2 See for example Y. Congar. *Neuf cents ans après. Notes sur le "Schisme oriental"*. Chevetogne 1954. English translation: *After Nine Hundred Years. The Background of the Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches*, New York 1959.

3 "L'Osservatore Romano" (Polish edition) 22 (2001), No. 7-8, pp. 12-13.

4 W. Hryniewicz, *Labour and Hope: Fifteen Years of Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue*, "St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly" 39 (1995) No 4, pp. 339-360.

5 Cf. *The Quest for Unity: Orthodox and Catholics in Dialogue. Documents of the Joint International Commission and Official Dialogues in the United States 1965-1995*, ed. by J. Borelli and J.H. Ericson, Crestwood, NY Washington, DC 1996.

6 The Eastern Catholic Churches began their (more or less) autonomous existence as a result of partial unions of some Orthodox communities with Rome. The best known is the Union of Brest (1596) when some Ruthenian Bishops decided to recognize the Pope's jurisdiction.

7 By the end of 1991, about 600 churches were taken over from the Orthodox in Western Ukraine.

8 The English text was published in: *The Quest for Unity...*, pp. 175-183.

9 Cf. S. Keleher. *The Kievan Church Study Group: "Impossible Dialogue"? W: Four Hundred Years Union of Brest (1596-1996): A Critical Re-Evaluation. Acta of the Congress held at Hernen Castle, the Netherlands, in March 1996*, ed. B. Groen, W. van der Bercken. Leuven 1998, s. 183-192.

10 See in this volume my essay "Outliving the Schism".

11 See my reflections in the report: *Catholiques – orthodoxes. Baltimore: Le dialogue continue*. "Chrétiens en marche" 37 (2000) No 68, pp. 4-5.

12 V. Solovyev. *Lectures concerning Godmanhood (1877-1884)*, in: P. P. Zouboff. *Godmanhood as the Main Idea of the Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyev*. New York 1944, Lecture two, p. 90.

13 Card. Walter Kasper. *Le radici teologiche del conflitto tra Mosca e Roma*. "La Civiltà Cattolica" 16. marzo 2002, I, quaderno 3642, pp. 531-541. An abbreviated French text *Racines du conflit Rome-Moscou*, in: "Chrétien en marche" 39 (2002) no. 76, p. 3.

14 French translation *Position orthodoxe russe*, in: "Chrétiens en marche" 39 (2002) No 76, pp. 4-5.

15 A similar response was given by Patriarch Alexis II in an interview published on May 13, 2002 in "Izvestia". French translation *Rome – Moscou*, in: "Chrétiens en marche" 39 (2002) No 75, p. 3.

16 The document is available in internet: <http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/ne207011.htm>

17 See E.Ch. Suttner, *Kircheneinheit im 11. bis 13. Jahrhundert durch einen gemeinsamen Patriarchen und gemeinsame Bischöfe für Griechen und Lateiner*, "Ostkirchliche Studien" 49 (2000), pp. 314-324.

18 Trullo was a large cupola hall in the imperial palace in Constantinople. The council is called Quinisextum because it wanted to "complete" the juridical definitions of the fifth and the sixth Ecumenical Councils.

19 The frontiers of Orthodox patriarchates changed in the course of history, what complicated mutual relations even more.

20 It is worth noting that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, because of the Turkish captivity, there were many cases when Catholic clergy exercised pastoral care for Orthodox communities. In spite of confessional borders the canonically divided Churches administered even the sacrament of ordination for the other side. See E.Ch. Suttner, *Das wechselvolle Verhältnis zwischen den Kirchen des Ostens und des Westens im Lauf der Kirchengeschichte*, Würzburg 1996, pp. 84-88.

21 This expression comes from Firmilian, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. *Epistula 75 ad Cyprianum*, 24,3. Cf. Saint Cyprien. *Correspondance*, tome II. Texte établi et traduit par le chanoine A. Bayard. Paris 1925, p. 306.

22 Italics mine W.H.

23 Cf. Card. W. Kasper. *Le radici*, p. 540: *La libertà religiosa come problema centrale* (the title of the last part of the article).

24 H. Legrand, OP. *Le dialogue entre catholiques et orthodoxes à l'épreuve. Quelques clés des difficultés de communication*. "Contacts" 54 (2002) No. 200, pp. 415-430, here 422. Italics of the Author.

25 V. Poggi. *Le travail futur d'après Philippe de Régis, S.J. (1897-1955)*. "Orientalia Christiana Periodica" 58 (1992) No. 2, pp. 5-21. This is the first postmortem publication of Fr. Philippe's will.

26 Ibid., pp. 13-14.

27 Ibid., p. 15: "...je dirais volontiers que nous devrions alors être plus chrétiens que catholiques".

28 This decision was withdrawn in 1986.

29 All quotations hereafter from *The Visit to Rome of Patriarch Teoctist of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, in: „SEIA Newsletter on the Eastern Churches and Ecumenism” (Washington), October 31, 2002, No. 85, pp. 1-3 and from *Begegnung der Schwesterkirchen. Besuch des rumänischen Patriarchen Teoctist im Vatikan*, in: "Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur – Ökumenische Information" Nr. 43, 22 Oktober 2002, pp. 12-13.

30 *Begegnung der Schwesterkirchen*, p 12.

31 *The Visit to Rome*, n. 3, p. 3.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., n. 5.

34 O. Clément. "*L'orthodoxie doit digérer ce terrible XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*". "La Croix" 17-18 Novembre 2001.

## **Chapter XIV**

### **THE COST OF UNITY:**

#### **THE PAPAL PRIMACY IN RECENT ORTHODOX REFLECTION<sup>1</sup>**

The issue of primacy has not yet been dealt with in the official dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. The documents of the dialogue speak of it only sporadically, announcing it as one of the most crucial theological questions for debate in the future. How can the Roman doctrine become more consonant with the tradition of the undivided Church? In which way can the Orthodox, with their understanding of the primacy in the universal Church, help the process of ecumenical reinterpretation of this thorny issue? Have they developed their own comprehension of the primacy in a way convincing to the Catholic side? Is there a due place in Orthodox ecclesiology for some kind of universal leadership? How do they interpret the relationship between the local and the universal Church?

In June, 1996 the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomaios I, gave a written response to questions concerning the Pope's primacy, put to him by the Cracow weekly "Tygodnik Powszechny"<sup>2</sup>. His answer was very concise: the issue of papal primacy has become the most serious and scandalous stumbling block for the dialogue between Orthodox and Catholics. He pointed to the tradition of the first millennium showing the Pope as a "Patriarch of the Church among other ancient apostolic sees of the world". In his view any claim to a universal primacy of jurisdiction is unfounded and theologically erroneous. Such concept of the Petrine ministry as developed in the West after the Great Schism claims unduly a direct episcopal jurisdiction over all the faithful and Bishops of the whole world.

The Patriarch was speaking on the same topic several times. His views have a special significance in the ongoing debate on the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. This debate entered a new stage after the Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, promulgated in 1995 by John Paul II. The subsequent statements of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople are a good starting point to reflect on other important Orthodox examinations of this thorny ecumenical issue. Opinions expressed by some other Orthodox hierarchs and theologians are to a large extent consonant with the Patriarch's views. In this way one can have a fuller image of Orthodox reactions to the Pope's invitation to seek together the forms in which the Petrine ministry may accomplish a real "ministry of mercy" and "a service of love" (*Ut unum sint*, 92-93, 95).

#### **A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH: INTERPRETATION OF JESUS' WORDS**

In an interview accorded to an Italian periodical "Il Regno" (June 1995) on the eve of his official visit to the Vatican, the Ecumenical Patriarch expressed his deep reservations concerning some views put forward by John Paul II in the apostolic letter *Orientale Lumen*. He regretted that the Pope used in it an unclear term "Eastern Churches" and because of this the Orthodox Church was put on the same ecclesiological level as the Eastern Greek Catholic Churches. Further according to him, the paternalistic tone of this document shows that the Roman standpoint is considered to be the only criterion of the truth<sup>3</sup>. However, those passages of the Pope's letter which stress a common patristic legacy and a deep spirituality of the Eastern Christianity were highly valued by the Patriarch. As far as the encyclical *Ut unum sint* was concerned, the Patriarch admitted that it might open a new space for discussion on the papal primacy. He said, nevertheless, that John Paul II sustained "exaggerated pretensions of the Bishop of Rome to primacy and infallibility, although they were expressed indirectly and in a mitigated form"<sup>4</sup>.

It is only when the Patriarch begins interpreting Jesus' words that one can see the acuteness of his formulations. This was the case when he met Swiss Roman-Catholic Bishops in Zurich on December 14, 1995. In response to the Pope's invitation to an ecumenical discussion, expressed in *Ut unum sint*, Bartholomaios I has opposed a traditional Catholic exegesis of the New Testament texts. In his opinion, there is no foundation which would justify the concept of the primacy as an authority exercised over other Bishops. Here is the most significant passage of his address:

I say this because the idea that the Lord choosing the twelve apostles entrusted to one of them the task to govern them (*la tâche de les gouverner*), has no foundation in the Holy Scripture. The Lord's command addressed to Peter to be the shepherd of His sheep meant repeating to him that command which had been given to all the apostles, and which he transgressed by the fact that he had denied Him three times and thus interrupted the contact with the Lord. So it did not mean that he [Peter] was entrusted with a pastoral task higher than that of the other apostles<sup>5</sup>.

According to the Patriarch, the only authority of divine foundation in the Church is that of the Bishops and their synodality. The mission entrusted by Christ to Peter is related to all the Bishops together who are the successors of the Twelve, and not to the Bishop of Rome alone. The Pope is the "first" (*prótos*), but there is no special sacrament of the papacy. Who would seriously affirm today that Christ ordered Peter to "govern" the other apostles? All Bishops are collegially successors of all the apostles. Christ has called apostles "in equal measure and without any discrimination" all His disciples (cf. Lc 6:13). To all of them He gave "authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness" (Mt 10:1)<sup>6</sup>. He said to all of them: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19; cf. Mk 16:15). He who leads the Church is not the only hierarch responsible for its destinies. Consequently, "Every one of us, Bishops, is considered to be personally responsible for the way in which he favours or hinders the course of this boat which is the Church - responsible for its good or bad success in following the path (*responsable de la bonne ou de la mauvaise tenue de sa route*)".



A French Orthodox theologian, Olivier Clément, calls these affirmations "a bit reductive and polemical"<sup>7</sup>. In his book *"Rome autrement"* he offers a more elaborate exegesis of the texts related to the apostles-martyrs Peter and Paul<sup>8</sup>. Special attention is devoted to three texts which determine the role of Peter: 1) "You are Peter [Greek *πέτρος*, from *πέτρα* - rock; Aramaic *kepha*] and on this rock I will build my Church" (Mt 16:18)<sup>9</sup>; 2) "And you, once converted, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:23); 3) "Simon..., do you love me more than these others do? ... Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:15-17).

All these words of Christ are placed in the resurrectional and eucharistic context. Two texts are followed by very harsh warnings, first when Peter refuses to accept the idea of a Suffering Servant: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mt 16:23), and second, when he impetuously announces his readiness to follow his Master: "by the time the cock crows today you will have denied three times that you know me" (Lk 22:34). The third text, from the Fourth Gospel, shows that Peter, if he wants to be faithful to his vocation has to become an example of a sinner to whom sins have been forgiven. Christ has put him back into the first position formerly held among the apostles, but He warns him once more and announces his martyrdom. The conclusion is obvious: the presence of Peter in the Church is far from earthly glory and domination<sup>10</sup>. He is not alone. The other apostles are with him, but the "foundation" and "main cornerstone" (Ep 2:20) of the Church building is Christ Jesus himself. They also receive the power to "bind" and to "loose" (Mt 18:18), i.e. according to the meaning of these words in judaism of that time, to reintegrate or not, into the community.

The *prótos* does not absorb the others. At the "council" of Jerusalem his opinion has its weight, but is not decisive. (...) Peter is therefore the "first", but if he is called to "strengthen" his brothers, it is not he who founds and justifies their apostolate: this one comes directly from Christ, as the vocation of Paul will show, recognized but not determined by Peter. Likewise the destiny of John escapes him: "If I want him to stay behind till I come, what does it matter to you? (J 21:22)<sup>11</sup>.

Clément rightly adds that there is something in the role of Peter – more than in the charismatic vocation of Paul -which cannot be transmitted<sup>12</sup>. He belongs to the group of the Twelve who cannot have successors in the unique character of their apostolic witness. They lived with Jesus, they saw him after his resurrection. In this they are unique witnesses.

Ecumenism demands a critical attitude towards historical and present modalities of exercising the Roman primacy. When Patriarch Bartholomaïos spoke to the Catholic Bishops in Zurich, he knew their serious difficulties at that time in relationship with the Vatican (the appointment of an unwanted Bishop in one of the Swiss dioceses). Each word demanded a lot of tact and care. I realize that the Patriarch's words might have been difficult to accept for many Roman Catholics. Some would consider them to be yet another example of multisecular biases against the papacy, reducing it to the minimum.

The Ecumenical Patriarch addressed Swiss Bishops in a very positive spiritual attitude. The encounter was supposed to be an hour of truth and sincerity. That is why he renounced at the very beginning of his address any "insincere communication" (*communication non sincère*). He also stressed at the same time that the love of truth requires talking "straightforward and in all sincerity" (*sans détours et en toute sincérité*). This attitude enables one to avoid insinuation and misunderstandings. It is inspired by the Lord's command: "All you need say is «Yes» if you mean yes, «No» if you mean no" (Mt 5:37; cf. 2 Co 1:17-20). The Patriarch intended that his reflections, drawn from the long experience of the Orthodox Church, might serve a process of better knowing each other. He tried to convey them "in the spirit of brotherhood and humility" and expressed his hope of reaching once the unity in faith. This desired unity will be easier to achieve "if we abandon every innovatory element" (*tout élément novateur*)<sup>13</sup> which caused the lasting division of our Churches.

## **AN APPEAL FOR DECENTRALIZATION AND SYNODALITY**

The very mention of the "innovatory element" in relation to the issue of primacy sharpens the meaning of his words. One can understand it only on a broader background of the Orthodox tradition, in the light of its attachment to the synodal system in which important church decisions are taken in a conciliar way, with the participation of many Bishops. None of them has a preponderant vote nor the right to veto a decision of major importance. If the opinion of one of them prevails, this happens only in the case when he can, through his personality, inspire confidence in others that this is a right solution of the problem under deliberation.

The synodal system is an expression of common responsibility and solidarity. By its nature it requires decentralization. It also prevents more effectively any tendency to impose one's own opinion and to introduce innovations in matters of doctrine and church practice. It is not easy to obtain agreement of all the Bishops or of many of them. Only one who has introduced an innovation on his own territory can be wrong. This innovation does not usually survive the innovator and slowly disappears. This is not the case in a heavily centralized system. The one who has a preponderant vote and authority accepts innovation and the others after him. The doctrine and church practice may be changed under his jurisdiction. The innovator as an individual can make mistakes easier than many. The Patriarch recalled here the words of Jesus: "For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them" (Mt 18:20). He himself has first solemnly promised: "If two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven" (Mt 18:19). It will certainly be granted, assures Bartholomaios, when they will be asking for preserving them in the truth. And he significantly added: "There is no similar promise of the Lord, that He will be present and will collaborate with the only one who separates himself from the others and places himself above the others"<sup>14</sup>.

Of course, these are quite strong words. I read them as an urgent and dramatic appeal for more collegiality, synodality and subsidiarity in the Church, because only thus may they prevent an overgrowth of centralism and of the role of primacy. The Ecumenical

Patriarch has drawn attention to the fact, that the very structure of the Western Church favoured the development of a determined way of exercising of the papal primacy.

During his stay in Switzerland, Bartholomaïos I had also a meeting with the representatives of the Protestant Federation. In his address delivered in Bern (December 13, 1995) he dwelled on the narrative of the Apostles' council in Jerusalem, and especially on the words: "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves..." (Ac 15:28). Stressing the role of this event in the Early Church, he said:

No apostle, even the first of them, assumed the power to give alone the solution to the problem (...). Peter had intervened, the assembly had listened to Paul and Barnabas, James had spoken and the decision was taken by all, in agreement with the whole Church. So also in Jerusalem all have very humbly submitted their opinion to the judgment of others, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit<sup>15</sup>.

In conclusion the Patriarch also emphasized the role of reception by the whole community of the Church. All are obliged to follow the conciliar (synodal) system handed down by tradition and witnessed to by the Holy Scripture. "Within the Orthodox Church," he added, "nobody has a monopoly on expressing this truth".

## **TO DEEPEN THE DIALOGUE AND LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER**

All these statements may seem to be too radical only to those who do not take into account the long opposition of the Orthodox Church to the Roman conception of the primacy of jurisdiction. The Patriarch laid emphasis that Peter did not receive from Jesus the function of "governing" the other apostles. Peter was only the first of the Twelve ("first, Simon who is called Peter"; Mt 10:2), their *coryphaeus* (the first in a choir), the conductor of their choir.

Some Roman Catholic critics were inclined to treat the Patriarch's words quite unjustly as a "theological absurd". They did not try to understand his position. May be he wanted also to appease in this way some conservative circles within the Orthodox Church, hostile to his ecumenical initiatives.

Bartholomaïos did not deny that the New Testament shows Peter as "the first". He forcefully denied instead the tendency to ascribe to him authority over the other apostles. Critics pointed out that speaking about Christ's promise to be amidst two or three gathered together, the Patriarch had forgotten some other words: "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Lc 22:32)<sup>16</sup>. The same Jesus, they argued, entrusted Peter with the task of strengthening the faith of other disciples, although the Apostle did not at all wish to rise "above others".

All these critical reactions indicate an urgent need to analyze honestly and truly ecumenically the New Testament texts dealing with the person of Peter. It must be a

common and solid effort, otherwise we will never get out of the frame of purely denominational and apologetic re-lecture of those texts. Peter was not only "the first" among the apostles. He was also a weak man who needed conversion and repented. Ideological or apologetic reasons should not overshadow the darker side of Peter's image. From this fact the encyclical *Ut unum sint* (n. 4) has drawn a clear conclusion about the need of "the conversion of Peter and that of his successors", i.e. "that conversion which is indispensable for «Peter» to be able to serve his brethren". One has to take these words seriously. They are a long awaited answer to the expectations of the East, as expressed in the encyclical letter of Eastern Patriarchs in 1848:

We know with certainty, through the Lord's words, that the time must come when this prayer [cf. Lk 22:32] - made in forecast of Peter's perjury, so that his faith would not fail to the end - will act on one of his successors who, like him, will bitterly weep and, having turned again to himself, will strengthen us with much more authority – us, his brothers in the Orthodox confession which we hold from our predecessors<sup>17</sup>.

Reflecting quietly on the issue of papal primacy Bartholomaios attempted to respond to the invitation of Pope John Paul II to engage with him "in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to one another" (*Ut unum sint*, 96). One should appreciate the modesty and sincerity of the Patriarch. He said to the Catholic Bishops at the end of his address:

Brothers, (...) I submit to your charity these fine reflections taken from our experience, considering this contact to be an occasion to know better our way of thinking and existence. I submit them in the spirit of fraternity and humility, in the hope that the fact of a deeper reflection (...) will permit a better mutual understanding (...).

What the Patriarch said about the primacy of the Bishop of Rome was in fact nothing new. He expressed a traditional standpoint of Orthodoxy throughout centuries. The quiet tone of his reflections, permeated by humility, is a hopeful sign of the dialogue becoming more mature among hierarchs, who are the most responsible people for the future of the Christian faith. The progress of ecumenism depends in a decisive manner on the solution of the issue of papal primacy.

Two years later, in the Italian newspaper "*Avvenire*", Bartholomaios emphasized a particular role of the Roman Church because of the apostles Peter and Paul. This role consists, however, not in governing the other Churches, but in "presiding in love"<sup>18</sup>. The last expression alludes to St. Ignatius of Antioch, who described the Roman Church as *προκαθήμενη της αγάπης*<sup>19</sup>. In fact, during the first centuries the priority or primacy of Rome was not linked with the person of its Bishop, but with the prestige of this local Church in the vast communion of Churches. Rome did not claim any jurisdiction over other Churches, but nevertheless enjoyed a special "authority" (not "power"), commonly "received" and acknowledged by them. This authority allowed the Roman See to exercise a large solicitude for the communion of local Churches, i.e. a charitable and eager care,

preventing their isolation or disunity. It was indeed a sort of prophetic function, the Pauline dimension of the apostolic witness in harmony with the Petrine vocation<sup>20</sup>.

## **TO CHANGE STRUCTURES AND RESTORE BROTHERHOOD**

The search for new forms of exercising primacy is a difficult and responsible task. It requires courage in the face of honest and serious criticism of the past and present. An effective reform of the papacy must also embrace the church structures. It is not enough to say that Peter received from Christ the order to "strengthen the brethren". One has to acknowledge that the brothers, in their turn, also support Peter. According to the Fourth Gospel, Peter, having come back to Galilee, said to his companions: "I am going fishing". The others replied: "We'll come with you" (J 21,3). It is quite probable that Peter, despondent over the discovery of the empty tomb and not yet having met the Risen Christ, was simply returning to his former occupation. The others went with him and supported him in a difficult time.<sup>21</sup>

This simple Gospel story reveals a deeper meaning, if we read it in the light of brotherhood and collegiality of those who are the leaders in the Church. Both the Orthodox and the other Christians do not believe that collegiality and subsidiarity are being practiced in the Roman Catholic Church in a sufficiently meaningful and effective way. One has to take seriously into account their reservations and expectations. In the encyclical *Ut unum sint* (n. 87), John Paul II quotes his earlier words: "We must take every care to meet the legitimate desires and expectations of our Christian brethren, coming to know their way of thinking and their sensibilities".

The Orthodox Church does not deny the need of primacy as a charismatic centre, as an instance of coordination, initiative and service of unity which does not encroach upon the regional autonomy of the Churches<sup>22</sup>. According to Metropolitan Ioannis (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, the need for the primacy of the Bishop of Rome cannot derive only from historical circumstances. It has its theological justification and, as we shall see later on, should be evaluated positively. The primacy exists in every local Church, on a regional level, and among the patriarchates as well<sup>23</sup>.

Metropolitan George (Khodr) from the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch emphasizes the need of "conversion" of the papacy to the brotherhood of the Churches. This conversion cannot be limited only to the sphere of concepts, but must become a real "experience of the hearts"<sup>24</sup>. It is not enough to speak about the dignity of the Christian East. This dignity finds, for all the Christians, its expression in the right to autonomy of their Churches and in preserving specific features of their life. It demands that Rome acknowledge the gifts of the Holy Spirit accorded to each one of those Churches. Consequently, it excludes the practice of the direct appointment of the Bishops of the whole world by the Pope.

According to Olivier Clément, it is by no means essential to the exercise of the primacy in the spirit of the 34<sup>th</sup> "apostolic" canon, that the Bishop of Rome should appoint Bishops all over the world, that he should have his See on a sovereign territory and be the head of the state with diplomatic representation. It has nothing in common with "the

mystery of the primacy", with the "mystery" of the presence of Peter and Paul, with the "presidency to love" (*présidence à l'amour*) of the Roman See<sup>25</sup>. The true presence of Peter in the Church is indeed far away from any terrestrial glory.

In one of his interviews metropolitan George expressed his criticism of the way the issue of the papal primacy had recently been dealt with in Rome<sup>26</sup>. John Paul II invited discussion of this question, but shortly afterwards the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith has declared that the dogma proclaimed by the I<sup>st</sup> Vatican Council concerning the papal jurisdiction and infallibility must remain untouched and cannot be revised<sup>27</sup>. Such terms as "universal Bishop" used by the Pope himself are incomprehensible for the Orthodox, says the metropolitan, and not acceptable. Otherwise even an ecumenical council becomes only a consultative instrument for the Pope, not to mention local synods or episcopal conferences.

It is clear that the Primacy of the Bishop of Rome requires a thorough reinterpretation in the light of the tradition of the first millennium. This is one of the points which constantly come back in the debate with the Orthodox. They notice a clear discrepancy between the will of the Pope to be a servant of unity, and the very structure of the Roman Catholic Church which embodies the idea of the "universal Bishop". To restore brotherhood and unity of the Churches means also to change first structures which hinder this process. As long as the Pope is considered to be the only guarantor of unity and its visible sign, and so long as the communion with him is seen as an indispensable condition of unity - this will constitute an insurmountable difficulty for most other Christians.

## **CHRISTIAN UNITY REQUIRES SELF-RESTRICTION**

Many Orthodox theologians ask now, to what extent the Bishop of Rome will be ready for a real dialogue on his authority and power if he considers them to be an essential part of his ministry. So long as the papal primacy constitutes for the Catholics the truth of the faith not allowing any revision, the possibility of an agreement seems minimal or none at all. Some have already called the debate on the reform of the papacy a vain and futile labour, and the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, in this respect, as a "non-given gift" (*ein ungeschenktes Geschenk*)<sup>28</sup>.

Not all critical voices are, of course, so pessimistic. A common denominator of Orthodox commentaries seems rather to be a conviction of the need for the dialogue on the common tradition of the first millennium. This is considered by metropolitan Damaskinos (Papandreou) and Vlassios Pheidas (church historian and canonist in Athens) to be the only realistic criterion in restoring the communion of Sister Churches<sup>29</sup>.

The dialogue on the doctrine and praxis of the first millennium on one side, and on the rank of the councils held in the West on the other, could help to determine the limits of the primacy, and to urge the process of resigning from the historic overgrowths of papal authority. The road was paved already in 1974 when Paul VI made a clear distinction between the true ecumenical councils held together by the East and the West during the first millennium, and the "general councils" or "general synods" of the West after the

separation, which do not apply to the Orthodox<sup>30</sup>. It requires a common study of the value of decisions taken during the centuries of separation, and would eventually lead to a revision of the teaching of Vatican I (1870).

During his official visit to the Vatican, Bartholomaios I delivered a homily in the basilica of St. Peter (June 29, 1995). The Eucharist was presided by John Paul II. In his presence the Patriarch was speaking also about the primacy. He stressed the need for humility and repentance which can make us wiser and to save our fidelity to Christ, who "emptied Himself" for the salvation of the world. And the Patriarch ended his homily with these thought provoking words:

(...) it is only when the priority of the kenotic ethos prevails convincingly in the historical Church, that we will then not only re-establish easily the so much desired unity in the faith, but at the same time we will become worthy to experience what the divine revelation has promised to those who love the Lord, i.e. "a new heaven and a new earth"<sup>31</sup>.

In his address to the Roman curia, Bartholomaios I also evoked the same idea in connection with the ancient Church of the Apostles. This Church, he said, knew very well that "through the mystery of *kenosis* of the cross, Christ, our Lord, had submitted the human nature to God His Father, becoming thus «the best model for all of us»..."<sup>32</sup>.

One has to read very attentively such texts, to see the importance of the kenotic ethos in the ecclesiological thinking of the Patriarch. They show the necessity of this ethos for the re-establishment of Christian unity. God in Christ "emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave" (Ph 2:7). This is an unusual intuition which - as Olivier Clément explains in his recent study "*Rome autrement*" - evokes God not in a language of perfection and fullness, but preferring the category of emptiness<sup>33</sup>. The fullness implies richness, abundance and power. Emptiness and void express the mystery of love. God transcends Himself towards humanity in an inversed movement. He becomes, so to speak, the humble and self-effacing God. This is not God in all His fullness and might who would crush and overwhelm a human being, but God who "emptied Himself" and thus is able to expect our free answer. The work of redemption was carried out by Jesus in humility, weakness, love and dedication. The salvific *kenosis* of Jesus implies a negation of self-centeredness and self-interestedness. Christ's *kenosis* has a permanent significance for the whole Christian existence. *Kenosis*, understood as disinterestedness and self-limitation, constantly judges our Churches, our ecclesiastical egoisms and our self-centredness.

Metropolitan Stylianos (Harkianakis) of Australia spoke some time ago about an inclination of the Roman Catholic Church to the pride of power (*Hochmut der Macht*) and of the Orthodox Church to the pride of the truth (*Hochmut der Wahrheit*)<sup>34</sup>. The distinction between these two temptations has been made not without reason. It helps to understand that this dangerous inclination has to be constantly overcome in the Church. If Christ emptied and humbled himself to save human beings, this fact has to determine the kenotic foundations of ecclesiology and the whole style of the life of the Church. The

kenotic soteriology opposes to the haughtiness of power and truth - humility of service and common searching for truth. Any kind of domination is alien to the spirit of the Gospel.

The reconciliation of the Churches with one another includes therefore the readiness to correct one's own self-understanding, to give up everything which diminishes the willingness to be reconciled. Christ's *kenosis* is the model, criterion and example of such an attitude. The biblical concept of *kenosis* should have concrete ecclesiological implications.

*Kenosis* is required on all sides in order for true unity to come about. Theological dialogue should continue, in order to clarify the issues of primacy, synodality, authority and relations between local Churches. The question of prestige, jurisdiction and authority constantly undermines the communion of the Churches. In the light of the Gospel it is indeed a scandalous question: "A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded the greatest. And he said to them: «The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves (...). But I am among you as one who serves»" (Lk 22:24-27).

The evil spirit of this early dispute among the disciples of Christ, presented by the Evangelist in the context of the Last Supper, has not disappeared in the Church. The drama of authority continues. Reconciliation and communion will never happen without the evangelical event of return to *kenosis*, to the true conversion of the Churches to each other.

## **KENOTIC ETHOS AND THE ISSUE OF UNIVERSAL PRIMACY**

In his reflection on how to "unblock" ecumenism, to come out of the unending discussions and to accelerate the process of restoring Christian unity, Metropolitan George (Khodr) of Mount-Lebanon not long ago briefly outlined a kenotic way of dealing with this painful issue. He writes:

There exists a doctrinal hypertrophy to which the West has set out in a solitary or unilateral way. I see no other way to reduce it, than to draw the line between the seven ecumenical councils and the councils which succeeded them here and there. During the second millennium the Church has not been reunited. Let it be reunited now on the basis of the ancient unique foundation. The unity resides in the encounter and the communion of the Churches among them, and not in the fusion which annihilates a part...<sup>35</sup>

This issue of ecumenical councils in the life of the Church awaits a thorough examination. The Church does not have all the answers ready-made. She must continuously search for truth, as the primitive Church struggled during the first Jerusalem council (Acts 15) over the burning doctrinal and disciplinary issue of the Mosaic Law.



Ecumenism requires new forms of exercising the papal primacy, more credible and more acceptable. Those new forms in which the Petrine ministry can be exercised can be found only when the past and current forms are evaluated in a real dialogue as inadequate and in need of a thorough reform. This requires vision, courage and, above all, self-limitation. When the Early Church was able to abandon the requirements of the Mosaic Law in relation to the gentiles, this surely demanded an admirable amount of courage. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, the Apostles ventured that historical decision, in spite of intense opposition to it.

Our situation today as regards the primacy seems to be comparable to the situation in the primitive Church. Will the Roman Catholic Church find enough courage and vision to face a major change? I personally hope this will be the case, but nobody knows when. Such a decision must demand much care, effort, attention and, let me repeat it, self-determination and self-sacrifice. Such is the cost of Christian unity. This means precisely what biblical language calls *kenosis*, self-limitation and self-renouncement.

*Kenosis* would mean concretely also the structural reform of the papacy. The lesson of history should not be forgotten. A purely moral reform would not be sufficient to bring about a real change. Since the Middle Ages the situation of the Latin Church has cried out for this sort of change. Yet a general wish for reform turned out to be ineffective. Many reform-minded people were not able to change the structures themselves. In a way they were prisoners of the doctrine, of the system and of their own inadequate vision. The moments of goodwill passed, the historical *kairos* was squandered, the drama of division became even more acute and disastrous.

A really strange legacy of the historical period since 1054 is the fact that the Latin Church has become, as Yves Congar put it, "a Roman patriarchate extended throughout the world" (*un patriarcat de Rome étendu dans l'ensemble du monde*)<sup>36</sup>. Many papal actions and decisions, apparently primatial, belong in fact to the power of the Pope as Latin patriarch, and concern only those within his patriarchal jurisdiction. Theoretically speaking, the West could surely have developed more patriarchates. In that case the ecclesiastical picture would be more balanced in relation to the East. The East has its own patriarchs. I am fully aware of the difficulties of other Christians, when the Pope is presented as a supreme head and immediate pastor. The West developed through the centuries according to the logic of ecclesiastical centralism and has remained the one huge Western patriarchate.

It is true that the limitation of the Roman primacy to the West could be a solution acceptable to the Orthodox: the Bishop of Rome is *prótos* only of the West, and as its Patriarch he could not exercise any form of his primacy over the rest of the world. As Metropolitan Ioannis (Zizioulas) explains, this approach, although consonant with the traditional Byzantine pentarchy, has nevertheless its serious weaknesses. It would lead to a division of the world into two parts (West and East) and two spheres of influence: the Old Rome would exercise primacy over the West (the Catholic, Protestant and Anglican world), the New Rome over the East (the Orthodox world). But the situation of the world today has changed (there are some parts of the Christian world unknown at the time of

the Byzantine pentarchy). How to justify this twofold division of primacies from theological point of view?

To consider the Pope as the patriarch of the West seems until today "a too much neglected reality"<sup>37</sup>. One could however imagine a new structure of the reconciled Church in the form of a concrete collegiality of patriarchates, both already existing (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia), and those which should still be established, e.g. Canterbury, in Africa, North and Latin America, Australia, Asia or some more. Is this only a utopian vision? It is surely not when one thinks in the light of ecclesiology of the ancient Church.

Metropolitan George Khodr, already quoted above, easily imagines continental patriarchates, such as for example a French or German one. In this case local or regional Churches could acknowledge some privileges of the Bishop of Rome.

Personally – he says in an interview – I support the idea that the Bishop of Rome should have more than a primacy of honour. (...). One could imagine, however, a practical exercise of the ministry of unity coming not from the divine institution, but from the will of the Churches (*sans qu'il soit d'institution divine, mais issu de la volonté des Eglises*). One would need around the Pope a kind of permanent synod (which would not be the curia), and from which all the Churches should receive advisories. A jurisdictional primate is instead inconceivable from the biblical point of view, because the local Bishop himself has, to use the Catholic vocabulary, the fulness of priesthood. With his local Church, he receives the entire Christ (*il reçoit le Christ tout entier*). The Bishop is not a simple "sub-prefect" (*pas un simple "sous-préfet"*)<sup>38</sup>.

Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas speaks also about the universal primacy as an ecclesiological necessity in the reunited Church. He emphasizes, too, that this primacy should not be understood as a primacy of jurisdiction, i.e. of direct intervention in internal affairs of a local Church. The primacy is not a prerogative of an individual but of a local Church. Thus the primacy of the Pope is in fact the primacy of his See, namely of the Roman Church<sup>39</sup>. According to an ecclesiology of communion, every Bishop is an integral part of his own local Church, and not above it. That is why the primacy should always be exercised in a synodal way, either on local and regional level or on universal one. The Bishop of Rome as *prótos* would exercise his universal primacy not as a primacy of jurisdiction, but in a truly synodal way, cooperating with the existing patriarchates and heads of autonomous Churches. So understood, the universal primacy would be carried out in communion with others, and not directly and in isolation. The Bishop of Rome would be the first among all other heads of the Churches, the spokesman of the whole Church when the announced decisions are a result of a consensus.

It would be wrong to think that according to Orthodox theology the universal primacy of the Bishop of Rome should be a pure primacy of honour, with no prerogatives attached to it. Both Metropolitans, George Khodr and Ioannis Zizioulas belong to those who are

ready to assign to the Pope more concrete rights and competences than did previous representatives of the so-called eucharistic ecclesiology. One cannot limit papal functions to the primacy in love, honour and witness. In the Orthodox Church the patriarchs have the right to convene synods, determine their agenda and preside over them. Thus, according to Zizioulas, similar prerogatives would belong to the Bishop of Rome in the reunited Church<sup>40</sup>.

It is a common conviction among Orthodox theologians that primacy is not a juridical reality, but rather a moral or pastoral authority. They are simply more skeptical about the importance of juridical or teaching structures within the Church. Even the synod or council is not understood as "power" in the juridical sense of the word, but rather as "witness" to the identity in faith. Clément points to the fact that during the first millennium the East recognized the Petrine charisma and a real primacy of Rome, not only a simple primacy of honour. The Popes used to send their letter (*tómos*) to the ecumenical councils (it was read with respect, but freely discussed), to receive appeals from the East (as determined already by the synod of Sardica, 343). So in the reunited Church the Pope would convoke ecumenical councils, preside over them and ratify their decisions<sup>41</sup>.

## **REFORMS NEED A SENSE OF URGENCY**

Reformulation of the doctrine and change of structures can be retarded or thwarted indefinitely. A realistic hope for unity evokes a sense of urgency and responsibility. The former Archbishop of San Francisco, John R. Quinn, wrote not long ago the following words which portray a sincere passion for truth, honesty and concern for Christian unity:

We cannot hold unity hostage until there is a perfect Pope in a perfect Church. Christian unity will require sacrifice. But it cannot mean that all the sacrifices must be made by those who want full communion with the Catholic Church while the Catholic Church herself makes no significant sacrifices. Of the individual Christian the Scripture says, "You have been bought at a price" (1 Co 6:20). Similarly, we all have to face the fact that unity among Christians will be bought at a price. All will have to sacrifice. If we are serious about the goal of unity, we must be serious about the cost of unity<sup>42</sup>.

In these words the kenotic attitude or kenotic ethos of thinking has found a clear expression. Readiness for self-limitation and courage have to go together. *Kenosis* requires *parrhesía*. Without courageous vision, a kenotic ecclesiology will remain purely declarative phraseology. Christ's *kenosis* becomes at present perhaps the greatest challenge to all of us. Metropolitan George (Khodr) says openly: "The Churches hold fast to their structures and remain prisoners of their confessionalism"<sup>43</sup>.

Perhaps in the future the Roman Catholic Church will find enough courage to begin a structural reform which requires a new logic of thinking. This logic demands respect for the autonomy of local and regional Churches. It urges giving up the claim of the

immediate jurisdiction over those Churches and understands the primacy as a real *diakonía* for the unity of the Sister Churches. For the time being it rather seems to be only a dream or a song of the future... Nothing indicates that it could be realized before long.

Such reflections are nevertheless justifiable. A kenotic type of ecclesiology requires courage and theological imagination. Have we enough of both of them? Be that as it may, we already have the possibility of patiently restoring theological balance to ecclesiology, through dialogue and a sincere desire to learn from and with each other in the atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence. There must exist something like a principle of ecumenical subsidiarity (this word derives from the Latin *subsidium* which means support or help). A common exploration of the way in which the ancient Church managed to maintain her unity can bring some encouraging insights and new impulses.

On the other hand, however, this should not be considered as a panacea able to solve all our problems. One has to be realistic. We live today in different circumstances. Ancient structures cannot simply and automatically be re-created as such. Faithfulness to the past must take into account the present situation. One can only hope that growing patiently in ecumenical *koinonía* the Churches will be able to discover the appropriate new structures of primacy, synodality and collegiality. As Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas puts it: "The synodal system is a *conditio sine qua non* of the catholicity of the Church. (...). Also the primacy is a *conditio sine qua non* of the catholicity of the Church"<sup>44</sup>.

## **A WORD ABOUT "INFALLIBILITY"**

Orthodox Christians do not see communion with the Bishop of Rome as constitutive of the full ecclesial reality of a local Church and as an essential condition for the communion of local Churches with each other. An additional difficulty lies in the issue of the infallibility of papal definitions. Roman Catholics consider the primatial role of the Bishop of Rome as essentially doctrinal, and not as a human administrative arrangement. They believe that he may, in certain limited circumstances and in communion with other Bishops, enunciate authoritatively the infallible faith of the Church without subsequent ratification.

In the Orthodox view, the "infallibility" or rather "indefectibility" as a gift of the Holy Spirit concerns the whole Church, and above all its conciliar proclamations. The truth of papal or patriarchal statements depends on their subsequent reception by the Churches. In the continuing life of the Church it becomes evident whether or not a particular papal or episcopal statement conveys the truth, whether or not the Spirit of God has spoken through a particular conciliar gathering. That is why Orthodox theologians would rather speak of the "invincibility of the truth" within the whole Church which cannot entirely defect from the Gospel (hence its indefectibility) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit<sup>45</sup>. One has to admit a certain "logic of tensions without juridically predetermined solutions"<sup>46</sup>. Sometimes this logic could even lead to a clash of opinions, as it was the case in Antioch between Peter and Paul (cf. Ga 2,11-14). The last word would nevertheless belong to the Holy Spirit, urging those responsible to reach an agreement.

This is in fact one of Christ's promises. Let us be open to the motions of the Holy Spirit and have confidence in Him!

The main difficulty for Orthodox theology in the doctrine of papal infallibility lies in the notion that the promise of truth is connected to the teaching of the Pope in virtue of his office. The Orthodox emphasize that his role within the universal Church must be seen in a much more limited way, and subjected to greater accountability to all other Bishops, than has been taught in Catholic ecclesiology for the past centuries. The fundamental point is to know whether the Bishop of Rome, installed on the apostolic See of Peter, has his authority by divine right, *de iure divino*, or this derives simply from a universal consensus of the Churches.

Metropolitan George of Mount-Lebanon has expressed his readiness to go far enough in recognizing a specific role of the Pope. He sees, however, a clear lack of coherence between the insistence of the Vatican II on the local Church led by the Bishop (manifestation of the fullness of the Church of Christ) and the claim of the Pope for the direct and universal jurisdiction over all the Bishops of the whole Church. "One can canonically extend the authority of the Pope – says the metropolitan – without involving in it the papal infallibility. The very concept of papal infallibility is unthinkable, it has no sense"<sup>47</sup>.

So, for the time being, in spite of many theological studies, this problem does not seem to be easily solved in the Catholic/Orthodox dialogue.

## **HOPES FOR THE FUTURE**

O. Clément rightly points out that the foundation of every primacy in the Church is Christ Himself, and only He, crucified and risen Lord, conqueror of death by His own death. Very early, in the community of Corinth, there appeared the first divisions: "I am for Paul", "I am for Apollos", "I am for Kephass", "I am for Christ" (1 Co 1:12). The apostle Paul categorically refuses any human reference. He proclaims that the only foundation in the Church is Christ himself: "Has Christ been parcelled out? Was it Paul that was crucified for you?" (v. 13). And later he explains his reaction: "There is nothing to boast about in anything human: Paul, Apollos, Kephass (...) are all your servants; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God" (1 Co 3:21-23)<sup>48</sup>. What does this centrality of Christ mean for us today?

Every primacy within the redeemed humanity - fundamentally of the Bishop in the local Church, but also of the metropolitan among his Bishops, of the patriarch among his metropolitans, finally of the first Bishop, the one of Rome, in the Pentarchy of the time of the individed Church - is only a precarious image, always to be purified, of the primacy of the One whom Fr. Lev Gillet, "a monk of the Eastern Church", used to call the "Lord-Love" (*le "Seigneur-Amour"*). Primacy of service, till witness, if need be, of blood and death<sup>49</sup>.

In the eyes of many Orthodox (and not only), the proud St. Peter's basilica in Rome stands in sharp contrast to the humble crypt of the Apostle. The Christians of the first centuries venerated the Church of Rome as the Church of the apostles and martyrs Peter and Paul together, later also as the Church of the martyrs. Its true role consists in a *martyria* understood in the double and, at the same time, unique sense of this word, as witness and martyrdom. Looking into the future Clément writes:

In this way one can imagine a reorganized Church composed of vigorous eucharistic communities, each one of them around its Bishop, regrouping themselves according to a whole ensemble of the centres of agreement, the centres of communion: metropolies, patriarchates (through national unities in many places, but more and more through unities of culture and destiny), finally universal primacy which belongs to the Bishop of Rome as "vicarial " presence of Peter, but also as charismatic inspiration of Paul (*comme présence 'vicariale' de Pierre mais aussi inspiration charismatique de Paul*)<sup>50</sup>.

In this perspective, a primatial authority of the Bishop of Rome should respect full internal liberty of the Eastern Churches, as it existed during the first millennium. A French theologian recalls that Pope John Paul II said once himself: "What I wish with the Orthodox is communion, and not jurisdiction"<sup>51</sup>. Clément has expressed his hope for the future in following words:

Rome, through its own process of grace, when God wants it, will come back to the authentic conception of the primacy as service of communion, in a real interdependence of its Bishop with all the others, in a real dialogue also with the whole People of God. This will require the integration of her own Reformation which reminds her that she should be the Church of Peter *and of Paul*, and the reconciliation, from Sister Church to Sister Church, without jurisdictional pretension, with the Orthodox Church<sup>52</sup>.

In fact, the practice of papal primacy in the first millennium was different from the relationship that developed later between Pope and Bishops in the Western Church. When the full communion in the faith is once restored, the Pope's relationship to Orthodox Christians must certainly change. The Churches of the East are not subjects but "Sister Churches". This term, so often used in the *Tomos agapis*<sup>53</sup> and in the official dialogue between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches<sup>54</sup>, has now fallen into disgrace. On the Catholic side it is due mostly to the *Note* issued on the use of this expression by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (June 30, 2000). The difficulties concerning its use are also present on the Orthodox side<sup>55</sup>. The term continues, however, to be further used in some official documents by both sides. It appears in the common statement issued at the end of the recent visit of the Rumanian Patriarch Teoctist to the Vatican (October 7-14, 2002)<sup>56</sup>. Sooner or later we will come back to this concept and treat it with more confidence.

According to Clément, the Orthodox Church, preserving the teaching of the Fathers on the freedom of Sister Churches within the universal Church will have to overcome the temptation of autocephalism and religious nationalism, and in this way to rediscover the proper relationship between synodality and primacy. One should not forget what the East fully recognized during the first millennium: primacy in the reconciled Church will be inseparably based on Peter's person and faith, on a Petrine ministry balanced by the ministry of Paul, the charismatic, and of John, the visionary<sup>57</sup>.

In the dialogue on the issue of the primacy, the Orthodox should also overcome fear, mistrust and isolation. I realize that the representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople may significantly differ, in their response to the question of universal primacy, from the theologians of other Orthodox Churches<sup>58</sup>. They certainly are not unanimous. The question is not yet solved and needs further clarifications on the Orthodox side itself. When the appropriate time of the dialogue comes in the future, they will have to develop more in detail their interpretation of the primacy in the universal Church. The work done by theologians of previous generations should then also be taken into account<sup>59</sup>.

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A serious difficulty lies in the fact that we cannot disregard our long separate history. It still lives in us and we live with it. How to find ways not to be bound by these separate historical developments? Looking at the divine economy of salvation we believe that once God entered into history of humanity with the purpose to heal it. Human history has become His own history. That is why we can dare to hope that His presence and His action will also transform slowly, from within, the history of our divisions. For this, however, God needs our willingness to cooperate with Him. Shall we find enough imagination, courage and wisdom to move beyond our traditional positions? Everyone has to answer this question on his or her own account.

## NOTES

1 A lecture given at the Faculty of Theology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven/Belgium, December 13, 2002 within the frame of the program Socrates/Erasmus, published in: "The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies" (Nijmegen-Leuven) 55 (2003) No. 1-2, pp. 1-27.

2 Bartłomiej I, Patriarcha Ekumeniczny Konstantynopola. *Patriarcha Kosciola*. "Tygodnik Powszechny" No. 26, June 30, 1996, p. 12. This interview was also mentioned by O. Clément. «*La vérité vous rendra libre*». *Entretiens avec le Patriarche oecuménique Bartholomée I<sup>er</sup>*. Paris-Bruges 1996, p. 255.

3 See *Deux patriarches réagissent aux récentes propositions du pape*. "Service Orthodoxe de Presse SOP" no. 202, novembre 1995, p. 11.

4 Ibid.

5 *Garder inalterable le système conciliaire. Rencontre avec les évêques catholiques suisses (Zurich, 14 décembre 1995).* SOP, no. 205, février 1996, pp. 18-20, here 19.

6 Here and further on the New Testament is quoted from *The Jerusalem Bible*.

7 O. Clément. *Rome autrement. Un orthodoxe face à la papauté.* Paris-Bruges 1997, p. 99: "ces affirmations semblent quelque peu réductrices et polémiques".

8 Ibid., pp. 18-32.

9 For many Eastern Fathers *pétra* – rock is the faith proclaimed by Peter. In this sense, all the faithful are "successors" of Peter, because the Church is founded on Christ, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14,6). According to St. Cyprian of Carthage every bishop is a "successor" of Peter by his apostolic mission, and all the bishops together, *in solidum*, sit on the *cathedra Petri*. See ibidem, pp. 25, 27. Slowly, esp. in the West, the emphasis will be put not on Peter's faith, but on his person itself: *pétra* becomes the person of Peter confessing the apostolic faith. Ibidem, p. 28.

10 Ibid., pp. 19-21.

11 Ibid., p. 19.

12 Ibid., p. 23.

13 Ibid., p. 20.

14 Ibid.

15 *Préserver l'unité d'enseignement et d'Esprit. Rencontre avec la Fédération Protestante de Suisse (Berne, 13 décembre 1995).* SOP no. 205, février 1996, pp. 20-22, here 21.

16 See for example G. Bavaud. *Primauté du pape et Révélation.* "Chrétiens en marche" 33 (1996) no. 50, p. 5.

17 Mansi 40, 407-408. French translation: *Encyclique de 1848 des Patriarches de Constantinople, d'Alexandrie, d'Antioche et de Jérusalem (Réponse à l'encyclique de Pie IX du 6 janvier 1848).* "Contacts" 17 (1965) no. 49, pp. 25-46, here 36-37.

18 Cf. Bartholomaios I. *Dialog mit Rom kommt voran.* "Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur. Ökumenische Information" Nr 4, 28. Januar 1997, p. 7.

19 *Epist. ad Romanos.* SCh 10, p. 106: "qui préside à la charité"

20 See Clément. *Rome autrement*, pp. 29-30.



21 Cf. R.E. Brown. *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*. London 1972, p. 1091.

22 Cf. Metr. Damaskinos (Papandreou). *Bleibendes und Veränderliches im Petrusamt. Überlegungen aus orthodoxer Sicht*, in: *Dienst an der Einheit. Zum Wesen und Auftrag des Petrusdienstes*, hrsg. von J. Ratzinger. Düsseldorf 1978, pp. 146-164.

23 Giovanni di Pergamo. *Il primato nella chiesa*. "Il Regno-attualità" no. 2, 1998, pp. 5-9.

24 Metr. Georges (Khodr). *L'Orient et l'Occident chrétiens*. SOP no. 205, février 1996, p. 23-26, here 25.

25 Clément. *Rome autrement*, p. 105. The title of the Chapter 12: "Le mystère de la primauté" (pp. 103-109). See also pp. 96 and 99.

26 "Le concept d'infaillibilité papale n'a pas de sens pour nous". *Un entretien avec le métropolite Georges du Mont-Liban*. SOP no. 247, avril 2000, pp. 19-23, esp. 20.

27 Cf. *La primauté du successeur de Pierre dans le mystère de l'Eglise. Réflexions de la Congrégation pour la Doctrine de la foi*. "La documentation catholique" 95 (1998) No. 21, p. 1016-1020.

28 This formulation came from Georgios Tssetsis, a representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the WCC. See A. Basdekis. *Orthodoxe Stellungnahmen zur Enzyklika "Ut unum sint"*. "Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur: Ökumenische Information" Nr 52/53, 19. Dezember 1995, p. 5-11.

29 Ibid., p. 5-6, 10.

30 See the letter addressed by Paul VI to cardinal Johannes Willebrands as his personal legate to the celebrations of the anniversary of the II. Council of Lyons (1274), called in this letter "secundum concilium generale". AAS 66 (1974) 620-625.

31 *Visite officielle du Patriarche Oecuménique à l'Eglise de Rome...*, "Episkepsis", no. 520, 31 juillet 1995, p. 15: "...c'est seulement quand le primat de l'ethos kénotique prevaudra d'une manière convaincante dans l'Eglise historique, que non seulement nous rétabliront alors facilement l'unité tant désirée dans la foi, mais que nous nous rendrons dans le même temps dignes d'éprouver ce que la révélation de Dieu a promis à ceux qui aiment le Seigneur, à savoir, «une terre nouvelle et un ciel nouveau»".

32 Ibid., p. 10. In the quotation reference is made to PG 94, 1076B. Already in 1990 Metropolitan of Philadelphia, Meliton (Karas), spoke of "a primacy of sacrifice" in relation to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. See Méliton de Philadelphie. *Le service du Trône oecuménique, une primauté de sacrifice*. "Episkepsis", no. 450, 1 décembre 1990, pp. 10-13.

33 *Rome autrement*, p. 119.

34 Metr. Stylianos (Harkianakis), *Der offizielle Dialog zwischen der römisch-katholischen und der orthodoxen Kirche*, in: *Am Beginn des theologischen Dialogs. Dokumentation des römischen, des Wiener und des Salzburger Ökumenismus. 10 Pro-Oriente-Symposien, 1982-1985*. Festschrift Theodor Piffl-Percevic, ed. Alfred Stirnemann, Innsbruck 1987, pp. 350-364, here 361 f.

35 Metropolitte Georges (Khodr). *Vers Rome ou avec Rome?* SOP, no. 193, décembre 1994, pp. 30-32, here 32.

36 Yves Congar. *Diversités et communion. Dossier historique et conclusion théologique*. Paris 1982, p. 9.

37 Y. Congar. *Le pape, patriarche d'Occident. Approche d'une réalité trop négligée*, in: idem, *Eglise et papauté*, Paris 1994, pp. 11-30 [reprinted from: "Istina", 28, 1983, pp. 374-390]. See also A. Garuti. *Il Papa Patriarca d'Occidente? Studio storico dottrinale*. Bologna 1990; F. R. Gahbauer. *Die Pentarchie theorie. Ein Modell der Kirchenleitung von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. Frankfurt 1993.

38 "Le concept d'infailibilité...", pp. 20-21.

39 Giovanni di Pergamo. *Primato nella chiesa*, p. 9: "Il primato non dovrebbe essere la prerogativa di un individuo, ma di una *chiesa locale*. Ciò significa che quando parliamo del primato del papa intendiamo il primato della sede, cioè la chiesa di Roma".

40 J. Zizioulas. *The Institution of Episcopal Conferences: An Orthodox Reflection*. "The Jurist" 48, 1988, pp. 376-383, esp. 380-381.

41 Clément. *Rome autrement*, pp. 60-61, 107.

42 John R. Quinn. *The Exercise of the Primacy: Facing the Cost of Christian Unity*. "Commonweal" 123, 1996, no. 13, pp. 11-20, here 19.

43 *Le concept d'infailibilité*, p. 20: "Les Eglises se cramponnent à leurs structures et restent prisonnières de leur confessionnalisme".

44 *Il primato nella chiesa*, p. 7.

45 See Bp Kallistos (Ware). *Response to the Presentation by His Grace, Bishop Basil (Losten): "The Roman Primacy and the Church of Kiev"*. "Logos" 34 (1993), No. 1-2, pp. 107-116, esp. 110.

46 Clément. *Rome autrement*, p. 107.

45 "*Le concept d'infailibilité papale...*", p. 21: "On peut étendre canoniquement l'autorité du pape sans qu'elle comporte l'infailibilité papale. Le concept lui-même d'infailibilité papale n'est pas pensable, il n'a pas de sens".

48 *Rome autrement*, p. 22.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

53 *Tomos agapis*. Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970). Rome-Istanbul 1971; *Tomos agapis. Dokumentation zum Dialog der Liebe zwischen dem Hl. Stuhl und dem Ökumenischen Patriarchat 1958-1976*. Hrsg. von Pro Oriente. Innsbruck-Wien-München 1978.

54 See the Document of Balamand (1993) on "uniatism," esp. nos. 12 and 14.

55 See W. Hryniewicz. *Vertrauen oder Mißtrauen? Die Krise des Begriffs Schwesterkirchen*. "Ostkirchliche Studien" 51(2002) H.

56 *Begegnung der Schwesterkirchen. Besuch des rumänischen Patriarchen Teoctist im Vatican*. "Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur. Ökumenische Information" Nr. 43, 22. Oktober 2002, pp. 12-13.

57 Clément. *Rome autrement*, p. 86.

58 See Clément. *Rome autrement*, pp. 93-101.

59 Cf. J. Meyendorff, A. Schmemmann, N. Afanassieff, N. Koulomzine. *The Primacy of Peter*. London 1963, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1973.

## Chapter XV

# **THE FLORENTINE UNION: RECEPTION AND REJECTION<sup>1</sup>**

Research and discussion concerning controversial topics require particular honesty and intellectual integrity. The Balamand Statement of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (1993) stresses the need to overcome prejudices and the polemical treatment of events and encourages us to develop "an honest and global presentation of history," aiming, if possible, at a common historiography of the Churches.<sup>2</sup>

An honest presentation of history means more than merely an accurate knowledge of chronology. A global presentation implies taking all possible considerations and points of view into account, so that this presentation could lead to a comprehensive understanding of events. As yet we are quite far from such an ecumenical initiative. The existing attempts to interpret the origins and history of "uniatism" are predominately characterized by a confessional or even polemical approach, insensitive to the real intentions and theological preoccupations of the other side. How can one speak then of "an honest and global presentation of history?"

In attempting to discuss the issue of the "Union of Florence" and its aftermath, I will try to keep this difficult requirement of honesty in research constantly before my eyes. The task of this paper is to reflect on ecclesiological motivations and consequences of the unionist movement in the Ruthenian<sup>3</sup> lands. This is a very delicate and painful issue. By its very definition "union" denotes overcoming division and schism. In fact, the revival of the Florentine Union through the Union of Brest (1596) produced a new and lasting division. "Uniatism" did not succeed in reestablishing unity between the Church of the East and the Church of the West. Division persists, embittered by partial unions with the See of Rome. The Eastern Catholic Churches born out of those partial unions each time involved only a part of the Orthodox Mother Church, which defended herself against the alienation of her faithful. Orthodox opposition to these partial unions was a defense reaction, inspired by a sense of dignity and by the conviction of being also the true Church of Christ. The "uniate" movement instead tended to ignore Orthodoxy as a spiritual locus of salvation, grace, and truth; thus breaking away from the old tradition of Sister Churches.

In my reflections I will try to show first of all a certain continuity of efforts to restore the Union of Florence among Ruthenians. The attitude of the Latin clergy in Poland and Lithuania towards the decisions of the Council of Florence deserves special attention. What role did the principles of Florence play in the unionist movement in the 16<sup>th</sup> century? Soteriological exclusivism had already permeated all Latin theological thinking from Florence to

Brest. The Union of Brest failed to be received by all Ruthenians<sup>4</sup>. What significance should be ascribed to the repeated projects to establish an autonomous Ruthenian Patriarchate? Do these projects indicate that the opposition to the Union of Brest was above all an opposition to some deficient modalities and methods in its realization rather than against the true reunion with Rome as such? We have to reflect on all these questions before coming to some final conclusions.

## **FIRST ATTEMPTS TO RESTORE THE FLORENTINE UNION AMONG THE RUTHENIANS**

On August 17, 1439 the Metropolitan of Kiev, Isidore, received from the Pope the mission to propagate the Union of Florence among the Greek Orthodox Eastern Slaves. He remained in the Ruthenian provinces of the Kingdom of Poland for about three months and did his best to encourage them to accept the Union and to safeguard their religious rights. It had been decided at the Council of Florence that no double hierarchy in the same place would be necessary, since the Eastern and the Western Church had been reunited. Isidore tried to apply the Florentine principle, stating that where there are two Bishops, the vacancy which would occur first is not to be filled but the surviving hierarchy, whatever his rite, should be the only one. In fact, despite these efforts, parallel hierarchies continued to exist side by side in many places (e.g. in Przemyśl and Chelm). At this early stage it was already an example of non-reception of the Florentine ecclesiological principle.

In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Isidore spent more than six months (from August 1440 to March 1441). His task was much more difficult there. The Catholic hierarchy was very strongly in favour of the Council of Basel. Bishop Matthias of Vilna did not even permit Isidore to proclaim the Union of Florence.<sup>5</sup> In Kiev, instead, he was quite successful in securing acceptance for the Union, at least for some time, by the Orthodox who still remembered a good ancient tradition of peaceful coexistence with the Catholics long after the schism of 1054.<sup>6</sup> Some Russian chronicles pretend, that the Metropolitan was expelled from Kiev by the people, but this statement runs contrary to the facts.<sup>7</sup>

After a complete failure of his mission in Moscow (1441), where the Council of Florence had been totally rejected as contrary to the Orthodox tradition, Isidore, having escaped twice from jail, returned to Lithuania and Poland (1442). This time he did not find there any freedom of action. Most of the Latin hierarchy had become even more favourably disposed towards the Council of Basel. Thus the Metropolitan of Kiev and all Rus', "the Ruthenian Cardinal", had to leave his ecclesiastical province and was never to return there. Soon after he was considered by the Orthodox as the one who had betrayed the Orthodox Church by contributing to the Union of Florence. The fall of Constantinople (1453) was seen in Moscow as God's punishment for the treason.

A famous Polish historian Jan Dlugosz, described the disastrous consequences of the conquest of the imperial city by Turks in the following words: "Of the two eyes of

Christendom one has been torn out, of its two hands one has been cut off" (*ex duobus Christianitatis oculis alter erutus, ex duabus manibus altera amputata*).<sup>8</sup> Writing this he was not thinking about the fate of the Union of Florence. Rather he expressed a general feeling after the tragedy of 1453, which was to affect deeply the further destiny of the Union of Florence. As an event of pretended reconciliation between the Eastern and Western Churches it had practically vanished. The first attempts to save it came from the Ruthenian lands of Poland and Lithuania. The chances there seemed most favourable under the rule of a Catholic king, Casimir the Jagiellonian.

In 1458 Kiev was separated from Moscow under Metropolitan Gregory, appointed by Rome and loyal to the Union of Florence. He came in 1459 to the Ruthenian territories, entrusted with the task of reviving the Union as Isidore's disciple and successor. King Casimir had recognized him as legitimate Metropolitan of Kiev. The Ruthenians had to make their choice between Metropolitan Iona, an opponent of the Florentine Union residing in Moscow (in 1459 the separation from Constantinople was completed by a synodal decision similar to that of 1448), and Metropolitan Gregory supported by Rome. The Ruthenian hierarchy was not much inclined to follow Iona, who had never been consecrated by any Patriarch. In 1460 the Lithuanian Diet in Brest officially recognized Gregory as Metropolitan. The Bishops had no intention of coming under Moscow's religious influence. Only the Bishop of Briansk went over to Iona.



The tradition of religious dependence on Constantinople, however, was very strong among the Ruthenians, including their leading families. Without formally rejecting the union with Rome, the Metropolitan See of Kiev was again looking more and more towards the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Around 1470, shortly before his death in 1472, Gregory was recognized by Patriarch Dionysius I as Metropolitan of Kiev. There are no indications that Rome interpreted these new relations of Gregory with Constantinople as an abandonment of the Union of Florence. Perhaps it realized the difficulty of his position. Gregory was never considered, even in the later tradition, unfaithful to his task of assuring the survival of the Florentine Union in Rus'. There were no formal objections to his relations with Constantinople, based on a long tradition of the past.<sup>9</sup> But Rome was gradually losing its interest in the problem of reunion with Ruthenians. It rather hoped to gain Moscow for the Union, thus reducing the importance of keeping the Florentine tradition alive in Kiev. The future of that Union depended more and more on the decisions of the Ruthenian Bishops themselves.

Some prominent successors of Gregory wanted to remain in communion with Rome without, however, completely breaking relations with the Patriarchs of Constantinople. That was one of the most promising features in the history of the attempts to keep the Union alive in the Ruthenian lands. In 1473 the mission to Moscow of the papal legate, Antonio Bonumbre, turned out to be a failure, similar to the later missions in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> The Union of Florence was once more rejected there, whereas in Lithuania, the

representatives of the Eastern Church gathered at a synod in Novogrodek declared to the legate their support for the Union of Florence. Unfortunately that document, sent through the legate, never reached Pope Sixtus IV, so the Ruthenians' message remained without any answer.

For this reason Bishop Misael (Pstrutski), the Metropolitan-elect and successor of Gregory, together with two archimandrites and thirteen prominent representatives of the nobility, decided at their assembly held in Vilna on March 14, 1476, to send another letter to Rome.<sup>11</sup> It was a lengthy theological treatise, written with exuberant biblical imagery and flowery Byzantine oratory. The Ruthenians emphasize that they are members of the one Body of Christ; they recognize not only the first seven Ecumenical Councils, but also the Council of Florence as the "eighth Council".<sup>12</sup> They also express their belief in the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son.<sup>13</sup> The Pope himself is given many high titles ("*Oecumenicus Papa*", "*supremus Pastor*", "*sanctae universalis Ecclesiae Christi vicarius*", "*universi pastor orbis*")<sup>14</sup>, often even excessive ("*fons salutis*", "*via et vita cunctarum animarum christianarum*").<sup>15</sup> He is considered the real source of the living water, although the faithful draw it through the four rivers — the four Patriarchs.<sup>16</sup>

This was an act of loyalty to the Union of Florence. At the same time the signatories of the message were complaining that the Latin rite hierarchy had treated them badly and even tried to force them to be re-baptized and to give up their Eastern rite. Precisely for this reason a request was

made for a papal bull in that matter and for two papal legates (possibly one Latin and one Greek!) who should help the Ruthenians to keep their traditional Eastern rite. They wanted to remain in unity with Rome according to the decisions of the Council of Florence, expecting that Rome would contribute towards improving the situation which at that time was marked by a growing distrust between the followers of the Eastern and Western rites.<sup>17</sup>

The exceptional importance of this document lies in the fact that it was signed not only by the clergy but also by many prominent lay leaders of the Ruthenian population. Two centuries later the same approach will also characterize Metropolitan Peter Mohyla in his secret memorial (1644) on the union of the two Churches. He will also try in his project to renew communion with Rome without breaking with Constantinople. Most probably the letter of 1476 did not even reach the Pope for the second time, and so the Ruthenians did not receive any answer to their appeal.

One more early attempt to restore the Union of Florence among Ruthenians is worth recalling. It reappeared almost twenty years after the death of Misael (around 1480), when Metropolitan Joseph I (Bolharynovic), even before his formal appointment, tried in 1498 to receive from the Patriarch of Constantinople an approval for his project to restore the Union of Florence. In his cautious answer to that inquiry, Patriarch Niphon II did not oppose Joseph's intention to follow the Florentine tradition, but insisted upon the maintenance of the Eastern rite. He himself

favoured the Union of Florence in the territories of his Patriarchate which were under Venetian rule.<sup>18</sup>

New Patriarch, Joachim I, who succeeded Niphon in 1498, confirmed Joseph as Metropolitan of Kiev, despite his favourable attitude to reunion with Rome. He could favour the reunion with Rome without breaking the communion with Constantinople. On August 20, 1500 Metropolitan Joseph signed in Vilna his act of religious reunion with Rome, submitted then in 1501 to the Pope for approval.<sup>19</sup> Like earlier Misael, he was not isolated in his efforts to restore the Union of Florence among Ruthenians, but supported by both clergymen and some prominent lay leaders.<sup>20</sup>

However, this promising project soon failed for a variety of reasons. Pope Alexander VI was not ready to accept it without further investigations. According to him, Joseph was not a Metropolitan of Kiev since he had been promoted by "the heretic Joachim", the Patriarch of Constantinople, and not by the Patriarch living in exile and loyal to the Union of Florence (in fact an Italian of the Latin rite Cardinal Giovanni Michele!).<sup>21</sup> The Pope was opposed to any simultaneous relations of the Metropolitan of Kiev with Rome and Constantinople. Earlier cases of such relations had thus been forgotten or simply ignored. There were also some dogmatic and liturgical reservations. The Pope was informed that the Ruthenians had not observed the doctrine of the Council of Florence on the procession of the Holy Spirit, on the Eucharist, purgatory and papal primacy.<sup>22</sup> He even complained that the *Filioque* was not mentioned in the

Creed! Joseph's humble recognition of his authority apparently did not satisfy him. This attitude seems to have been influenced by conflicting reports coming from the Latin hierarchy.

The whole project of reviving the Florentine Union, at first so well received, was entirely abandoned. Rome's insistence on breaking communion with the "schismatic Patriarch" of Constantinople was, indeed, contrary to the long Kievan tradition. A new attempt to revive the reception of the Union of Florence failed once more.

### **"REBAPTIZATIO RUTHENORUM": LATIN CLERGY AND THE FLORENTINE DECISIONS**

Metropolitan Misael's letter to Sixtus IV complained against the Latin clergy who insisted on re-baptizing the Orthodox Ruthenians. This fact demands reconsideration if we are to learn more about the extent of the reception of Florentine decisions in Poland and Lithuania.

Some Polish theologians claimed as late as 1417 that the Orthodox baptism was valid. They conveyed this opinion in a letter sent to the Council of Constance by king Ladislas Jagiello and Lithuanian Grand Duke Vitold. The letter explained that forcing the Ruthenians to be re-baptized would be an insult to the sacrament itself (*"iniuria fieret sacramento"*) and thus would prevent them from conversion.<sup>23</sup> That approach, however, did not stop the spread of the practice of re-baptizing in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The fourth wife of King Jagiello, Sophia, was forced to undergo rebaptism according to the Roman rite on the eve

of her wedding in 1422. The Latin canon law treated the "schismatic Ruthenians" in the same way as Jews and heathens. Almost no trace of the 12<sup>th</sup> century tolerance and openness of both denominations was left. Mutual alienation caused the emergence of the two different Churches, two mentalities and two isolated cultures. The Latin hierarchy insisted on the rebaptism of those Ruthenians who wanted to become Catholics: This was "one of the significant elements in the system of restrictions directed against the religious freedom of the schismatics".<sup>24</sup>

This practice was sanctioned by the synods of the dioceses where that issue was especially relevant. Some attempts were made to specify its theological foundations. Particularly influential in this respect was a treatise by the Rector of the Jagiellonian University, John of Oswiecim, alias Sacranus, entitled: "*Elucidarius errorum ritus ruthenici*" (Cracow 1501).<sup>25</sup> The opinions of the supporters of re-baptizing betrayed a profound distrust of the sacraments administered by the "schismatic Ruthenians".

It may be that practice, contrary to the decisions of Florence, was based on some expressions contained in a brief of Nicholas V addressed to the Bishop of Vilna in 1452, which were insufficiently clear.<sup>26</sup> They could be understood as encouragement to re-baptize the converted Ruthenian Orthodox according to the Latin rite. When the matter of reunion of the Ruthenians with Rome became alive again under Metropolitan Joseph I, Pope Alexander VI issued two statements which declared that the Ruthenians, if they fully accept the Catholic doctrine,

would not have to be re-baptized.<sup>27</sup> In conformity with the decisions of Florence, the Eastern formulae of baptism were recognized as equivalent with the Latin formula. The Orthodox baptism was thus explicitly recognized as valid. Nevertheless, the customary practice of re-baptizing appeared time and again especially among the Latin secular clergy (its adversaries were mostly the Bernardine Franciscans). It was a result of many deeply rooted prejudices against the Orthodox Ruthenians. During the V<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council, on August 9, 1515, Pope Leo X granted the Archbishop of Gniezno, Jan Laski, the primate of Poland, a special privilege which allowed him to keep the existing practice.<sup>28</sup>

The decisions of the Council of Florence on the equality of the Latin and Greek baptismal formulae did not succeed in breaking the customary practice of re-baptizing. Under the influence of the papal legate, Bishop Zacharias Ferreri, the synod of Vilna (1521) affirmed its support for the decision of Florence, but its statutes had no major influence on the development of the widespread practice of re-baptizing.

One of the most significant facts in 16<sup>th</sup> century Poland was that only some clergymen of the Ruthenian origin (e.g. Stanislas Orzechowski) or those baptized in the Orthodox Church (e.g. Bishop John Drohojowski), were firm opponents of re-baptizing.<sup>29</sup> Personal or family reasons helped them to overcome the distrust and develop a friendly attitude towards the Orthodox sacraments. They were accused of compromising too much with the Orthodox. Probably because of these objections the

provincial synod of Piotrkow (1551) decided that the issue of conditional re-baptizing should be left to the converts to Catholicism themselves. The synod of Przemyśl (1554) demanded the practice of conditional baptism ("*baptismus sub conditione*"). It was only the decision of the Council of Trent (*De bapt.*, 4<sup>th</sup> canon), first acknowledged in Poland by the provincial synod of Lvov (1564), which put an end to the long-lasting practice of re-baptizing the Ruthenians.

## **PRINCIPLES OF FLORENCE AND THE UNIONIST MOVEMENT IN THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

From the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, relations of the Metropolitans of Kiev with Rome ceased almost completely. None of them tried to resume the unsuccessful project of Joseph I. They were satisfied with being confirmed by the Orthodox Patriarchs of Constantinople who remained in opposition to the Council of Florence and to the papacy as such. There are, however, no traces of a formal break with Rome.

The problem of the reunion with the Orthodox Church was again raised by some Roman-Catholic theologians. One of them, already mentioned, was Stanislas Orzechowski (+1566), whose father was a Catholic and mother an Orthodox (the daughter of an Orthodox priest). The reunion of the two Churches was his main theological concern.<sup>30</sup> He was convinced that there were no fundamental differences between them: "*cum re convenientes, ritu vero differentes*".<sup>31</sup> According to him, the Greeks and the Ruthenians follow the truth of the same Catholic faith. They have not defected from the Catholic Church, but



remain within her: "*non desciverunt ab Ecclesia catholica, sed intra illam manent*".<sup>32</sup> Their faith is free from any error and remains in full agreement with the doctrine of the ancient Councils. Therefore the union with the Eastern Patriarchs is not only possible but necessary.<sup>33</sup>

Orzechowski did not see any dogmatic or ecclesiological obstacles on the way towards reunion. As far as the *Filioque* is concerned, the difference with the Eastern tradition lies merely in a different way of expressing the same truth. The Pope has to exercise a higher authority over all faithful, but the Roman Church is only a part of the universal Church ("*pars universalis Ecclesiae*", "*una pars de universitate Ecclesiae*"), a member of the whole body ("*non est Ecclesia tota, sed sit membrum corporis de ipsa universitate sumptum parsque totius*").<sup>34</sup>

The views of Orzechowski were sharply criticized by the Latin clergy. His Bishop forced him (1547) to renounce his activity and stop defending the errors of the so-called "Ruthenian sect" ("*secta Ruthenorum*").<sup>35</sup> This was contrary to his own conviction, that there were no such errors in the Ruthenian Church: "*Nam ego in Ruthenorum ecclesiis, Graeco ritu constitutis, versari errorem nullum scio*".<sup>36</sup> Orzechowski left no detailed project of the reunion with the Orthodox Church. Nevertheless his general ecclesiological approach did not remain without impact on other theologians (Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, Stanislas Herbest).

One of the signs of a growing interest in the Council of Florence in Poland was the publishing of a treatise *De*

*primatu papae* (1582), translated soon into Polish. It was in fact a part of the famous *Defensio quinque capitum quae in ... Florentina Synodo continentur*, first published in 1577 as a supplement to the Greek edition of the *Acta*, then in 1579 translated into Latin, ascribed as a whole to the patriarch of Constantinople, Gennadios Scholarios, although its real author was Joseph Plusiadenos, Bishop of Methone in Macedonia. The name of the Patriarch of Constantinople had contributed greatly to its numerous re-editions in Europe, also in Poland in the 16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The translation by Stanislas Radziwill of an important part of it (*De primatu papae*)<sup>37</sup>, made the ecclesiological teaching of the Florentine Council better known in Poland and Lithuania. The same should be said about another part of the *Defensio* under the title *Interrogationes et responsiones de processione Spiritus Sancti a Patre et Filio* which also was published in Poland.

The unionist movement in Poland and Lithuania was also influenced by the activity of some Jesuits (Benedict Herbest, Antonio Possevino, Peter Skarga). They referred to the Union of Florence, but often misinterpreted its genuine principles. The Latin rite seemed to them the only secure way to salvation. Some of them would occasionally voice their conviction that the diversity of rite should be removed altogether. How far we are here from the Florentine tradition stressing the equality of both rites!<sup>38</sup> No wonder that the very notion of "union" was viewed by the Jesuits in an abstract and predominantly dogmatic perspective, far from the concrete realities of life. Its central point was that the Ruthenians should accept all the

articles of faith of the Latin Church and acknowledge the primacy of the Pope. The patriarch of Constantinople was totally excluded from this project of reunion. The Jesuit theologians were much more severe in their verdict on the Eastern Church than were the fathers of the Council of Florence. Possevino listed not only 17 errors that set apart the Greeks and the Ruthenians from the Latins, but also 11 others proper to the Ruthenians. Skarga found the Ruthenians guilty of 19 errors and 3 deplorable practices...<sup>39</sup> In fact, some of these "errors" are merely canonical and liturgical differences or simply calumnious inventions of the Latins!<sup>40</sup> In many ways Orzechowski had a better understanding of the Eastern tradition and much more respect for its spiritual heritage.

## **TOWARDS THE UNION OF BREST (1596)**

After the Council of Trent the Latin Church clearly favoured an ecclesiological model of centralization and uniformity which hardly fostered reunion with the Orthodox Church. It would rather encourage individual conversions to the Latin rite. Even if some prominent Latin clergymen tried to convince Rome about the possibility of union with the Ruthenian Church, their initiatives remained without effect for a long time.<sup>41</sup> In 1588, before going to Moscow, the patriarch of Constantinople, Jeremiah II, was in the Ruthenian lands. The judge of Brest, Adam Pocij (Potij), recently converted from Calvinism to Orthodoxy, expressed to the Latin Bishop of Luck Bernard Maciejewski, the willingness to start talks about reunion with the Patriarch on his way back from Moscow. The

Bishop sent a project to the papal legate Ippolito Aldobrandini (later Clement VIII). Although the latter reacted favourably, the answer which came from Rome was completely negative: "The advice of the Bishop of Lutsk to reunite the Latin Church with the Greek is a Greek vanity and therefore does not deserve any basic consideration".<sup>42</sup> The whole project was dismissed as a "Greek vanity". It was a clear sign of Rome's distrust of the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Despite this, the movement in favour of the reunion with Rome was going on. The Ruthenian Bishops, irritated by the reforms Patriarch Jeremiah introduced in 1589 during his second stay in their lands, had themselves decided to negotiate the union with Rome. Their move was inspired by the Florentine tradition. Rome could not deny that. Its initial reluctance had yielded to a new situation. The Ruthenian Bishops had their own reasons to venture such a serious initiative. Their Church badly needed thorough reforms to overcome its moral, spiritual and disciplinary crisis. The reforms introduced by Patriarch Jeremiah were unsatisfactory.<sup>43</sup> The powerful Orthodox confraternities were reinforced in controlling the hierarchy. Concluding the Union with Rome, the Ruthenian Bishops hoped to strengthen their authority and become equal in social rights to their Latin counterparts (their wish to obtain seats in the senate had, however, never been fulfilled).

But religious concerns were far more important. One had only to check the progress of conversions to Calvinism and anti-trinitarianism. The first to leave the Orthodox Church

were those who found Protestant communities using the Polish language. Others would pass over to the Latin Church. Higher social classes striving for more education accepted the secular Western culture of the Poles (flourishing then under the influence of Renaissance humanism) and with it their Protestant or Catholic religion as well. It was simply a result of the movement caused by the dynamism of the Western culture, attracting many Ruthenians deprived of such possibilities and aware of their deficiencies in this respect. Even many years after the Union of Brest, the Ruthenian rite will be still called "the peasants' rite" (*ritus ruthenus, ritus rusticus*).<sup>44</sup>

Without taking into account this religious and cultural background it would be impossible to evaluate properly the basic intentions of the Ruthenian Bishops and the whole event of the Union of Brest itself. The most decisive theological motivation for the Union seems to have been the conviction expressed in the axiom: "outside the [Roman] Church there is no salvation".<sup>45</sup> In that Church the Ruthenian Bishops hoped to find support for an inner renewal of their own Church. The decision to conclude the union with Rome was motivated soteriologically by the Ruthenians.

## Chapter XVI

### ECUMENICAL LESSONS FROM THE PAST:

#### SOTERIOLOGICAL EXCLUSIVISM AT THE BASIS OF UNIATISM<sup>1</sup>

In the unionist movement among Ruthenians<sup>2</sup>, especially in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, a considerable role was played, on the theological level, by soteriological exclusivism, i.e. by a rigid confessionalist interpretation of the axiom *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. Such exclusivism had permeated Latin theological thinking since the Middle Ages. A careful analysis of the sources of those times can show us to what extent it had also influenced the theological evolution of the "Uniates"<sup>3</sup> themselves. The Orthodox, in their opposition to the Union of Brest (1596), were not free of the same sort of exclusivism either. Dealing today with the difficult question of so-called "uniatism", one has to bear in mind its soteriological and ecclesiological presuppositions. A detailed theological analysis of them, on the basis of the sources, is the task of this paper.

#### *EXTRA ECCLESIAM ROMANAM NULLA SALUS*

A strictly confessionalist interpretation of the ancient axiom *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* was adopted in the official teaching of the medieval Latin Church. The IV Lateran Council (1215) stated generally: "There is one universal Church of the faithful, outside which no one whatever is saved."<sup>4</sup> Pope Boniface VIII in his bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302) stressed not only the necessity of the Church for salvation, but linked it very closely with the subordination to the Bishop of Rome: "We declare, define and pronounce that for every human creature to be submitted to the Roman Pontiff is simply a necessity of salvation."<sup>5</sup> The same reference to the Pope is also evident in the statement of Clement VI (1351), for whom "the Roman Church" (*Ecclesia Romana*) is "the only one Catholic Church" (*quae una sola catholica est*); consequently "being outside the faith of the same Church and the obedience of the Roman Pontiffs, no man among the pilgrims can finally be saved."<sup>6</sup>

Quoting St. Fulgentius of Ruspe, the Council of Florence uttered the same conviction in the Decree for the Jacobites:

No people who do not exist within the Catholic Church can be participants in eternal life, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics (...). Nobody can be saved, whatever alms he would give, even if he had shed his blood for Christ's name, unless he remains in the bosom and the unity of the Catholic Church.<sup>7</sup>

The quotation of Fulgentius played an important role in this ecclesiological conception. A long tradition ascribed this text, although unjustly, to St. Augustine, whose authority contributed greatly to its significance and application.

A famous Jesuit, Antonio Possevino who unsuccessfully tried to convert Tsar Ivan the Terrible, makes in his book *Moscovia* (1586) a clear reference to the same teaching: "If somebody reads very attentively the canons of the Council of Florence (...), he will come to know the truest and the only faith, without which nobody can achieve the glory of heaven" (*sine qua nemini unquam ad coelestem gloriam aditus patebit*).<sup>8</sup> And, significantly, he adds:

But among all errors, the most obvious and the greatest is the opinion of the Greeks and the Ruthenians that they may achieve salvation (*aeternam se posse salutem adipisci*) outside the Roman Catholic Church. (...) In fact, if somebody denied that Christ the Lord gave Peter power and primacy on earth (*potestatem ac primatum in terris*) or, deceived fraudulently, thought the power which should never be overcome by the gates of hell had become extinct - he has already been condemned, even if he believes in all other truths (*iam condemnatus est, etiamsi pleraque alia omnia credit*).<sup>9</sup>

Similar views were also shared by another well-known Jesuit theologian of that time, Peter Skarga.<sup>10</sup> In his letter of November 12, 1594 Cardinal I. Aldobrandini expressed quite clearly his theological opinions while speaking about those Ruthenian Bishops who had been ready to acknowledge the primacy of the Roman See:

(...) Se li vescovi di Russia (...) si mostreranno saldi nel proposito di riconoscere l'autorità et il primato di questa Santa Sede, sarà cosa non solo per se stessa utilissima et salutare ad infinite anime che vanno miseramente dannate, ma sarà argomento che la divina Providentia, toccando così li cuori degli huomini, voglia lasciar placare l'ira sua, per esserci poi nelle cominciate imprese più propitia.<sup>11</sup>

Here again we can see "infinite souls going miserably to be condemned" because they live outside the true Church. Those who are ready to acknowledge the authority and the primacy of the Pope can consequently be seen as a sign of the divine Providence touching human hearts to appease the wrath of God.

## **THE ROMAN DENIAL OF THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF SISTER CHURCHES IN THE CONSTITUTION *MAGNUS DOMINUS***

The constitution *Magnus Dominus* (1595) which proclaimed the Union of Brest displays the same soteriological and ecclesiological exclusivism. It says that Ruthenian Bishops came to the conclusion that they themselves and the flock entrusted to their responsibility "had not been members of Christ's body which is the Church, because they lacked any link with the visible head of his Church, the supreme Roman Pontiff" (*non esse membra corporis Christi, quod est Ecclesia, qui visibili ipsius Ecclesiae capiti Summo Romano*

*Pontifici non cohaerent*);<sup>12</sup> that "they were not inside the sheep-fold of Christ, inside the Ark of Salvation, and in the house built on a rock" (*intra Ovile Christi, intra Arcam salutis et intra Domum illam non essent, quae est aedificata supra petram*).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, "They firmly decided to return to the Roman Church, their Mother and the Mother of all the faithful, to come back to the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth, the common Father and Shepherd of the whole Christian people" (*firmiter decreverunt redire ad suam et omnium fidelium Matrem Romanam Ecclesiam, reverti ad Romanum Pontificem Christi in terris Vicarium, et totius populi christiani communem Patrem et Pastorem*).<sup>14</sup>

No wonder that the Ruthenian Bishops, the clergy and the faithful were canonically received into communion with the Roman Church, not as a Metropolitan Sister Church, but simply as individuals, coming back to the Church from "outside" and asking *individually* for reunion. No mention was even made of the synodal decision of the Ruthenian Bishops in this matter. On the part of Rome, there was no recognition of the Kievan Sister Church.

The Constitution notes that this return takes place after the more than 150 years which had elapsed since the Union of Florence, and thus should be understood as accepting the union again. The category return plays a decisive role in this ecclesiological thinking. The Roman Church is called "the Head, the Mother and the Teacher of all Churches" (*Caput, Mater et Magistra omnium Ecclesiarum*).<sup>15</sup> In their confession of faith, the Ruthenian Bishops pledged to preserve the "true Catholic faith, outside which nobody can be saved" (*extra quam nemo salvus esse potest*) in all its integrity and purity".<sup>16</sup>

This final formula was taken from the Tridentine profession of faith<sup>17</sup> reintroduced also in the profession of faith prescribed in 1575 for the Greeks by Pope Gregory XIII<sup>18</sup>. It will appear later also in a special profession of faith introduced by Pope Urban VIII (1623-1644)<sup>19</sup> which was used unchanged until the 1<sup>st</sup> Vatican Council by newly appointed Uniate Bishops (a reference to the primacy and infallibility of the Pope was introduced only in 1878).<sup>20</sup>

In the light of all these statements, the membership of the Church of God was seen as essentially conditioned by communion with the Pope. Those who do not belong to the Roman-Catholic Church cannot be saved because they are not members of the Church of God as such. Membership of the Roman Catholic Church was thus thought of as the only possible way of attaining salvation.

## **EVOLUTION IN SOTERIOLOGICAL VIEWS OF THE UNIATES**

There is a striking evolution in the soteriological and ecclesiological views of those Ruthenian Bishops who prepared the union with Rome and later tried to justify or to defend it. In the early period of preparation for the event they had their own understanding of ecclesiology and soteriology. Latin theology did not yet influence their minds. The decision to conclude the union with Rome was from the outset motivated soteriologically, but only in general terms. It is noticeable already in the initial secret document signed by four Bishops on June 24, 1590.<sup>21</sup>



The most significant piece of evidence in this respect were the deliberations held on December 2, 1594, i.e. two years before the formal conclusion of the Union of Brest in 1596. The Bishops expressed their conviction of being "the people of the same God" (*unius Dei homines*), "like children of the one Mother, the Holy Catholic Church" (*tamquam unius Matris Sanctae Ecclesiae Catholicae filii*).<sup>22</sup> This is a clear evidence that the consciousness of belonging to the same Church of Christ had not vanished among Ruthenians at that time. They firmly believed themselves to be members of the same "Holy Catholic Church", within the same Body of Christ.<sup>23</sup> They did not doubt the possibility of salvation within their own community. At the same time they also realized all the negative effects of the schism in the Church in those, as they put it, "most unhappy times" (*his infelicissimis temporibus nostris*).<sup>24</sup>

Here are some features of the situation. Many people are subject to the heavy influence of "different heresies" (*variae haereses*) and depart from "the true and Orthodox Christian faith" (*plurimi recedentes a vera et Orthodoxa fide Christiana*); they leave the Church of God and abandon the true worship of God in the Trinity (this is a clear reference to the spread of anti-trinitarianism). All this happens, stress the Bishops, "because of disagreement" with Romans. The division foils any mutual help and support: *Ab iis divisi sumus, unde auxilio praesidioque invicem nobis prodesse nequimus*.<sup>25</sup> The Bishops note that they have been expecting new initiatives for reunion from the Eastern Patriarchs, especially from the Patriarch of Constantinople (*spectando semper Superiores nostros, et expectando*). This hope, however, was fading all the time because of the Turkish captivity. The Ruthenians themselves try then to achieve what the Greeks could not, even if they wanted to (*servitute paganorum oppressi, etiamsi fortasse vellent, non possunt*).<sup>26</sup> To justify their own initiatives of reunion, the Bishops stress therefore their soteriological preoccupations: without reunion of the Churches people have serious obstacles on the way towards salvation; the salvation of many is endangered by discord in matters of religion.<sup>27</sup>

This important synodal document reveals unambiguously the real intentions and hopes of the initiators of the Union of Brest. They wanted not only to preserve their own Eastern heritage and identity, but also to remain in communion with all Orthodox Sister-Churches, while at the same time being united with the Roman See. The Kievan Metropolitan Church wished to live in communion both with the East and the West. The possibility of breaking the bond of unity with the other Eastern Churches was not even taken into consideration. It soon became clear, however, that the union with the Latins inevitably led to severing relationship with the rest of the Orthodox Churches. This is one of the reasons why the Union turned out to be only a partial one, unable to overcome the schism in the Church. It has made it even more visible and painful.

Some other documents deserve a careful analysis as well. Very significant in this respect is the declaration of four Ruthenian Bishops of August 27, 1595.<sup>28</sup> It was signed by Cyril Terlecki of Lutsk, Michael Kopystynski of Przemysl, Gedeon Balaban of Lvov and Dionysius Zbirujski of Chelm. Kopystynski and Balaban were soon to change their minds and go over to the opposition. In their common declaration they still shared the same soteriological concern. The unity of the Church of God appeared then to all those Bishops

"useful to our salvation" (*poleznuju do spasenija nashego*) because Christ himself wanted it for His Church.<sup>29</sup> Nothing was said which could denote a soteriological degradation of their own Church.

In the expectations of the Ruthenian Bishops the new union was about to bring better fruit than the Union of Florence itself: Metropolitan Isidore of Kiev was alone, they are many, enlightened by God's grace for the salvation of their people. According to the report of nuncio G. Malaspina, they said this during their decisive meeting with the Latin hierarchy and nobility in Cracow on September 22, 1595, shortly before leaving for Rome.<sup>30</sup> There is another very interesting statement in this report. If accurate, it would indicate that the Ruthenian Bishops had already been strongly influenced by Roman soteriological and ecclesiological exclusivism:

Dissero (...) che erano costituiti in tal termine, che o dovevano ritornare allo stato della dannatione, riconoscendo il Patriarca di Constantinopoli (il che essi non volevano fare in eterno, ma piuttosto eleggevano di morire), ovvero doveano unirsi con la chiesa latina. Che senza capo non potevano stare, ne altro legittimo conoscevano, se non il Romano Pontefice. Che non ambitione, non altro rispetto humano li haveva indotti alla Unione, ma si ben la gratia et lume celeste, quale li haveva levati dalle tenebre.<sup>31</sup>

Malaspina's account seems to be very clear on this point: without reunion with Rome, by recognizing only the Patriarch of Constantinople, Ruthenians would have to "return to the state of damnation". They are supposed to have said this themselves, describing their previous state as that of "darkness".<sup>32</sup>

This change in the ecclesiological motivations for the reunion is incomprehensible without taking into account the tragic axiom of those times: *Outside the Roman Church there is no salvation*. When a delegation of Ruthenian Bishops came to Rome in November 1595, they brought 32 articles composed synodally as quasi-conditions of the Union. They wanted some guarantees on the part of Rome, so that even those Ruthenians who still hesitated or were hostile to the Union might have safeguards for everything that was truly their heritage. Pope Clement VIII had the Ruthenian conditions scrutinized by a special commission of cardinals and theologians. The most serious reservations came from a Dominican theologian, Juan Saragoza de Heredia: As membership of the Roman Church is necessary for salvation, it cannot be subject to any preconditions! Many articles seemed to him quite unacceptable. The Ruthenian Bishops had to yield to that uncompromising attitude, and 32 articles dealing mostly with liturgical and disciplinary questions went to the archives.<sup>33</sup>

On arrival in Rome, the Kievan delegation had to face a concept of union much different from what they had been expecting and aiming at during their own early deliberations. Their sacramental vision of the Church was now challenged by a predominantly institutional ecclesiology developed by Latin theologians after the Council of Trent.<sup>34</sup> From the Roman perspective it was not enough to restore the sacramental communion with the Kievan Church. The Ruthenians had to be incorporated, as individual Christians,

into the institution of the Roman Church under the leadership of the Pope. The union was reduced to an ecclesiastical legal act of submission, considered then essential to the very existence of the Church. The Eastern Christians were supposed to have lived, before reunion with Rome, outside the true Church of God. The constitution *Magnus Dominus*, as we have seen earlier, did not sanction the sacramental communion with the Kievan See as such.

This is a clear case of collision of two different ecclesiologies. Sacramental understanding of the Church had to yield to a powerful institutional ecclesiology centered around the primacy of the Pope. The Ruthenian Bishops, inspired by a sacramental vision of the Church, came to Rome to ask the Pope for admission of their autonomous Metropolitan Church to communion with the Roman See. Instead they had to comply with the Roman model of union, shaped in the spirit of soteriological exclusivism.

The fact remains that in the solemn synodal proclamation of the Union of Brest by the Ruthenian Bishops in the presence of the legates of Pope Clement VIII and of king Sigismund III on October 18, 1596 only a general soteriological concern was again expressed. The Bishops, however, had already become more negative in their attitude towards Constantinople. They said that the Patriarchs of Constantinople had abandoned the Church union (*ot soedinenija cerkovnogo ... otstupili*). Because of that sin of breaking the unity (*grekh otstuplen'ja i rozorvan'ja edinosti cerkovnoj*) they had fallen into the pagan captivity of the Turks. Metropolitan Michael Rahoza and the Bishops loyal to him declare then they neither want to be participants in that sin any more (*ne khoteci byti uchastnikami grekhu tak velikogo*) nor to contribute to the continuation of the schism in the Church.<sup>35</sup> Their firm wish is to prevent the process of spiritual devastation of the Churches which more and more endangers the salvation of their people.<sup>36</sup> This was simply a general soteriological preoccupation.

A clear change in the Uniates' thinking came only some time later. They had to justify theologically the necessity of the Union. A most decisive role began to be played then by the conviction that "outside the Roman Church there is no salvation". This was one of the most striking features of the Uniate theology in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. For Metropolitan Hypatius Pocij, the Roman Catholic Church is "the Ark of Noah" and everybody who does not belong to it must burn in hell.<sup>37</sup> The very term, "the Ark of Noah," seems in this context to be only an echo of "the Ark of Salvation" in the constitution *Magnus Dominus*. In this spirit Hypatius addressed the Orthodox in one of his sermons:

Invocations of the Saints will not help, for you have trampled on their heads. Jesus, the Mediator, will not help, because you have despised the Vicar of Jesus. The holy sacraments will not help, because with your cruel hand you have torn the keys of the Kingdom from Peter, their steward.<sup>38</sup>

This was a constant motif in the writings of the Uniates. In his famous memorial *De quinque impediments unionis*<sup>39</sup> Metropolitan Joseph Velamin Rutski complains of the Latins who display towards the United the same animosity and contempt which they have

for the schismatics. Some Latin Bishops would willingly abolish the Union instead of supporting it.<sup>40</sup> According to Rutski the Union is necessary for the salvation of the Ruthenian people. The Ruthenian nobility may go over to the Latin rite, but not the Ruthenian peasants (*rusticelli*). Their salvation is at stake: *salus illorum curanda est*.<sup>41</sup> Keeping their own Eastern rite they have to learn the Catholic faith in order to be "in the bosom of the Church". Otherwise, "an infinite multitude of people who die in obstinacy will descend to hell, whereas they can be saved by abiding, through the Union, by their rite."<sup>42</sup>

The most dramatic expression of the same conviction appears in the spiritual testament (1637) of Metropolitan Rutski: "So I testify before the whole world that I believe all that the Holy Catholic Church proposes to believe in, and that without this faith, especially without communion of the Holy Roman Church nobody can be saved..." (*sine hac fide et speciatim sine communione S. Ecclesiae Romanae nemo salvus esse potest*).<sup>43</sup> His last words before death were: "There is no salvation outside the Roman Church."<sup>44</sup>

One only has to compare these last statements with the synodal document of 1594 to see a long evolution in the soteriological and ecclesiological thinking of the Uniates themselves. The Latin ideology slowly got the upper hand. The general soteriological preoccupations and motivations in evidence at the beginning of the unionist initiatives had yielded to a soteriological exclusivism adopted from the official Roman position in this matter.

## **OPPOSITION TO THE UNION OF BREST AND**

### **ITS SOTERIOLOGICAL MOTIVATIONS**

The axiom "outside the Church there is no salvation" became tragic by its exclusiveness. On the Orthodox side it was often applied in a similar way as well. It is true that the Orthodox Church as a whole did not officially support soteriological exclusivism in the same manner as the Roman Church had been doing since the Middle Ages.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, reading attentively the documents relating to the Union of Brest, one can also find similar convictions on the Orthodox side. The basic argument can be summarized as follows: there is only one, proper way of confessing and praising God — the Orthodox one, and the Orthodox Church is the only true Church of Jesus Christ where lives the true Tradition of the Apostles and the Fathers. Outside this Church there is only schism, heresy, error and damnation. Those who fall away into the Latin heresy will no doubt perish in hell. One soteriological and ecclesiological exclusivism had been opposed by another restrictive confessionalist interpretation of the same sort.

In his letter of March 8, 1594 sent to prince Constantine Ostrogsky, patriarch of Alexandria, Meletios encouraged him to persevere in the ancient faith of the Fathers:

When we shall all stand before the awful throne [of God], whom will the Fathers recognize as their own (*koich poznajut svoich otcy*)? Those who have rejected the fatherly faith and the God-inspired traditions of the holy Fathers? Or us, the Orthodox, who have changed nothing and in no respect (*nichto zhe ni v chem izmensikh*)? Not them, I think, but us. The symbol of the Faith, composed by the distinguished Fathers, the "God-bearers" (*vsekh izrjadnii bogonosnii otcy onii*) (...) is now different for the others (*v inykh ubo nyne inako*), whereas among us it is kept by the divine grace without alteration (*v nas ze bozhieju blagodatiju nepremenno khranitsja*).<sup>46</sup>

Meletios adds that those who depart from the faith and the tradition of the holy Fathers risk denying them and uttering blasphemies, thus passing a verdict of condemnation on themselves (*kakoby osudilisja na sude*).<sup>47</sup>

Prince Ostrogsky himself soon became a leading personality among those who opposed the Union of Brest. When the majority of the Ruthenian Bishops agreed upon the project of union with Rome during their preparatory synod in Brest (June 22, 1595), the prince appealed to the clergy and to the faithful, sharply opposing them. The Bishops had been declared "false shepherds ... turned wolves", who had renounced "the only true faith of the holy Eastern Church" and defected from their Patriarchs.<sup>48</sup>

In bitter words those Bishops were accused of acting in conspiracy (*potaemne*), like Judas, the traitor of Jesus, in order "to precipitate all devout Christians in these lands with themselves into perdition" (*z soboju v pogybel' vrinuti*).<sup>49</sup> Being conscious of his particular responsibility (*mene nekako ... za nachalnika v pravoslaviju byti menjat*), the prince declared: "Together with you I want to stand firmly against such wretched enemies of our salvation" (*protiv takovykh pagubnykh spasenia nashego supostatov*).<sup>50</sup> Those enemies are simply deserters and apostates (*otstupci, predateli*), who dare to treat their fellow Christians as if they were mute (*jako bezslovesnykh sobe vmeniajushche*) and to lead to perdition (*v pagubu sotvoditi*).<sup>51</sup>

To understand this soteriological pathos manifest in the ecclesiological argumentation of the opposition, we have to look back at the beginnings of the growing dissent. Prince Ostrogsky had his own plan of reuniting the two Churches. Its best expression is to be found in his letter of 21<sup>st</sup> June 1593 to the newly appointed (thanks to his support!) Bishop Hipatius Pociej.<sup>52</sup> The importance of this document has very often been ignored or misinterpreted. The letter was written only a few days before an Orthodox synod which was to be held in Brest at the end of June 1593. The prince attempted to break with the practice of conspiracy surrounding till then the unionist tendencies among some Ruthenian Bishops. As a layman, he did not pretend to encroach upon the Bishops' competence, but asked them to discuss at the synod the situation of the Ruthenian Orthodox Church and to find possible ways towards reunion. This attitude of a prominent Orthodox layman was a proof of his deep concern for the Church and its renewal.

With the other Orthodox, Ostrogsky shared the opinion that the Latins fell away from the true Orthodox faith, although in the past they were brothers (*ottorgnuvsikhsja Rimljan, jaze inogda besha bratija*).<sup>53</sup> In his letter to Pociej there are, however, no signs of the animosity against them, which will become evident later on. Already in 1580-1585 the prince had some unofficial preliminary consultations with Rome's representatives, especially with nuncio Alberto Bolognetti and with Antonio Possevino.<sup>54</sup> However, according to his own words, he wanted to "consult together and debate not alone, but with his elders and presbyters" (*ne sam, no so svoimi starshimi i prezviteri sovetovati i gadatel'stvovati*).<sup>55</sup> These words may suggest that Ostrogski had expected an invitation to take part in the official negotiations: this did not happen. Even the unofficial talks were broken off. It was a serious mistake on the part of their initiators who did not take advantage of the good predispositions of the prince. "God did not want it" (*Bogu ze ne izvolivshu*), he says in his letter to Pociej, "but I do not know whether for our benefit and good or evil" (*nasheja li radi pol'zy i blaga, ili zla, ne vem*).<sup>56</sup>

There was too much optimism among the Catholics who thought they saw in Ostrogsky a man favouring their own concepts of the reunion. This optimism was most probably one of the reasons why the hasty unionist action in the 1590-ties was not duly and carefully prepared by its initiators.<sup>57</sup> They did not take into account the realities of life and the reaction of large Orthodox masses, so much attached to their own religion. There was much disappointment among the Latins, when in 1593 Ostrogski put forward his own vision of the reunion and formulated some concrete conditions.

He was ready to initiate talks in Rome, with the approval of the Bishops, as they were about to convene at a synod. According to his suggestion, Bishop Pociej should in turn go to Moscow for the same purpose: to put an end to the schism of the Churches. The project of the prince differed much from that signed in Brest three years later by the Ruthenian Bishops. The eight articles attached to his letter to Pociej expressed the basic preconditions of the reunion.<sup>58</sup> Certainly they may lack a clear classification according to certain priorities, but reflect well the realities of life. Central to Ostrogsky's project is his resolute demand to win the agreement of the Eastern Patriarchs (art. 5) and of such Orthodox lands as Muscovy and Walachia (art. 6). The project of reunion requires also a renewal of the Orthodox Church itself, especially around those things which are only "human inventions" (*okolo vymyslov ljud'skikh*: art. 7). Noteworthy in Ostrogsky's plan is his emphasis on the liturgical, social and cultural aspects of a possible union: the necessity to keep the Eastern rites (art. 1), protection of the properties of the Eastern Church against any possible intercepting by the Latin Church (art. 2), ban on going over to the Latin rite (art. 3), equal social rights, including the presence of the Eastern Bishops in the senate (art. 4), religious education, especially schools for the clergy (art. 8).

Ostrogsky's memorial had never become a basis for a synodal discussion. The secret negotiations of the Ruthenian Bishops were then already under way. Bishop Pociej to whom the letter was addressed did not take seriously its content, which may have seemed to him too Utopian. He even misinterpreted some statements of the prince, especially his unclear expression on "human inventions" in the Orthodox Church. What did he mean? For Pociej it was certainly an indication that Ostrogsky favoured some Protestant

innovations.<sup>59</sup> It seems that he rather envisaged some necessary reforms of ecclesiological norms and regulations. There is no reference to the sacraments in the whole text of the memorial.<sup>60</sup> The whole life of the prince shows clearly how deeply he was attached to the Orthodox Church.

The most critical moment in the unionist endeavours was thus overlooked and irretrievably wasted. Ostrogsky wanted above all a comprehensive debate on these matters at a synod, the negotiations with Rome, with the Eastern Patriarchs, and eventually with Muscovy. This approach certainly required a lot of time and patience, but it was more consonant with the Florentine tradition than the hasty and conspiratorial methods adopted by the Ruthenian Bishops, which provoked so much opposition. If the Union had been concluded, at least partly, according to Ostrogsky's project, it would have avoided, with his firm support, many obstacles on its way. One might reasonably assume that not all his preconditions could be easily fulfilled, but some points turned out to be of crucial importance. As a matter of fact, some of them were later adopted even by the Ruthenian Bishops themselves in their negotiations with Rome, unfortunately with little success.

The opposition of Prince Ostrogsky would not have produced the same effect, if the Orthodox masses of people had not supported him. Those who are inclined to consider him only as a religious fanatic or to see his offended ambition will never understand the real motifs of his opposition. He was defending an ancient religion. The Union with Rome, as conceived by the Ruthenian Bishops, seemed to him no solution of the problems facing the Orthodox Church. He was afraid of it and opposed its methods. In his understanding, such a union threatened the very identity of the Orthodox Church, exposing it to the danger of latinization and Roman centralism. Orthodox Archbishop Jeremias (Anchimiuk) of Wroclaw wrote some time ago:

Ecumenical aspirations in a contemporary sense of this word may be found with many outstanding Orthodox personalities in Poland and Lithuania during 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Union of Brest would not have been possible, if ecumenical trends had been strange to the Orthodox community of those times. Prince Constantine Ostrogsky really thought of reuniting the Eastern and the Western Church — of reuniting, however, and not of 'union'. His dream was, that the Orthodox Church of Lithuania should become a bridge between the Eastern Patriarchates and Rome. He had a beautiful vision of reuniting Christianity ... The fact, that Ostrogsky was a decided adversary of the Union of Brest should be explained by his perception of the Union as a denial of the idea of true unity of the Eastern and the Western Church.<sup>61</sup>

Let us look at the motivations for the opposition immediately after the proclamation of the Union on the synod of Brest in 1596. At the same time Prince Ostrogsky had called there an anti-unionist synod with two Bishops participating and presided over by Nicephorus, the representative of the Patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>62</sup> They sent an appeal (October 9, 1596) to King Sigismund III arguing that the Union of Brest would not last

for three main reasons.<sup>63</sup> The first is its merely regional character. The Ruthenian Church constitutes only a part of the Eastern Church under the obedience of the Patriarchs. How can she now abandon them and accept the Union concluded at a local synod without their knowledge and permission! The second reason for rejecting the Union is that those Bishops, who secretly supported and finally concluded it, do not deserve confidence. The document does not specify this charge, which does not seem to be dictated, as some authors suggest, only by Ostrogsky's personal animosities or by his wounded ambition.<sup>64</sup>

The third reason is the existence of many dogmatic and ritual differences between the two Churches, which cannot be overcome at a local synod. The fundamental difference lies in the Roman conception of the Pope's primacy. The Latins are supposed to recognize the Pope as the universal shepherd of the Church, while for the Orthodox this role belongs to Christ alone: only He is "the Shepherd above all shepherds" (*Pastyr nad vsimi pastyri*).<sup>65</sup> All differences in the faith should be removed, if the reunion is to be durable (*trvalogo zednochenja*). The document does not ascribe to the Council of Florence any significance in this respect, although it mentions the presence of the Patriarch of Constantinople at the "council of Ferrara" (*ferrarskoe konsilium*).<sup>66</sup>

Whatever might be said about the motivation behind the opposition, one thing seems to be clear: leading personalities of the Ruthenian nobility, especially Ostrogsky himself, should not have been excluded from the negotiations. This was a serious mistake which only contributed to the hostility towards the Union. The process of reception does not depend only on the formal ratification of an act or decision. It can be traced back to the preparatory stages.

The assessment of the Union of Brest, being in the intention of its initiators a regional reception and application of the Union of Florence among Ruthenians, has been divergent and full of contradictions ever since. The anti-synod summoned by Ostrogsky ended with its appeal to the Orthodox clergy and the faithful not to obey any longer the deposed Bishops, but to "despise them as they had despised God and his Church".<sup>67</sup> On the other side, during the solemn liturgy concluding the synod of Brest on Sunday October 20, 1596, Fr. Peter Skarga SJ, in his sermon devoted to the unity of the Church of God, praised the blessings of the Union. For the opposition it was a "damned union" (*proklátaia ounia*). The United and the Latins considered it a "blessed Union" and a "holy Union". Already in 1596 this contradiction was clearly manifest.

The supporters of the Union based their initiative on the decisions of the Council of Florence, while its opponents simply ignored that Council. The Union was violently attacked by the Ruthenians who wanted to remain faithful to the Orthodox Church. There is an abundance of polemic literature throughout the following centuries.<sup>68</sup> One could only mention here that before long its target became also the Council of Florence itself. Some Orthodox objected that the Greeks were apparently forced there to sign the act of reunion with the Latin Church.<sup>69</sup> No wonder that the Uniates themselves<sup>70</sup>, supported by some Latin theologians<sup>71</sup>, tried to defend that Council against all accusations. The polemic lasted long after the Synod of Brest.



The spirit of soteriological exclusivism was often present in the argumentation of the opponents of the Union. There is an interesting account of the Synod of Brest written by a Greek Orthodox who took part in the events there.<sup>72</sup> It is a very critical evaluation of the Union concluded in Brest (1596). The Bishops favouring the Union are accused of acting secretly and with bad intentions as apostates and "enemies of the truth". Being "bad workers of the vineyard entrusted to them by the Lord", they attempted to destroy it.<sup>73</sup> This was surely the way towards perdition. In this context the anonymous Greek points to the words of Jesus: "Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to perdition is wide and spacious, and many take it" (Mt 7:13). The Bishops have strayed from the good path of righteousness and turned out to be "cruel wolves". They have to be torn out and thrown away like bad eyes offending the whole body, "for it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body thrown into hell" (Mt 5:29).<sup>74</sup>

For the Orthodox the Union of Brest was a denial of the true unity of the Eastern and the Western Church. As Archbishop Jeremias of Wroclaw said:

The Orthodox feel that the intention of the 'unionist movement' was less reunion of the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches than the desire to subordinate the Orthodox Churches to the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome and to oblige them to accept the dogmas; this in the Orthodox opinion amounted to a violation of the purity of the Christian doctrine. Besides, the Roman Catholic conception of the Union was in fact only a temporary stage on the way towards latinizing the Christian East. This should explain the opposition of the Orthodox to the Union.<sup>75</sup>

As a matter of fact the post-tridentine concept of the primacy with all its juridical consequences was unacceptable for the Orthodox. It meant practically not only a subordination to the Pope, but also an exposure to the growing domination of the Latin culture. Nevertheless, some sort of communion with Rome which would not endanger the Orthodox identity seemed in principle possible. An eloquent example of this were the projects to establish the autonomous Ruthenian patriarchate in communion both with Rome and Constantinople. Further developments of relations between the Metropolitan See of Kiev and Rome, especially under Metropolitan Peter Mohyla, show it with all clarity.

Similar views were shared by many opponents to the Union of Brest. Their traces could be easily observed in polemical Orthodox literature of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In this context Metropolitan Peter Mohyla stands as a rare exception. He was not inclined to adopt any kind of soteriological exclusivism. According to him, salvation is to be found in the Church of Christ which is only one. In spite of a long opposition to the Union of Brest, he ventured in his secret memorial (1644) sent to Rome a project for an autonomous Ruthenian Patriarchate, and found support among both his clergy and laity.<sup>76</sup>

Mohyla's project to establish the autonomous Kievan Patriarchate in communion both with Constantinople and Rome reflects an ecclesiology of Sister-Churches. Unfortunately, for various reasons, it had no chance of being put into practice. The main

theological ideas expressed in it deserve a careful consideration today. They remind us of some earlier attempts of some Ruthenians to remain in communion both with Constantinople and Rome. This was the attitude of Metropolitan Gregory (+1472), and especially of his successor Metropolitan-elect Misael. Mohyla's secret memorial on the union of the two Churches is similar in tone and content to the letter of Misael to Pope Sixtus IV, signed also by two archimandrites and 13 representatives of the nobility on March 14, 1476.<sup>77</sup> One can see a certain parallel between these two documents, unfortunately both unsuccessful and largely forgotten.

## CONCLUSIONS

The process of ecumenical learning from the past may be a painful lesson but it cannot be neglected. A regional union of Ruthenians with Rome was achieved at the cost of another separation, lasting until today. The most tragic side of the unionist movement was a break of the communion between the United ("Uniates") and the Orthodox Church as a whole. The real union of Ruthenians with Rome was not the same that they were hoping for at the beginning. Its modality and ecclesiological consequences were imposed unilaterally by Latin ecclesiology. Clear evidence of that was the slow evolution of their soteriological views.

Soteriological exclusivism was often adopted in the past. It led to many sterile polemics and non-Christian attitudes. Any narrow confessional appropriation of God's sovereign gift of salvation contradicts His universal will to save all people and runs contrary to the ecclesiology of Sister Churches. Each Church is a God-given community of salvation. Soteriological universalism is the most radical challenge to any kind of soteriological exclusivism.

The axiom "outside the Church there is no salvation" became tragic because of its narrowness, restrictiveness and confessional interpretation. It contributed decisively to the destruction of the ecclesiology of communion and, at the same time, to the dissolution of the theology of Sister-Churches.

If there is a chance today to solve the problem of "uniatism", it should be looked for within the frame of the ecclesiology of Sister Churches. The ecclesiology of absorption and annexation cannot be reconciled with an ecclesiology of communion. The true faith of the Church demands respect for the variety of cultures, rites and traditions.

In spite of its good initial intentions, uniatism has proved unable to overcome the division. It cannot be considered a model for the union of the Churches. We have to look for new ways of reconciliation by means of a patient dialogue on equal footing for both sides. Mutual forgiveness of past mistakes and injustices can open new ways of reconciliation and new ecclesiological prospects for the future.

## NOTES

1 An enlarged version of a paper read at an international symposium held in Evangelische Akademie Tutzing/Germany, May 16-20, 1990, published in: *Kirchen im Kontext unterschiedlicher Kulturen. Auf dem Weg ins dritte Jahrtausend*, hrsg. von Karl Christian Felmy u.a., Göttingen 1991, pp. 521-533.

2 This term can be confusing. The faithful of the Kievan Metropolitanate, the Church of Kiev and All Rus', were largely (although not exclusively) the people who eventually came to be known as Belarusians and Ukrainians. "Ruthenian" is a Latin form of "Rus'" but not the only Latin form for this term.

3 This term is used here in its historical meaning ("Uniates" as distinct from the opponents of the "Ounia" called "Disuniates") with no pejorative connotations of today's usage.

4 DS 802.

5 DS 875.

6 DS 1051.

7 DS 1351; Fulgentius, *De fide ad Petrum* 37, 78sq. PL 65, 703 sq.

8 *Moscovia*, Vilnae 1586, p. 96v [quotation taken from "the list of errors" common to the Greeks and Ruthenians].

9 Ibid., 108r [from the catalogue of errors proper to Ruthenians]. Hence the conclusion of Possevino: "For this reason, those who have not been approved by the Pope, his [St. Peter's] successor on earth, are in the eyes of God no Metropolitans and Bishops" [ibidem, 108v].

10 *O iednosci Kosciola Bozego pod iednym Pasterzem ... [On the Unity of the Church under One Shepherd ...]*, Vilna 1577. Many opinions of Skarga were simply offensive to the Orthodox Ruthenians. He was firmly convinced that there was no salvation outside the Catholic unity based upon the recognition of Pope's authority and upon the unity of the faith. The first part of the book was entirely altered in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition [1590].

11 In: *Documenta Unionis Berestensis eiusque auctorum* [1590-1600], ed. A.G.Welykyj, Romae 1970, No 15, p. 32 [further quoted: DUB]

12 DUB, No. 145, pp.217-226, here p.218. There is a printing omission in the same long sentence [p.218], which has to be completed according to another edition of the same constitution in: *Monumenta Ucrainae Historica* [further: MUH], vol.IX-X, Romae 1971, No. 124, pp. 182-191, here p. 184.

13 Ibid., p. 218.

14 Ibid., pp. 218-219.

15 Ibid., p. 221.

16 *Professio fidei catholicae Hypatii Potij ...*, in: DUB No. 143, p. 215.

17 DS 1870.

18 DS 1987.

19 Published by C.G. Patelos, *Aux origines dogmatiques de l'uniatisme*, "Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique." 73 (1978) pp. 334-348; the Latin text, pp. 340-343, the Greek text, pp. 344-348. For a long time this profession of faith was unduly associated with Benedict XIV. Cf D 1459-1473; DS 2525-2540. Patelos [p. 340] writes: "Cette profession de foi nous dévoile le fondement dogmatique de l'uniatisme et de la latinisation hiérarchique de l'Orient; son existence dès Urbain VIII fait mieux ressortir que l'uniatisme est le produit de la conjoncture posttridentine dans l'Église catholique romaine". See also p. 337.

20 DS 2539.

21 In: DUB, No. 2, p. 8.

22 In: DUB, No. 17, p. 32-35, here p. 33.

23 Ibid., p. 33. The same conviction was expressed much earlier in the letter sent to Pope Sixtus IV by Bishop Misael [Pstrutski], the Metropolitan-elect in 1476; that letter, or rather a lengthy theological treatise was also signed by two archimandrites and thirteen representatives of the Ruthenian nobility. See MUH vol. IX-X, No 4, pp. 6-30 [Ruthenian text], 30-55 [Latin version]. Cf. pp.35 and 43. See also W. Hryniewicz, *Ein Vorläufer der Unionsbestrebungen der Ruthenen. Die Denkschrift des Metropoliten Misail (1476)*. „Ostkirchliche Studien" 44 (1995) Heft 1, pp. 49-60.

24 DUB, No. 17, p. 33.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.. A. Jobert [*De Luther à Mohila. La Pologne dans la crise de la chrétienté 1517-1648*, Paris 1974, p. 335-336] is wrong when he understands these words in the sense that the Bishops justify in this way their break with the Eastern Patriarchs.

27 DUB, No. 17: "... quanta impedimenta homines habeant ad salutem absque hac unione Ecclesiarum Dei ..." [p. 33], "... animarum salus multarum ob eas in Religione discordias diutius periclitaretur ..." [p. 34].

28 DUB, No. 79, pp. 126-127.

29 Ibid., p. 126.

30 DUB, No. 95, p. 152.

31 Ibid., p. 151.

32 G. Hofmann is therefore right, when he gives the following comment: "Inzwischen trafen Terlecki und Pociej in Krakau ein. Sie gaben am 22. Sept. 1595 auf die ihnen von der Konferenz gestellten Fragen die bestimmte und klare Antwort, die alle Bedenken zerstreute: Ihr Anschluß an Rom sei eine Heilsnotwendigkeit". *Ruthenica. Wiedervereinigung der Ruthenen mit Rom.* „Orientalia Christiana" vol.III-2, (1925) No. 12, p. 135.

33 Cf. *Articuli seu conditiones Unionis Berestensis* ..., in: DUB, No. 60, pp. 107-110.

34 The situation of the Italo-Greeks in southern Italy and on Sicily had a special influence on this development. Cf. V. Peri, *Chiesa romana e "rito" greco*, Brescia 1975; idem, *L'unione della Chiesa Orientale con Roma. Il moderno regime canonico occidentale nel suo sviluppo storico*, "Aevum" 58 (1984), pp. 439-498.

35 DUB, No. 231, p. 360.

36 Ibid., pp. 360-361.

37 *Kazania y homilie* [Sermons and Homilies], Suprasl 1714, p. 190.

38 Ibid., p. 274.

39 *Epistolae metropolitaram, archiepiscoporum et episcoporum*, vol. I: Epistolae Josephi Velamin Rutskyj, metropolitae kiovensis catholici (1613-1637), ed. Th. T. Haluscynskyj, A. G. Welykyj, Romae 1956, No. 66, pp. 130-160.

40 Ibid., pp.136-141.

41 Ibid., p. 139.

42 "Interim infinita multitudo hominum in pertinacia sua morientium descendet ad Infernum, qui per Unionem manendo in Ritu suo salvi poterant". Ibidem, p. 139.

43 *Testamentum spirituale* ... [Jan. 28, 1637]. in: MUH vol. XI, Romae 1974, No. 167, pp.190-192, here 190.

44 Cf. Jobert, op. cit., p. 367.

45 In modern times, especially since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there appeared among the Orthodox some extreme tendencies denying the ecclesial status of all non-Orthodox denominations.

The Russian and Greek positions in this matter were often divergent, as one can see e.g. in a long debate on the validity of the Roman-Catholic baptism. See my essay "The Florentine Union: Reception and Rejection" published in this volume.

46 DUB, No. 13, pp. 29-30.

47 Ibid., p. 30.

48 *Okruzhnoe poslanie kievskago voevody kniazja Konstantina Ostrozskago Ipatiju Poteju*, in: *Akty otnosjashchiesja k istorii Zapadnoj Rossii* (further: AZR) IV, St. Petersburg 1851, No. 71, pp. 99-104, esp. p. 100.

49 Ibid., p. 100.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., p. 101.

52 *Poslanie kievskago voevody kniazja Konstantina Ostrozskago ... Ipatiju Poteju*, in: AZR IV, No. 45, pp. 63-66.

53 Ibid., p. 64.

54 See K. Lewicki, *Ksiaze Konstanty Ostrogski a Unia brzeska 1596 r. (Prince Constantine Ostrogsky and the Union of Brest 1596)*, Lvov 1933, pp. 66-70.

55 *Poslanie ... Ipatiju Poteju*, p. 64.

56 Ibid.

57 See some pertinent remarks by K. Lewicki, op. cit., pp. 22-23, 25, 71.

58 *Poslanie ... Ipatiju Poteju*, pp. 65-66.

59 The interpretation of Pocij was favoured also by E. Likowski, *Unia brzeska (r. 1596)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Warsaw 1907, pp. 102-103, and A. Jobert, op. cit., p. 334.

60 Cf. K. Lewicki, op. cit., p. 98.

61 *On Uniate Churches: An Orthodox Point of View*, in: "Zeszyty Naukowe KUL" 19 (1976) No. 1, pp. 42-44, esp. p. 43.

62 Some Protestant delegates were present too. On the role of Nicephorus, accused of being a Turkish spy, see O. Halecki, *From Florence to Brest (1439-1596)*, Rome 1958, pp. 375-377, 402-407, and A. Jobert, op. cit., pp. 341-342.

63 *Instrukcija, dannaja pravoslavnym Brestskim soborom deputatam, otpravlennym k korolju 1596 oktjabria 9*, in: "Archiv Jugo-zapadnoj Rossii" (further: AJZR), Part I, vol. I, Kiev 1859, No. 122, pp. 509-517, esp. pp. 511-512.

64 See O. Halecki, op. cit., p. 388.

65 *Instrukcija ...*, p. 512.

66 Ibidem, p. 511.

67 Quoted by O. Halecki, op. cit., p. 381.

68 See B. Waczyński, *Nachklänge der Florentiner Union in der polemischen Literatur zur Zeit der Wiedervereinigung der Ruthenen im 16. und am Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts*, in: „Orientalia Christiana Periodica” 4 (1938) 441-472; E. Ozorowski, *Eklezjologia unicka w Polsce w latach 1596-1720*, in: „Wiadomosci Koscielne Archidiecezji w Białymstoku” 4 (1978) No. 4, pp. 51-112; 5 (1979) No. 1, pp. 47-106.

69 See some anonymous writings: *Istoria o listrikijskom, to est, o razbojniceskom, Ferarskom abo Florenskom sinode ...*, Ostrog ca. 1600; *Opisanie postupkov i spravy sobora florentejskogo*, Ostrog ca. 1600.

70 See P. Fedorowicz, *Oborona Sobora Florentyskogo protiv falsyvomu nedavno ot protivnikov zgodu vydanomu*, Vilna 1605; M. Smotryski, *Apologia peregrynacji do krajów wschodnich* (An Apology of the Peregrination to the Eastern Countries), Lvov 1628.

71 See K. Petkowski, *Swiety a powszechny sobor w Florenciey odprawiony, abo z Grekami unia ...* (The Holy and Universal Council Celebrated in Florence or the Union with the Greeks ...), Cracow 1609.

72 DUB, No 229, pp. 344-358.

73 Ibid., p. 345.

74 Ibid., p. 356.

75 Jeremias, art. cit., p. 42.

76 *Sententia cuiusdam Nobilis Poloni Graecae Religionis*, published by A. G. Welykyj, *Un progrcto anonimo di Pietro Mohyla sull'unione delle Chiese nell'anno 1645*, in: *Mélanges card. E. Tisserant*, vol. III, Città del Vaticano 1964, pp. 451-473 [Latin text pp. 467-473]. See also my essay "Orthodoxy and the Union of Brest: The Ecumenical significance of the Memorial of Metropolitan Peter Mohyla..." published in this volume.

77 See above, note 22.

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## Chapter XVII

### ORTHODOXY AND THE UNION OF BREST:

#### THE ECUMENICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MEMORIAL OF METROPOLITAN PETER (MOHYLA) TO POPE URBAN VIII (1644- 1645)<sup>1</sup>

The Union of Brest took place in 1596. Fifty years later many Orthodox Ruthenians were strongly opposed to it. Was this an opposition to any re-union with Rome, as such, or was this an opposition to a deficient modality of union with Rome? For the Orthodox, the post-tridentine concept of the Roman primacy, with all its juridical consequences, was difficult to accept. Not only did the Roman primacy thus conceived mean a subordination to the Pope; it meant also an exposure to the growing domination of Latin culture. Nevertheless, some sort of communion with Rome, which would not endanger the Orthodox identity seemed possible.

On November 3, 1643 Pope Urban VIII addressed a special *breve* to the Orthodox Metropolitan Peter Mohyla of Kiev, inviting the Metropolitan to enter a union with the Roman Church.<sup>2</sup> In response, in 1644 the Metropolitan collaborated with castellan Adam Kisiel (Kysil) to write a document entitled *Opinion of a Polish Nobleman of the Greek Religion*.<sup>3</sup> Some of Metropolitan Peter's clergy and laity who were familiar with this matter approved the memorial enthusiastically. Father Valeriano Magni, O.F.M. Cap., brought this memorial on the union of the Churches to Rome and submitted it to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1645.<sup>4</sup>

#### A NEW APPROACH TO REUNION

The document makes a sharp criticism of the architects of the Union of Brest, above all for the lack of a "pure and holy intention" (*non pura nec sacra intentio*), for thinking too much of their own interests and not enough about what belongs to God (*quae sunt Dei, non quae sua*).<sup>5</sup> This seems to be a clear reference to the social privileges which the Latins promised to the Uniates, but which were never granted. During the three and half centuries since Mohyla wrote this memorial, his criticism on this point has often been repeated. For the Orthodox, the Union of Brest was a denial of the true unity of the Eastern and Western Church.

How did then Mohyla evaluate the whole experiment of the Union of Brest? What conclusions did he draw from the experience of fifty years of opposition to that union? In what respect did his own project of reunion of the Churches differ from the arrangement of Brest? These important questions require clear answers.

Peter Mohyla's position was far more nuanced than any previous attempt at reunion. He did not wish to join the supporters of the union of Brest. Certain earlier efforts towards the reunion of the Churches were more important in Mohyla's eyes. Reading the *Acta* of the Council of Florence<sup>6</sup>, Metropolitan Peter seems to have noticed some new opportunities in interpreting this Council's decisions. He distinguished very clearly between "union" and "unity." Unity excludes duality, whereas union means reconciling two elements without destroying either:

Unio et unitas sunt maxime diversa. Unitas excludit dualitatem; Unio duo sine unibilium destructione unico vult combinare nexu, qualis fuit aliquoties, et ultima Florentina inter Latinos et Graecos unio.<sup>7</sup>

According to Mohyla, such a union was intended by the Latins and the Greeks at the Council of Florence.<sup>8</sup> As noted above, he formulated his project in close cooperation with Orthodox clergy and laity: *omnes quotquot sumus spirituales et saeculares [...] reperimus unanimiterque acceptavimus: ut sub uno Capite et Rectore Vicario Christi vivamus ...*<sup>9</sup> By this procedure of wide consultation Metropolitan Peter hoped to avoid the danger of subsequent dissension among the Ruthenians (*ad evadenda dissensionum pericula*) as had happened after the union of Brest. Furthermore, this new approach was intended to secure "the ancient religion" (*ad stabiliendam nostram antiquam Religionem*), in other words to preserve the identity and the integrity of the Orthodox faith. Reunion was to be based on mutual recognition of the identity of faith in both Churches.<sup>10</sup>

## **UNION WHILE SAFEGUARDING THE IDENTITY OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

In his memorial, the Metropolitan of Kiev gave a fresh, critical examination of the past experiences of union with Rome. His vision of reunion was based on the early Christian model of Sister Churches. In this way his views differ strikingly from the existing model of the union of Brest, which had led to the severance of communion with the Mother Church of Constantinople. This aspect of the union of Brest made the schism between the Church of the East and the Church of the West to become even sharper. The partial union of the Ruthenians with the See of Rome accomplished at Brest was unable to achieve the reestablishment of unity; this union of Brest only embittered mutual relationships and widened the gap.

Mohyla was fully aware of this situation. His words express much bitterness for the division and dissension among the Ruthenians were for him a very painful experience. In his memorial, Metropolitan Peter lists all the disastrous consequences of the schism: murders, martyrdoms, madness of spirit (*animorum alienatio*), mutual accusations of heresy, innumerable blasphemies and all this to the insult of God himself.<sup>11</sup> In Mohyla's eyes, this is a tragic deviation from the goal of any true union.

According to Metropolitan Peter, the "Greek Religion" is Orthodox and holy (*estque orthodoxa et sancta Graeca religio*).<sup>12</sup> On both sides the Christian faith is one and the

same, despite the variety of liturgical traditions (*nos ritu duntaxat a Romanis distingui, essentiam vero fidei unam ab omnibus, et eandem teneri*).<sup>13</sup> Therefore genuine reunion requires a full recognition of the identity of the faith and the gift of salvation (*vera salus*) in both Churches. Any soteriological or ecclesiological exclusivism of that period was completely alien to Mohyla. In his view, the promoters of the union of Brest had disrupted the very foundations of the Orthodox understanding of the Church. He writes that "the holy doctrine of the Ruthenians" (*sacra doctrina Ruthenorum*) was unjustly condemned as heretical and made ridiculous. But true reunion does not mean transformation (*unio, non mutatio quaeritur*).<sup>14</sup> Authentic union should not destroy the identity of either side (*sine unibilium destructione!*) but should become a source of mutual enrichment. The union of Brest could not have the desired effect because it did not preserve Orthodoxy, but rather tended to transform Orthodoxy into the Latin religion (*intendens non conservationem Religionis, sed transsubstantiationem Graecae in Romanam*).<sup>15</sup> As a result of this flaw, the union of Brest caused an enduring division, not only among the Ruthenians themselves, but also between the Ruthenians and the Latins (*quodammodo perpetuo diviserunt Ruthenos a Latinis*).<sup>16</sup>

Metropolitan Peter's critique of the union of Brest was severe but penetrating, far-seeing, and in some sense prophetic. He knew that healing the schism should not be postponed indefinitely for a distant and nebulous future. He believed in the possibility of restoring communion between the Orthodox and the Latins. His vision of reunion is not limited to some theoretical principles of ecclesiology. Through Metropolitan Peter's collaboration with castellan Kisiel the memorial sent to Urban VIII took concrete, practical shape. The historical lessons of the union of Brest were not ignored and in this respect, Mohyla and Kisiel were sober realists. Their memorial indicates concrete ways to involve prominent lay people in the very process of reaching an agreement in these matters. Their basic concern was to prepare the process of reception of the union in advance, so that all Ruthenians could accept the union (*ut irrefragabiliter ab omnibus Ruthenis acceptetur*).<sup>17</sup> This concern manifests the pastoral and ecumenical wisdom of Metropolitan Peter Mohyla.

## THE PRIMACY RECONSIDERED

From an ecumenical perspective, it is important to note Mohyla's method of dealing with the most controversial problems. He was able to distinguish fundamental questions concerning the doctrine of both Churches from secondary issues which might be left aside (*ut negligantur quae minoris sunt momenti*).<sup>18</sup> According to him, the whole effort should be concentrated on the most divisive issue: the understanding and exercise of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome as successor of Saint Peter. This controversy, with all its lamentable consequences, came from the Greeks to the Ruthenian lands and brought division among the Ruthenians. Some sort of mutual concession is needed (*nisi ut pars parti cedat*). Metropolitan Peter was convinced that a new approach to this question was required, inspired by the Holy Spirit (*novum quoddam medium per Spiritum S. suggeratur*),<sup>19</sup> through returning to the sources and origins of the Christian faith (*ad fontem et originem rei*).<sup>20</sup>

The question of papal primacy arises several times in the memorial. Metropolitan Peter does not deny that Saint Peter was the first among the Apostles, as Orthodox liturgical texts often proclaim. He affirms that the Bishops of Rome as the successors of Saint Peter have "a supreme authority in the Church of God."<sup>21</sup> From the very beginning, the Bishop of Rome was considered "First and Supreme in the Church of God" (*semper Primus ac Supremus in Ecclesia Dei*) and this should remain so (*idem modo servetur*).<sup>22</sup> However, the memorial never mentions subordination to the Pope. Mohyla remains faithful to the Eastern understanding of the primacy. He was not thinking in terms of a direct dependence. According to him, the Latin Patriarch cannot exercise any direct jurisdiction over the Greek rite of the Eastern Patriarchates (*nusquam fuisse ut ritui Graeco Latinus directe superintenderet*).<sup>23</sup> While recognizing the primacy of Rome, the Orthodox Ruthenians would continue to depend canonically upon their own Patriarch of Constantinople.

Here one can discern the basic difference in ecclesiological approach between Metropolitan Peter and the supporters of the union of Brest. He found the solution adopted at Brest by the Ruthenian Bishops unacceptable, because they had placed themselves under direct obedience to Rome, simultaneously sundering their communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople.

The whole thrust of Metropolitan Peter Mohyla's project lies in his determination to avoid separation from Constantinople. His "great hope" (*magna spes*) is based on the good will of the Patriarch, still oppressed under the yoke of the Muslim rulers. Once the Patriarch will become free, he will certainly strive for the "holy universal concord and union". A particular concord of the Ruthenians should not deprive the Patriarch of his mission to initiate that holy work and participate in it.<sup>24</sup> The achievement of a genuine, lasting union must also involve the Greeks. Once the Ruthenians break off communion with their Patriarch they can only aggravate the situation and turn the Greeks away from the union.<sup>25</sup>

Acting in harmony with his clergy and laity, Metropolitan Peter Mohyla decided to recognize the primacy of the Pope, while keeping Orthodoxy ("the Greek Religion") intact until the Patriarch of Constantinople himself, liberated with the entire Greek nation, would one day lead the Orthodox to the "salutary concord" (*ad hanc salutarem concordiam*) for which the Church fervently prays above all in her Liturgy.<sup>26</sup> Orthodox Ruthenians, who fully enjoy freedom in a free country, should therefore simply accept reunion, recognizing the unity of the faith and the primacy of the Pope in the Church while preserving their Church order fully and entirely.

Metropolitan Peter was profoundly aware of the provisional character of this solution. He did not propose to establish a Ruthenian patriarchate, nor was he seeking the patriarchal dignity for himself (*nec igitur formandus est patriarcha*).<sup>27</sup> His main concern was to avoid direct subordination of the Kievan Church to the authority of the Pope. The Ruthenians should live in the state of temporary autonomy. Their Metropolitan, elected by his Bishops, will ask for confirmation neither from the Patriarch of Constantinople nor from the Pope. Both the Metropolitan and his Bishops would make a profession of the

common faith with Rome and recognize the primacy of the Pope. The whole jurisdiction of the Patriarch should remain untouched. In this way the hope for a "happy union and peace" (*felicis unionis et pacis*) in the future can be given to all the Greeks. Likewise the Ruthenians themselves will be able to overcome their "great suspicion" (*suspicio magna*), when they no longer see their religion in danger of being modified or abolished, and when their nobility are fully involved in the project of the new union.<sup>28</sup>

What are the implications of Metropolitan Peter Mohyla's project for present-day ecumenism in our own time? In his encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), Pope John Paul II has invited Church leaders and theologians to intensify "a patient and fraternal dialogue" (No. 96) on the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. The Pope also encourages everyone to leave useless controversies behind and to listen to one another. In this context, the Mohyla memorial seems to acquire even greater significance today.

### **THE BAPTISMAL ARGUMENT TO SUPPORT OF COMMUNION WITH CONSTANTINOPLE**

Orthodox opposition to the Union of Brest was above all an opposition to the errors committed in the concrete realization of that union, and not an opposition to the possibility of an authentic re-union properly understood and accomplished. At that time, some sort of communion with Rome seemed possible, provided it did not endanger the canonical link with Constantinople. In elaborating his memorial, Metropolitan Peter Mohyla adopted a new method. He wanted to correct the errors of the Brest union. His project was firmly rooted in Eastern ecclesiology, and much better suited to the realities of the time.

Metropolitan Peter sought a "happy union" with the See of Rome without breaking communion with Constantinople. This was his central concern, arising from the ancient ecclesiological tradition of Sister Churches. In his project, baptismal consciousness plays a decisive role. Mohyla argues that the Ruthenians cannot break communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople because Kievan Rus' has received the gift of faith and Holy Baptism from Byzantium (*neque a Patre nostro Patriarcha, a quo initiati sumus sacro Baptismate, recedentes*).<sup>29</sup> Twice the memorial discusses Christian initiation and the gift of salvation which came from the Mother Church of Constantinople. This is a powerful baptismal argument for maintaining communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople whilst simultaneously accepting communion with Rome.

In the tradition of the first millennium this baptismal principle determined the relationship between the Churches, especially between the Church from whom the gift of Baptism had been received and the Church which was the recipient of that gift. Anyone who received Holy Baptism and was initiated into the Mystery of salvation was obliged to show respect, love, and obedience towards the Baptizer, the local Church through whom this gift had come. Baptism engenders a new bond, which could be compared to family relationships, above all to the relationship between a father and his children. Thus, in 866, Pope Nicholas I wrote to the Bulgarian Tsar Boris-Michael: "*ita diligere debet homo eum qui se suscipit ex sacro fonte sicut patrem*."<sup>30</sup> This concept was known both in

Rome and in Constantinople. In this way, one Church becomes a mediator of the divine gift for another Church, and the Church which thus becomes such a mediator merits love and obedience.

In his memorial, Metropolitan Peter (Mohyla) gave this ancient baptismal principle a new ecclesiological significance. He applied this principle to the problem of the restoration of communion between the Churches. Today's ecumenism seems to appreciate this point highly. The 1982 Lima document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) stresses the ecumenical importance of Baptism: "Our common Baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. Therefore, our one Baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the Churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship."<sup>31</sup>

Today there is a clear tendency towards a more baptismal ecclesiology. There has been an over-emphasis on eucharistic fellowship in modern ecclesiological thought, with little concern for the significance of Baptism. Ecclesiology must explore the implications of Baptism, to complement and correct eucharistic ecclesiology, which too easily lends itself to triumphalism. The Eucharist is a foretaste of the Kingdom, not the final realization of the Kingdom.

## **DOUBLE LOYALTY?**

From a historical perspective, the concept of a double loyalty and communion seems entirely justifiable. One can trace this concept back to some earlier developments, intended to be only provisional solutions, dictated by local needs and circumstances. They should be understood as an anticipation of an expected world-wide solution of the problem of reunion. Metropolitan Mohyla stressed this particularly in his project of reunion based upon the unity of the faith which is common to both Churches.

This effort is reminiscent of some earlier attempts in the Kievan Church to maintain communion both with Constantinople and with Rome. This was the ecclesiastical policy of Metropolitan Gregory (+1472) and especially of his successor, Metropolitan-elect Misael. In 1476 Metropolitan Misael addressed a special memorial to Pope Sixtus IV, and prominent members of the clergy and laity also signed this memorial.<sup>32</sup> There is a striking resemblance between Metropolitan Misael and Metropolitan Peter (Mohyla). Unfortunately, both documents, separated in time by almost two centuries, were doomed to failure and oblivion.

Can the concept of a double loyalty be applied also to our situation today, especially to the problem of "uniatism?" In the 1970s, when Metropolitan Elias (Zoghby), Greek-Catholic Archbishop of Baalbeck, Lebanon (1968-1988), suggested the possibility of such a "double membership" or double communion, the reaction of Rome was categorically negative. In 1995, the Metropolitan's proposal reappeared, when his short Profession of Faith was accepted by Greek-Catholic and Greek Orthodox Bishops within the Patriarchate of Antioch.<sup>33</sup> Metropolitan Elias's proposal foresees the restoration of full sacramental communion with the Orthodox without breaking with Rome. However,

he understands communion with the Bishop of Rome in the light of ecclesiology as taught by the Church Fathers of the first millennium.<sup>34</sup>

Metropolitan Elias Zoghby is right when he affirms that the *praestantia ritus latini* has destroyed a theology of Sister Churches.<sup>35</sup> An ecclesiology of annexation and absorption cannot be reconciled with an ecclesiology of communion. The unity of the Church does not simply mean a submission to the Roman See. The whole post-tridentine ideology which considered the Roman Church to be the only *mater et magistra* is incompatible with the basic insights of the ancient idea of Sister Churches.

Certainly the situation today is different from the situation from the 15th to the 18th centuries. The dogmatic definitions which the Roman Catholic Church has proclaimed since then must be taken into account. Nevertheless, the very concept of a double loyalty seems to be both legitimate and fruitful in the light of the ecclesiology of Sister Churches. Thus the concept of a double loyalty may be of some assistance, at least as a provisional solution.

Recently Metropolitan Peter Mohyla's approach to the problem of reunion seems to have found a positive resonance in the ecumenical efforts of the *Kievan Church Study Group*. This unofficial bi-lateral dialogue began in 1992, and has initiated a series of consultations between hierarchs and theologians of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, with the blessing both of the Ecumenical Patriarch and of the Synod of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Hierarchs.<sup>36</sup> The goal of the Kievan Church Study Group is the restoration of communion between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. Some prominent members of the Study Group believe that this goal can be accomplished without requiring the Ukrainian Greek-Catholics to sever their communion with Rome. They see this proposal within the larger framework of the International Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. The Church of Kiev was the first local Church to suffer an internal division as a consequence of the schism between Rome and Constantinople. Healing the wounds within the Church of Kiev today is seen prospectively as an anticipatory part of the contemporary dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox.

## **ST. PETER MOHYLA'S SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT**

In Rome, the initial reactions to Metropolitan Peter's memorial were encouraging. The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith was ready to accept the project as a basis for further negotiations, but insisted that Rome should confirm the election of the Ruthenian Metropolitan. Some concessions in this matter were not excluded. However, the new hopes of reunion soon faded after Metropolitan Peter's premature death (1 January 1647), since the new initiative was based on his personal authority and zeal. His

*spes magna*, his "great hope,"<sup>37</sup> could not be realized. His death deprived the project of the necessary support. Other unfavorable events in the mid-17th century did the rest: the death of King Ladislaus IV, who was sincerely devoted to the union; the forthcoming period of wars, and the revolt of the Cossacks. Thus Metropolitan Peter's memorial was consigned to oblivion. A unique opportunity was irreparably wasted.

The memorial of 1644-45 can rightly be considered as Metropolitan Peter Mohyla's spiritual testament.<sup>38</sup> The significance of this document cannot be confined to past history. We have tried to show the relevance of this document to the situation today. By his way of thinking Metropolitan Peter teaches us a lesson of courage, openness, and understanding. Mohyla was a true man of dialogue, a man of many worlds, and one of the most distinguished Orthodox hierarchs of the 17th century. His project reflects the basic desires and preoccupations of his life. The anonymous character of his memorial was largely responsible for its long neglect and oblivion. Theologians and ecumenists did not investigate its ideas thoroughly. Orthodox historiography usually portrayed Metropolitan Peter as an unyielding defender of Orthodoxy and a rigid opponent of reunion with the Church of Rome. However, his memorial to Pope Urban VIII demonstrates that the problem of reunion was dear to him until the end of his life, so prematurely interrupted.<sup>39</sup>

Three hundred and sixty years later, the main ecclesiological ideas which Metropolitan Peter (Mohyla) put forward in his memorial to Pope Urban VIII still deserve careful examination. The situation of ecumenical relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church as we move to the third millennium makes such a reflection even more urgent.

Metropolitan Peter was deeply aware of the complexity of the problem of reunion with Rome. Years of opposition to the Union of Brest did not discourage him from taking a new initiative at an appropriate moment. Mohyla did not wish to repeat the errors of the Orthodox Bishops who negotiated secretly with the Latins. The time seemed ripe to develop a new vision of reunion of the Churches. Today also, certain insights of his memorial are ecumenically relevant. Above all, Saint Peter (Mohyla) of Kiev, especially after his canonization (1996), can teach us the power of a patient dialogue, which is the only way to overcome the long schism of the Churches.

## NOTES

1 A slightly modified version of a paper published in "Eastern Churches Journal" 3 (1996) pp. 51-66.

2 *Documenta Pontificum Romanorum historiam Ucrainae illustrantia*, vol. I, ed. A. G. Welykyj, Romae 1953 No. 472, pp. 531-532.

3 *Sententia cuiusdam Nobilis Poloni Graecae Religionis*, in: A. G. Welykyj (ed.), *Un progetto anonimo di Pietro Mohyla sull'unione delle Chiese nell'anno 1645*, in: *Mélanges card. E. Tisserant*, vol. III, Città del Vaticano 1964 pp. 451-473 (Latin text, pp. 467-473).



4 For more information about the origins of this document, see Wacław Hryniewicz, "Unio sine destructione": *Ein Unionsdokument des Metropoliten Petr Mogila 1644-1645*, "Ostkirchliche Studien" 42 (1993), H. 2-3, pp. 172-187, esp. pp. 172-174.

5 *Sententia*..., f. 375 (p. 467).

6 *Sententia* ... f. 378 (p. 470): "Legimus in Florentino Concilio..." In 1638 the *Acta Concilii Florentini* were published. Bishop Methodius Terlecky of the Uniate Eparchy of Kholm (Chelm) brought this publication from Rome and presented it to Metropolitan Peter Mohyla. Cf. A. Jobert, *De Luther à Mohyla: La Pologne dans la crise de la chrétienté, 1517-1648*, Paris 1974, p. 395.

7 *Sententia*..., f. 374 (p. 467).

8 *Sententia* ..., f. 375 (p. 467).

9 *Ibid.*, f. 379v (p. 467).

10 Mohyla teaches that true union is possible because the Ruthenians have the same faith as the Latins. Cf. *Sententia* ..., f. 378-378v (p. 471).

11 *Sententia* ..., f. 375v-376 (p. 468), f. 377v (p. 470).

12 *Ibid.*, f. 378v (p. 471).

13 *Ibid.*, f. 379v (p. 472).

14 *Ibid.*, f. 379 (p. 471).

15 *Ibid.*, f. 375v (p. 467).

16 *Ibid.*, f. 375v (p. 468).

17 *Ibid.*, f. 377v (p. 469).

18 *Ibid.*, f. 377v (p. 470).

19 *Ibid.*, f. 378v - 379 (p. 471).

20 *Ibid.*, f. 377v (p. 470).

21 *Ibid.*, f. 379v (p. 472): "Pontifices Romanos, perpetuo supremam habuisse in Ecclesia Dei auctoritatem."

22 *Ibid.*, f. 379 (p. 471-472).

23 Ibid., f. 379 (p. 472).

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., f. 379-379v (p. 472).

26 Ibid., f. 380 (p. 473).

27 Ibid., f.379v (p.472).

28 Ibid., f. 380-380v (p. 473).

29 Ibid., f. 379v (p. 472).

30 PL 119, 979.

31 *Baptism* No. 6, in: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva 1982, p. 3.

32 *Poselstvo do Papeza rymского Siksta IV / Litterae synodales ad Sixtum IV*, in: *Monumenta Ucrainae Historica*, vol. 9-10, Romae 1971 No. 4, pp. 5-55. Cf. W. Hryniewicz, "Ein Vorläufer der Unionsbestrebungen der Ruthenen: Die Denkschrift des Metropolitens Misail (1476)", *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 44 (1995) H. 1, pp. 49-60.

33 Metropolitan Elias retired 1988 but continued to be an active member of the Greek-Catholic Synod of Antioch.

34 For details see my essay "Outliving the Schism," published in this volume.

35 Elias (Zoghby), *Den zerrissenen Rock flicken ...* pp. 69, 167.

36 Cf. *The Kievan Church Study Group*, "Logos/Journal of Eastern Christian Studies" (Ottawa), 34 (1993), No. 1-2, pp. 8 ff; No. 3-4, pp. 355-463.

37 *Sententia ...*, f. 379 (s. 472).

38 Certain ideas launched in Mohyla's memorial can be discerned in his earlier works, especially in his last book, *Lithos* (1644), in which he also defended the dignity of the tradition of the Eastern Churches, and criticized some disastrous consequences of the Union of Brest.

39 Ten years later, during the time of negotiations with the Cossacks (1658-1659), some new projects of reunion appeared. But these projects did not obtain sufficient understanding in Rome. Cf. A. Mironowicz, *Prawosławie i unia za panowania Jana Kazimierza (Orthodoxy and „Union” under the Reign of John Casimir)*, Białystok 1996, pp. 149-189, esp. 164-167, 170, 188-189.

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## **Chapter XVIII**

# **OUTLIVING THE SCHISM<sup>1</sup>**

The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Union of Brest (1596), irrespective of its religious context, is among the significant dates of Church activities in Eastern Europe. It marked the beginning of the Greek Catholic Church in the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Because a part of the Orthodox hierarchy concluded a union with the See of Rome, the break between the two Churches became deeper and sharper. The religious polemicists in the past centuries have testified in regard to this antagonism. During recent years, the question of union unexpectedly became a reality in connection with the rebirth of the Greek Catholic Church in central and east European countries, and subsequently a serious challenge for the Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue.

The International Catholic-Orthodox Joint Commission issued an important statement on this issue in 1993, known as the Balamand Statement, which evoked an immediate reaction from both the Greek Catholics and the Orthodox. The document initiated an innovative and ecumenically-oriented approach to the difficult issue of union. This spirit ought to provide an appropriate atmosphere for dealing with this thorny issue. Because of the Balamand document, some initiatives were recently taken on a local level, which contributed to breaching the gap of the schism between the Sister Churches. They are an expression of opposition to continuing the Church schism.

### **IN SEARCH OF A BETTER MODEL OF UNION**

Some Greek Catholic Bishops are sincerely and deeply involved in the movement of reconciliation of Sister Churches. Reconciliation is of utmost importance to them, even more so than to their brothers, the Bishops of the Roman and the Orthodox Churches. Greek Catholic Bishop Basil Losten, ordinary of the diocese of Stamford, U.S.A., wrote recently:

...Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy have each become comfortable (may God forgive them!) with the schism, but we, Eastern Catholics, can never truly become accustomed to the schism; there is always a tension within us because in spite of everything, we love both Orthodoxy and Catholicism and we cannot accept separation from either of them. Often that tension is invisible for even long periods of time, but it is always there, and always reappears.<sup>2</sup>

An understanding of Christianity in terms of Sister Churches offers a new opportunity for their reconciliation. The East and the West must recognize mutually their ecclesiastical

dignity. The relations between the Churches of the East and the Church of Rome should be based on the common tradition which was formed during the first millennium. Encouragement comes from the fact that in his encyclical *Ut unum sint* (Nos. 55, 61), John Paul II strongly emphasizes the role of tradition during the first millennium of Christianity.

The re-establishment of brotherly relations between Greek-Catholics and Orthodox is indispensable in the historical process of Church reconciliation. This is a very difficult task. Any attempt to introduce sudden changes, without proper reflection and preparation, would only lead to a new schism. It is necessary to proceed sensibly and intelligently, lest old wounds not as yet healed, be re-opened. The Union of Brest was an event of its time, and it is impossible to change a fact of history. However, we can seek new solutions by tending the wounds it caused.

Bishop Basil Losten, supported by a theological model of sister Churches, offered a bold proposal: "I believe we are prepared to consider equally our communion with the Old and the New Rome in order that the currently unsatisfactory model could be replaced by a better model."<sup>3</sup> A similar view was expressed somewhat earlier by Bishop Vsevolod (Majdansky) of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Ecumenical Patriarchate) in America. Bold initiatives and ecumenical concepts are born on American soil. Their common feature is that they are developing from the Kievan Christian tradition.

Bishop Losten's proposal closely corresponds to some Greek Catholic theologians in the United States and in Canada. A restoration of full communion with the Orthodox of the Church of Kiev, as well as with the Mother Church of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, without cutting off communion with Rome, is simply considered as the "ideal of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics." They are convinced that realization of that ideal essentially would constitute a stimulus, leading to a complete reconciliation between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. However, in order to realize this, it is necessary to persevere in introducing the deep content of the idea of the Sister Churches.

This kind of initiative, directed at healing the schism in the local Church, is an attempt to bring about the correction of four hundred years of consequences of the Union of Brest. The union of Ruthenians with Rome resulted in breaking the union with their mother Church of Constantinople. At present, thanks to a great extent to the documents of the international Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, there is an intensified effort among Ukrainian Greek Catholics to heal the schism with Constantinople. The first step of the utmost importance would be reconciliation of the three main Orthodox Churches in Ukraine (two with autocephalous jurisdiction and one tied with the Moscow Patriarchate). The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church could then efficaciously strive towards union with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It follows that Constantinople would recognize all Churches of Kiev, including the Greek-Catholic Church, as Sister Churches. The question is whether these intentions could be realized.

## **THE HOPE OF "THE CHURCH OF KIEV"**

The adherents of this mobilizing idea are well aware of the particular responsibility which rests today on the Metropolitanate of Kiev, in which the Union of Brest took place four hundred years ago. The Greek Catholics connected with the Kievan tradition recall the time when their Church developed in communion with the See of Constantinople. Bishop Losten does not conceal his hope of renewing communion with the Mother Church. It is also his hope that the Ecumenical Patriarchate, while striving for some kind of renewal of communion with the Roman Church, will not demand that the Greek Catholics break their communion with Rome. Rather, the best mutual way of realizing communion with both capitals of Christianity should be sought.

The suggestion that Ukrainian Greek-Catholics enter into relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate without breaking their communion with Rome inspires interest among Orthodox, in particular those who are active in "the Kievan Church Study Group". That Group consists of representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Catholic Church. The former suggestion merits attention, but is difficult to realize in a situation in which Rome and Constantinople are not in communion. It is true that the schism between the two Sees of Christianity was a gradual and slow process. It was accepted in Rus' only after resistance and in the hope of overcoming difficulties. However, the issue is complicated today by the existence of serious doctrinal divergences, which appeared after the schism had taken place. The Church of Kiev would desire to return to the state which existed before the schism: to be in communion equally with Rome as with Constantinople, in spite of the existing schism between the Old and the New Rome. Thus, in time, there would be some type of indirect communion.

Is Kiev capable of becoming a creative intermediary in the process of restoring unity between the Sister Churches? History shows cases when a community was capable of remaining in communion with two different communities which were not in communion with each other. In A.D. 360 and 370, in Antioch, there were two rival Bishops, Paulinus and Saint Melitius. While both were defenders of the Orthodox faith against the errors of Arianism, there was no sacramental bond between them. And what did other Bishops do? Saint Basil the Great maintained his bond of unity with Saint Melitius, whereas Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, as well as the Bishop of Rome, remained in communion with Paulinus. Thanks to Basil, Athanasius, and the Bishop of Rome, who remained in unity with one another, there existed a kind of indirect communion between the two quarreling Bishops of Antioch.

Let us look at recent history. From 1872 to 1945, the Patriarchate of Constantinople was not in communion with the Bulgarian Church, while the Russian Church remained in sacramental unity with both. At present, the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Russian Church Abroad are not in communion. The Serbian Church, meanwhile, does not sever relations with them. Why, then, could not the Greek-Catholic Church be likewise in communion with Rome and Constantinople, though there exists a state of schism between them? The present situation differs from these examples. The schism between the Roman and the Orthodox Churches resulted in serious differences in theology. In the eyes of many Orthodox, the Catholic teaching in regard to the primacy and the infallibility of the Pope is a serious dogmatic error.

Can "indirect communion" be achieved when one party suspects the other of departure from the true faith? Normal sequence of events requires that doctrinal divergences be first removed from the road leading to dialogue, and thereby pave the way to restoration of full unity, in the expression of sacramental communion. Also, consider seriously the position of other Orthodox Churches. What will be the reaction of the Greek Church to the proposal of the Greek Catholics? It is common knowledge that the more or less latent conflict between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople has intensified because the Orthodox Churches of eastern Europe, in particular of Ukraine and Estonia, wish to free themselves from the influences of Moscow and connect themselves with the See of Constantinople. These partial solutions bring the danger of new divisions. The interests of individual Churches are frequently preferred to the good of the whole Church, which immensely impedes the problem of reconciliation and reunion.

## **CHANGES ARE POSSIBLE**

The readiness of Ukrainian Catholics to return to communion with the Mother Church of Constantinople without breaking unity with Rome may seem only a noble dream. Such a design would demand radical changes in mutual relations among the Churches, and towards the Roman Church. Bishop Basil Losten, however, calms those who are alarmed, by recalling that meaningful changes have already taken place in the past. One of the most radical changes in regard to relations with Rome took place one hundred years ago. This touches upon the problem of the Union of Brest. At the level of principles, it meant return to "communion with Rome." And yet, three hundred years after conclusion of the union, Greek Catholics did not have a normal sacramental Eucharistic communion with the Latin Church. The Roman Church would not permit its faithful to receive Communion when the Eucharist was celebrated in "Uniate" churches. It remains unclear as to when and why this prohibition was introduced. Apparently, it resulted from the centuries-long controversy in regard to the Eucharistic bread (leavened or unleavened), as well as the practice of receiving Communion under both species. Roman polemicists justified the prohibition for Catholics to receive Communion in "Uniate" churches by saying that it could cause scandal among those who were accustomed to receiving Communion under the species of the white host.

This prohibition remained in force three centuries after the conclusion of the Union of Brest. Its abolition was only implemented by the Eucharistic Congress of Jerusalem (1893) as well as by the Apostolic Letter of Pope Leo XIII, *Orientalium Dignitas* (1894). The way to this change was not easy. At present, it is appropriate to recall as to what followed the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II, *Oriente Lumen*, as well as his encyclical, *Ut unum sint* (1995). Changes, therefore, are possible. However, imagination and courage are required to implement this into life. Maturation of ecumenical and Christian consciousness accelerates the necessity for change, prompted by the current state of faith in the world.

And what about the past? This also provides inspiring examples. Since the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some prominent Orthodox hierarchs remained in sacramental communion

with the Mother Orthodox Church after they had individually concluded unions with the See of Rome. For the Greeks under the Turkish yoke that was indeed the only possibility of union. An important role in this respect was played by the Greek hierarchy, who in the 17<sup>th</sup> century could still grant, if not a clear recognition, then at least toleration of individual union initiatives of that kind. One can better understand in that context the great sensitivity of Metropolitan Peter Mohyla, Metropolitan of Kiev (deceased 1647), to the situation of the Greeks, as well as his effort for reconciliation with Rome without breaking communion with Constantinople. His plan of union received equal support among the clergy and laity<sup>4</sup>.

Previously mentioned pursuits of union step out from the framework of institutional and juridical ecclesiology. They were not inspired by Latin concepts of primacy and subordination to papal jurisdiction. Rather, they developed against a background of a consciousness, not yet totally erased – of belonging to one and the same Church of Christ. This assertion has important ecumenical consequences. The only chance of solving the problem of "uniatism" is in the framework of the sacramental-mysterious concept of the Church as a community of Sister Churches, which meets half-way the ecclesiological sensitivity of the Christian East. This understanding of the Church played a decisive role when the Orthodox Church in Moldova announced its union with Rome (1588-1589), based on the Eastern concept of primacy, not presupposing juridical subordination to the Pope. At least for some time, the Moldovan Church maintained relations with other Orthodox Churches, while at the same time, recognizing the supremacy of the Pope. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the Ruthenians intended to create their own autonomous Patriarchate, while remaining in communion with Constantinople and with Rome they related to a similar ecclesiological model.

From the historic viewpoint, the notion of dual allegiance and loyalty is totally justified. Its history extends to the installation of those Metropolitans of Kiev, who during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries supported a mutual community link with Rome without severing their communion with Constantinople. The same applies to the endeavours to create the Ruthenian Patriarchate, as well as individual unions. All these attempts, obviously, were intended to be only temporary solutions. It should be considered an anticipation of the global solution of the problem of the expected union.

## **A BOLD INITIATIVE OF THE MELKITE GREEK CATHOLICS**

Can the notion of dual loyalty and allegiance be applied as well to the present situation, and can it be helpful in solving the age-long problem of "uniatism"? At the start of the 1980's, the Greek Catholic Archbishop of Baalbek in Lebanon, Elias (Zoghby), stated that there was a definite possibility of realizing "dual communion" in the Near East in the Patriarchate of Antioch<sup>5</sup>. The reaction of the Roman authorities at that time was decisively negative<sup>6</sup>. The Greek Catholics did not capitulate, but continued the process of reconciliation with the Orthodox. The problem renewed itself. Archbishop Elias formulated in two points a short Creed on February 18, 1995:

I. I believe in everything which Eastern Orthodoxy teaches.



II. I am in communion with the Bishop of Rome, in the limits recognized to the first among the Bishops by the Holy Fathers of the East during the first millennium, before the separation.<sup>7</sup>

Greek Orthodox Metropolitan George (Khodr) accepted this Creed (February 20, 1995) as a special "necessary and sufficient conditions to re-establish the unity of the Orthodox Churches with Rome."<sup>8</sup> Archbishop Elias' successor, the Greek Catholic Archbishop of Baalbek, Cyril Salim Bustros acted (February 25, 1995) similarly. Except for two Bishops, the same Creed was individually signed by all members of the Greek Catholic Synod of Antioch. They informed the Greek Catholic Patriarch Maximos V (Hakim) of their decision at the conclusion of the Holy Synod, held in Rabweh, Lebanon (24 July - 4 August 1995) as well as the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius IV (Hazim).

Nearly unanimous acceptance of the Creed formed by Archbishop Elias meant the beginning of gradual process of union of the Patriarchate of Antioch (the schism there was caused by the union of 1724). Its aim was the achievement of full communion of faith by those who signed the Creed with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, and consequently restoring sacramental communion. At the same time this meant also the maintenance by the Bishops-signatories of communion with the See of Rome, recognized by the Orthodoxy as the first among other episcopal Sees. It should be the same communion as the communion recognized and practiced by the Eastern Fathers during the first millennium, before the Great Schism.

This unity move grew out of the privileged condition of proximity of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church and of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, by virtue of their common origins and ecclesiastical tradition. In the course of 1996 the Antiochene initiative moved further on. The synod of 32 Melkite Greek Catholic Bishops held in Rabweh (July 22-27) officially declared willingness to restore the unity of the Patriarchate. According to them, nothing justified the continuation of the schism.<sup>9</sup> In turn, an extraordinary synod of 18 Orthodox Bishops held in Damascus (October 8-10, 1996) stressed the need for further dialogue on ecclesiological issues, with special reference to the papal primacy. In the eyes of Orthodox Bishops the concept of "double communion" is insufficient to solve the problem of reunion. One should remove first the doctrinal divergences starting with the study of the real value and significance of the councils held in the West after the schism. The Orthodox side is convinced that those are not ecumenical councils, but only synods of the Latin Roman Church. Another qualification of these synods could greatly help to solve the controversial issue of the Pope's primacy<sup>10</sup>.

As one can easily see, the initial enthusiasm on both sides gradually ceded to a more realistic and cautious appraisal of the situation. The participants in the dialogue realized they are not alone and have to take into account their respective Churches in their entirety. This situation clearly illustrates a certain drama of dialogues on a local scale.

How did the Roman authorities react on the whole Antiochene initiative? The project to restore the unity of the Patriarchate was conditionally approved by the Vatican in the

joint letter (June 11, 1997) signed by three cardinals of the Roman Curia: Joseph Ratzinger, Achille Silvestrini and Edward Idris Cassidy<sup>11</sup>. The letter expresses "the wish of the Church" that "adapted ways and means be found to proceed subsequently on the road of brotherly understanding, and to encourage new forms that may allow the realization of further progress towards full communion". The Vatican letter agrees with the proposal for unity, but recommends "patience and carefulness" to avoid precipitating theological problems, especially to avoid any simplification which might ignore different points of view on critical issues. In conclusion, the letter says: "The dialogue of fraternity undertaken by the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarchate will be all the more useful to ecumenical progress if it strives to implicate, in maturation of new sensibilities, the whole Catholic Church to which it belongs". It adds that the Vatican offices are ready to collaborate in the joint follow-up on repercussions and verification.

## **TOWARDS REVISION OF UNIONIST ECCLESIOLOGY**

The Melkite Greek Catholics look patiently for new ways of removing obstacles to the reconciliation with the Orthodox. Some of them, even among the high ranking hierarchs, would even be ready to cease to exist as a distinct Church. Mutual relations between the two Antiochene Churches undergo a constant improvement, and the dialog continues.

An eloquent example of this are the critical reflections of Archbishop-emeritus Elias (Zoghby) on unionist ecclesiology.<sup>12</sup> He recalls first that the "uniate"<sup>13</sup> Eastern Churches were created at the expense of Orthodoxy by the Roman Church around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the zeal of Latin missionaries. They were united to the See of Rome at a time when there was no dialogue between Rome and Orthodoxy. After the Balamand statement one could expect that these "Uniate" Churches in different parts of the world would make a serious revision of their condition as Eastern Churches united to Rome in order to put an end to their "false situation created by the uniate movement".<sup>14</sup> It did not happen. Unity is still considered only "a dream to be realized", and there was no effective collaboration with the Orthodox.

The Archbishop admits that a bold attempt of the Greek-Melkite Catholic Bishops has not attained its basic goal, although it has greatly contributed to the rapprochement of both Churches. Too prematurely the task of continuing the dialogue with the Orthodox Church was left to the Joint International Commission. In this context one can understand his somewhat bitter remarks:

Every effort should be made for common ecumenical action between *each* uniate Church and the Orthodox Church from which it was detached.

Instead of each accepting what was common with its mother-church, the uniate Churches began to share their uniatism by erecting it *en bloc*, not against Orthodoxy but more in the presence of it".<sup>15</sup>

According to Archbishop Zoghby, this tendency among the Greek Catholics towards tightening denominational ranks and affirming their uniate identity before Orthodoxy has

nothing to do with an authentic ecumenism. It merely contributes to the fact that "the uniate wound is still bleeding":

Instead of heading toward Christian unity and turning themselves toward Orthodoxy, their mother in the faith, these united Churches of the East withdrew themselves and without wanting it, reinforced the line of demarcation which separates them from Orthodoxy.

Uniatism is one of the serious obstacles on the way to unity and this orientation of the uniate Churches which I call 'pan-uniatist', is not in line with ecumenism.<sup>16</sup>

The spirit of an authentic ecumenism and the logic of Sister Churches require something other than erecting the uniate entrenchment behind Roman barricades. It requires dialogue with the Orthodox Church of origin, return to the common Orthodox tradition in close collaboration with the Orthodox Mother-Church in all domains. One has to rectify, through a more authentic ecumenism, an ecclesial situation that the Greek Catholics have not chosen themselves. Therefore the final Archbishop's appeal carries something of a prophetic warning:

On the threshold of the third millennium, let us make a serious revision of our uniate ecclesiology. Let us not allow ecumenism to flow from a uniatism that envelops us, but let us judge our uniatism from an authentic ecumenism that opens us once again to the 'catholic' Orthodoxy of our Fathers. Without us rendering account of it, we are in a good form to constitute a fortress of uniatism in the East, which would implicate the credibility of our ecumenism and that of the Roman Church.<sup>17</sup>

I frankly admit that these critical remarks made by an experienced, wise and ecumenically-minded hierarch from Lebanon, provoke thorough reflection. They deserve it, and are directed to all who really care for the progress of ecumenical reconciliation between Sister Churches.

One has to note that the Antiochene proposal for unity also encounters some difficulties on the Orthodox side. They point to the fact of continuing sporadic proselytism and to some contradictions in the ecclesiological situation of the Greek Catholics.<sup>18</sup> The slow process of the reception of such documents as the Balamand statement and the lack of its practical implementation arouse mistrust and uneasiness. All the participants in the dialogue become more and more aware that the controversial dogmatic issues can be solved only on general Catholic and pan-Orthodox scale.

In sum, significant ecumenical events have been taking place recently among Greek Catholics and Orthodox. The decision of the Greek Catholics, as expressed in their "fraternal discussion" with Rome, is an important step towards restoration of unity of the Patriarchate of Antioch. But these are only beginnings of a long term work. Nevertheless, Antiochene Christians can be regarded as an example of ecumenical resoluteness,

perseverance and farsightedness. One should not forget that "it was at Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians'" (Ac 11: 26).

For all the Greek Catholic Churches, the Antiochene initiative should be a great encouragement to undertake ecumenical involvement on every level with similar openness and lucidity. The Ukrainian Greek Catholics and Orthodox gain in their own endeavours an ally and a strong incentive, resulting from the local initiatives taken in Antioch, to make their own ecumenical efforts. However, those responsible for the direct legacy of the Union of Brest will have a much more difficult task to accomplish in the context of the internal divisions within Ukrainian Orthodoxy. The Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine has formally accepted the Balamand Statement and tries to implement its practical recommendations. The ongoing divisions of the Ukrainian Orthodox and their indecisiveness with regard to the Balamand Statement considerably hinder all ecumenical efforts in Ukraine. If the Orthodox manifest more understanding and openness, this will no doubt encourage the Greek Catholics to trust them and to shape a better future together. But for this to come about, all animosities, violence and rivalry must be stopped on both sides.

## **TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING OTHERS**

Whether and when full communion may be restored between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches, and in the Church as a whole, is a question to which there is no simple answer. To answer this in the affirmative, one should at least assume that Catholic dogmas, in particular the primacy and the infallibility of the Pope, would remain binding only for the Roman Church. This concept of the community of faith would reconcile two asymmetric ecclesiologies: one emphasizing the primacy of jurisdiction over the entire Patriarchate of the West, the other would have synodal ecclesiology ( in the spirit of the so-called *sobornost'*, i.e. togetherness) of the Eastern autocephalous Churches. Therefore, mutual recognition of the identity of their faith and sacraments would be sufficient.

The Catholic-Orthodox dialogue logically makes the restoration of full communion of both Churches its goal. Initially, all serious doctrinal differences, including the very difficult problem of the primacy, would have to be resolved. Until such a time, the notion of Sister Churches would remain unclear and doubtful. As a matter of fact, it would influence mutual relations between our Churches. An appeal to asymmetric ecclesiology alone is not a solution to the ecumenical problem. While taking the road of dialogue and pursuing it with patience is the longer road, in the present situation, it seems to be the most realistic way of eliminating division of the Church as a whole. However, the need to conduct an official dialogue does not hinder undertaking local initiatives. These are the incentives which stimulate dialogue, accelerate its intensity and promote mutual understanding. Now, more than ever, the credibility of Christianity in Europe and worldwide requires this.

The Letter to the Hebrews offers stimulation, the importance of which is generally lost in biblical commentaries. The unusual thing about this stimulation is its appeal to our intellect and heart. Literal translation of the verse reads: "Let us be deeply concerned for

each other (*katanoōmen allēlous*), to stir a response in love (*eis paroxysmōn agapes!*) and in good works." (Hb 20:24). The point is not a superficial understanding which only refers to the presence of another person. Its stimulation refers to its profound meaning (expressed by the preposition *katá* attached to *noéō*, it enhances the meaning of the base word). A narrow and shallow interpretation does not promote the culture of goodwill and the cause of reconciliation. Only an in-depth perception of human affairs and their motives may contribute to an "awakening of love," and therefore, bring down the walls which divide people, and bring about mutual friendship, forgiveness, and respect. In this way the Bible formulates one of the quintessential prerequisites of human co-existence. It is also a necessary requirement for ecumenism.

We all were given the grace of belonging to one Church of Christ. God's Spirit has kept the Church through centuries on a correct course, whenever human freedom has caused it to veer off its proper course. I dream that the painful problem of the uniatism may be resolved, and would not bring humiliation and faithlessness to the whole Church and to one's own conscience. God gave the others "the same gift he gave us" (Ac 11:17). I dream that all conflicts, discord, competition, and rivalries cease one day among Sister Churches. This dream causes anxiety, and at the same time, gives hope that God will manifest Himself to be greater than all painful events in the history of our Churches.

## NOTES

1 An enlarged version of a paper published in: "Eastern Churches Journal" 3 (1996) No. 2, pp. 43-52.

2 Bishop Basil (Losten) of Stamford, *The Roman Primacy and the Church of Kiev*, "Logos" 34 (1993) No. 1-2, pp. 70-106, cited passage on pp. 78-79.

3 Ibid., p. 76.

4 See in this volume my essay "Orthodoxy and the Union of Brest".

5 Metropolitan Elias held this post from 1968 until 1988, when he retired, but continued to be an active member of the Greek-Catholic Holy Synod of Antioch.

6 Elias (Zoghby), *Tous schismatiques? La robe déchirée*, Beirut 1981; German translation *Den zerrissenen Rock flicken ... Wie lange wollen Katholiken und Orthodoxe noch warten?* Paderborn 1984, pp. 109-120.

7 Elias (Zoghby), *Orthodoxe uni? Oui! Uniate? Non!*, Beirut 1995; English translation: *Orthodox in Union? Yes! Uniate? No!*, "Eastern Churches Journal" 2 (1995), No. 3, pp. 16-28; ibidem (pp. 11-14) documents related to his Profession of Faith.; German translation: *Mit Rom in Communio stehender Orthodoxer? Ja! Uniat? Nein!*, "Der Christliche Osten" 50 (1995), Heft 5, pp. 280-295. See also Bp. Nicholas (Samra). *The Melkite Initiative: A Profession of Faith to Heal Divisions*, "Eastern Churches Journal" 4 (1997) No. 1, pp. 24-28.

8 *Initiative of Archbishop Elias (Zoghby)*, "Eastern Churches Journal" 2 (1995) No. 3, p. 12.

9 *Les évêques melkites grecs-catholiques se prononcent pour le rétablissement de l'unité du Patriarcat d'Antioche*. «Service Orthodoxe de Presse – SOP» 1996 No. 211, pp. 12-13.

10 *Assemblée de l'épiscopat du patriarcat d'Antioche*, «Service Orthodoxe de Presse – SOP» 1996 No. 212, pp. 1-2.

11 *Une lettre très prudente*. «Chrétiens en marche» (Lyon) 35 (1998) No. 58, p. 6.

12 *Triumph of Uniatism: Speech at the Congress of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of the Middle East held in Lebanon, 9-20 May, 1999*, "Eastern Churches Journal" 6 (1999) No. 2, pp. 51-56.

13 The Archbishop himself often uses this expression.

14 *Triumph of Uniatism*, p. 52.

15 Ibid. Italics mine, WH.

16 Ibid., p. 54.

17 Ibid., p. 56.

18 See T. Mitri, *Œcuménisme antiochien*, «Chrétiens en marche» 37 (2000) No. 65, p. 4; idem, *L'uniatisme et le Patriarcat d'Antioche. Notes sur l'histoire et la situation actuelle*, in: Comité Mixte catholique-orthodoxe en France, *Catholiques et orthodoxes. Les enjeux de l'uniatisme. Dans le sillage de Balamand*, Paris 2004, pp. 135-146, here 144; Patriarch Ignace Hazim, *Une vision antiochienne de l'unité de l'Église*, «Proche Orient Chrétien» 28 (1978) pp. 202-208; idem, *Le problème œcuménique à la lumière de l'expérience antiochienne*, "Contacts" (1983) No. 123, pp. 246-268.

## CONCLUSION

### ON THE WAY TOWARDS RECONCILIATION<sup>1</sup>

Centuries of living without of communion have strongly marked our confessional identity. We are still victims of historical conflicts, denominationalism and other forms of ecclesiastical competition. To remember who we are, is not enough. One has to ask above all: "Whose are we?" We all belong to Christ. Ecumenism educates us to discover an open, fuller and wiser identity. "We belong together in Christ", says the European *Charta Oecumenica* (No. 6) signed in Strasbourg/France on April 22, 2001 by the highest representatives of the Conference of European Churches and of the European Bishops' Conferences.<sup>2</sup> This statement is, indeed "of fundamental significance in the face of our differing theological and ethical positions". It helps us to see "our diversity as a gift which enriches us" (No. 6).

I am deeply convinced that the difficult ecumenical process of reconciliation cannot be accomplished without an ethos of compassion. We think too readily of differences in our understanding of the one faith and often forget too easily that "there exists an order or «hierarchy» of truths" (*Decree on Ecumenism*, 11). *Charta Oecumenica* indicates the most difficult task facing the Christians, which is to convert the Churches to one another in mutual understanding and trust, in compassion and forgiveness. The ecumenism of the mind is not enough. We need also the ecumenism of the heart. It can thus become a truly learning and therapeutic process. This requires, however, as the Second Vatican Council says in its *Decree on Ecumenism* (art. 8), a "change of heart", *conversio cordis*. *Charta Oecumenica* (No. 3) also stresses the role of "the renewal of our hearts and the willingness to repent and change our ways".

#### *The Gift of Unity Is Stronger Than Our Divisions*

The unity with which God endowed his Church is a reality rooted in the mystery of the divine life itself. That is why the innermost roots of the unity of the Church have never been damaged. This truly divine core remains a bright reality even amidst an imperfect communion of the different Churches. Christ's promise that the Church cannot be destroyed (cf. Mt 16:18; 28,20) is the source of hope that no division will ever manage to destroy its essential unity. It is at the same time a continuous call to reconciliation and mutual recognition. All the commitments of the European *Charta Oecumenica* encourage concrete steps in this direction. They urge Christians "to acknowledge the spiritual riches of the different Christian traditions, to learn from one another and so to receive these gifts" (No. 3), "to deepen the spiritual fellowship among the churches" (No. 5), i.e. "ecumenical fellowship" (No. 6).

One can hear nowadays quite often a sad observation: "The world is changing – enmity and hatred remain". When the Churches contribute to enlarging the space of hostility among people it is indeed a negation of their credibility and mission. The Good News of God's love for all proclaimed by Jesus is turned thereby into disrepute. It was he who "in his own person killed the hostility" (Eph 2:16). A true evangelization brings peace, gives courage and hope in the human quest for meaning. With our proclamation of the Gospel we are not allowed to export our divisions and rivalries.

### *To Overcome Division in Oneself*

Ecumenism is a sort of beneficial education for all of us. It aims at educating believers in such a way that there be more and more Christians inwardly free from the chains of division and separation. Fortunately there are Christians who live and act according to the inner law of grace and freedom, in a truly Christian way. One can only rejoice that it is so. This is indeed a victory of the spirit of Christ's *Beatitudes* over the spirit of a narrow and unfeeling denominationalism which so often hurts people. Ecumenism teaches how to overcome the split and schism above all in oneself. There can exist such a desire for reconciliation and unity, which inwardly delivers from the state of separation those who bear in themselves this longing for unity.

Early Christianity knew the so-called "baptism of desire". The belief in its existence originated in a very difficult period of history when a reception of the baptism was physically impossible. For martyrs the death suffered for Christ was considered to be a "baptism of blood". The others who could not receive the baptism "through water and the Spirit" (Jo 3:5), strongly desired to do so. Christians believed that those were baptized by the baptism of the very desire.

The concept of the baptism of desire may offer a certain ecumenical analogy. The strong wish for unity can be fulfilled in a situation, when churches are not yet able and ready to overcome the divisions and to acknowledge themselves mutually as churches, although they share the basic truths of the Christian faith. I believe this desire for unity is a kind of inner personal anticipation of a reconciled diversity. It achieves in the heart of a Christian something that our churches, for various reasons, are not able yet to achieve. He or she becomes then a human being inwardly free from impoverishing division and separation. Remaining loyal to his or her Church they recover a living consciousness of belonging together in Christ and to be members of His "one holy catholic and apostolic Church". They rediscover their deep spiritual fellowship with other Christians. We still seem to be too pusillanimous and helpless in the face of divisions. This diminishes our possibilities to proclaim the Gospel together, to move towards one another, to pray and act together, to reach a consensus in faith through patient dialogue.

### *We Will Not Give up Hope*

We live in a difficult period of time of transition marked by conflicts and tensions between the churches. Quite recently a voice was heard in my own country: *Ecumenists*,



*give up any hope!* "Churches and faith will still divide us for a long time", "for the majority of us Christ is no Teacher, but only incantation «to ward off evil»"<sup>3</sup>.

This situation is not a reason to be discouraged. It rather urges one to see more acutely the need to overcome the feelings of mistrust, antipathy, self-sufficiency and split - first of all in oneself. People are able to come to terms on a cultural, social and political level within civil society. The very process of the integration of Europe encourages us to be more ingenious and creative in overcoming our divisions. Cultural polyphony often seems today to outdistance religious polyphony. One can be grateful to God, however, that in this way He arouses in us the sense of urgency, or even makes us feel ashamed by example of civil instances.

Ecumenists do not and will not give up hope for lowering the ecclesiastical walls which separate us from one another. We realize how difficult this task is. Our Churches still tend to increase their doctrinal and practical claims. It is often a result of a narrow understanding of the truth, and of the lack of confidence in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ecumenism educates to another style of thinking, feeling and acting, as described in the European *Charta Oecumenica* (No. 3) :

In the spirit of the Gospel, we must reappraise together the history of the Christian Churches, which has been marked by many beneficial experiences but also by schisms, hostilities and even armed conflicts. Human guilt, lack of love and the frequent abuse of faith and the Church for political interests have severely damaged the credibility of the Christian witness.

Ecumenism therefore begins for Christians with the renewal of our hearts and the willingness to repent and change our ways. The ecumenical movement has already helped to spread reconciliation.

If we do not become more modest in the face of the divine truth, which is Christ in his own person, a shortsighted denominational education will further prevail over ecumenical openness and readiness to understand the others. Who liberates oneself from the chains of inner division is not a dreamer, but makes this world a bit brighter and more worthy of God. We will not give up hope.

Ecumenical hope, by no means naïve, allows us to live and to labour solely for the future of a more reconciled Christianity. One can only hope that it will make Christianity more able to reconcile peoples and cultures, ready to strengthen community with Judaism and to cultivate relations with Islam, eager to encounter other religions and world views.

## NOTES

1 A slightly shortened and modified version of a paper published in: *Charta Oecumenica: A Text, a Process and a Dream of the Churches in Europe*, ed. by Viorel Ionita and Sarah Numico, Geneva: WCC Publications 2003, pp. 56-59.

2 *Charta Oecumenica: Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe*, in: *Charta Oecumenica: A Text, a Process and a Dream of the Churches in Europe*, ed. by Viorel Ionita and Sarah Numico, Geneva: WCC Publications 2003, pp. 7-16.

3 A. de Lazari. *Ekumenisci – porzuccie wszelka nadzieje (Ecumenists, Give up any Hope)*. "Tygodnik Powszechny" (Cracow) No 23, June 9, 2002, s. 10.

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## **Epilogue**

### **Thinking about Church with Hope: The Example of Waław Hryniewicz**

*Maciej Bielawski*

In the Church there is a perichoresis of thoughts, a mysterious reality rooted in the unity of Life which enables us to discuss one theologian through the theology of another (and vice versa). Their thoughts are complementary and mutually revealing. Given such an understanding, I have allowed myself to think about Ghislain Lafont – without talking about him directly - and at the same moment to write about Waław Hryniewicz, a Polish theologian. To my knowledge, they have never met, yet their theological search is deeply related. The following pages present some aspects of Hryniewicz's ecclesiology.

#### **BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Waław Hryniewicz (born in 1936) belongs to the generation of Catholic theologians who developed their activity after the Second Vatican Council and under its influence. This broad current renewing theology with its dimensions of deepened biblical, liturgical, patristic and ecumenical studies had an important influence on his way of thinking and "doing" theology. On the other hand, Hryniewicz also contributed to this same current of theological research. In his writings, an attentive reader can find references to the most important Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic theologians of the twentieth century from whom he had learned and with whom he actively dialogued. In the context of such a multiform, contemporary theology it is also possible to identify some specific influences, which particularly characterize his theology.

Hryniewicz was born and raised in Poland, where he still lives. His youth was shadowed by the tragedy of the second world war, which can symbolically be indicated by the term "Auschwitz". Although well known from a historical point of view, these events also had theological consequences.<sup>1</sup> The inhumane experiences and suffering challenged any kind of theological "theory" about the reality of history. The banality of death placed the question of hope in front of despair.

The post-war period in Poland was marked by a forced communist regime with its totalitarian politics and materialistic ideology. Humanists, philosophers, and theologians developed some specific intellectual attitudes in response. The result: the monologue society proposed by the totalitarian regime was faced with a dimension of "dialogue";<sup>2</sup> and instead of a purely materialistic anthropology, special attention was given to the person.<sup>3</sup>

Poland must also be considered as a country between Christian East and West, between Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.<sup>4</sup> For the theologian, this situation presents a challenging question of unity and diversity of Christian Churches (Protestants, Orthodox and Catholic) in a context of somewhat "specifically" Polish catholicism. The situation reflects also the post-conciliar tension between an "open" and "closed" Church. The theology of Hryniewicz likewise moves in a similar context, influenced by the same tension.

In order to complete the image of the various influences on the theological formation of Hryniewicz, there are several that require specific mention. It was Wincent Granat (1900-1979), a great dogmatic theologian whose speculative theological system incorporated personalistic dimensions and comparative studies of Christian traditions, who directed Hryniewicz to study Eastern and Orthodox theology.<sup>5</sup> Another person of influence was the Polish, Orthodox priest and theologian, Jerzy Klinger.<sup>6</sup> Hryniewicz's role of teaching and directing the chair of the Catholic University of Lublin dedicated to ecumenical and comparative theology studies continues to shape his own thoughts. In addition, his involvement in many ecumenical conferences and meetings — for many years (from 1980) a member of the Catholic-Orthodox theological commission — rendered his theology open and ecumenical.<sup>7</sup>

Let us now briefly mention the main theological works of Hryniewicz (all written in Polish and not translated). In 1966, at the Catholic University of Lublin, he presented his dissertation, *The Teaching of Contemporary Catholic Theologians about the Soteriological Role of the Resurrection of Christ*.<sup>8</sup> Ten years later, he published a study entitled *Tradition in the Theological Interpretation. Analysis of Contemporary Dogmatic and Ecumenical Theories*.<sup>9</sup> These two books, written to fulfill university requirements, enabled our theologian to look at the whole theological tradition while centering his attention on the Resurrection. From then on, two elements — hermeneutics and dogmatics — would be strictly related in his theological reflections. Between 1987 and 1991, Hryniewicz published his monumental work, a Paschal trilogy (Christ is our Passover, 1987; Our Passover with Christ, 1987; The Passover of Christ in the History of Man and the Universe, 1991).<sup>10</sup> One of the most interesting and best theological syntheses in the post conciliar period, the trilogy — as the titles suggest — looks to the Paschal event as interpretative key in the systematic exposition of all Christian doctrine.

Accompanying his speculative work, Hryniewicz also developed his studies of sources by publishing an analytic study of Bishop Cyril of Turov Paschal homilies (*An Old Russian Paschal Theology*, 1993)<sup>11</sup> and a critical edition, translation and theological study on writings of Metropolitan Ilarion (*Christ is Risen*, 1995),<sup>12</sup> a very interesting, twelfth century, Ruthenian bishop. Both of this authors are still relatively unknown.

Hryniewicz is also known for his theology of hope, developed thus far in four volumes (*The Hope of Salvation for All. From an Eschatology of Fear to an Eschatology of Hope*, 1990; *The Drama of Salvation for All*, 1996; *Pedagogy of Hope. Meditation about God, Church and Ecumenism*, 1997; *On the Way of Reconciliation. Ecumenical Meditations*, 1998).<sup>13</sup> A general movement can be identified in these works as the author moves slowly

from existential and individual dimensions of hope in the eschatological perspective to the ecclesiastical and ecumenical ones. He thus shows hope to be personal, "for me", only in as much as it is for all of us, "together".

Other ecclesiological and ecumenical reflections — with respect to Orthodox-Catholic dialogue — were developed by Hryniewicz in his two books: *Sister Churches* (1993) and *Leave the Past to God. Union and Uniatism in the Ecumenical Perspective* (1995).<sup>14</sup> Two volumes are comprised of various articles in which he addresses theological methods, tradition, the centrality of Christ's Pascha, and hope, commenting his main works in the form of "glossa" (*God of Our Hope*, 1989; and *Hermeneutic in Dialogue*, 1998).<sup>15</sup>

As seen thus far, the work of this theologian is vast and rich. In addition to the above-mentioned books, he has published a large number of articles in various reviews.<sup>16</sup> It is too premature to attempt a synthesis since he continues to write. Nonetheless, this short bio- and bibliographical overview does offer the reader a general idea of his theology. In the pages that remain, we will explore some aspects of his ecclesiology, seen especially in light of his theology of hope.

## **THEOLOGICAL METHOD — A WAY OF THINKING**

Since the way of thinking specifically about the Church is rooted in the more general methods of thinking in theology, we can start by identifying several aspects which are characteristic for Wacław Hryniewicz and his ecclesiology. Four dimensions illustrate his approach.

### *Apophatic Dynamism*

Hryniewicz has a special affinity for the apophatic theology of the Fathers and of modern theologians, both Eastern and Western, which emphasizes the greatness of the mystery of God and the inadequacy of the human mind to reach Him. In his own words, "This way of thinking and talking about God is characterized first of all by the conviction that the deepest reality of God cannot be recognized and that it passes over all human concepts. God is the 'hidden One' unknown, mysterious and yet very close".<sup>17</sup> However, as such, "knowing God" (or rather, un-knowing God) does not favor a skeptical attitude. Instead, it leads man to transcend concepts, speculations and turns to antinomy, paradox, experience and contemplation. Only then can eventual knowledge, understanding or talking about God result. The apophatic theology does not want to say that "man is by nature unable to know God, but rather points out the conviction that His deepest essence is transcendental".<sup>18</sup> Hryniewicz finds a certain fascination standing before the mystery of God and trying to contemplate and express it. This fascination sometimes causes him to use poetic or imaginative language and fashions his understanding of the theologian's mission. For example, referring to John Chrysostom homilies *De incomprehensibilitate Dei*, he writes that "The theologian is like a man who walking in the fog reaches the high

and steep edge of the ocean, feeling the unending horizon just beyond the edge which impregnates him with delight and fear".<sup>19</sup>

Hryniewicz's stance toward apophatic theology seems to develop over time. His earlier writings speak of apophaticism, though appreciated by him, as just one of the ways of "doing theology", a complementary one among others. In his later and recent works, he privileges apophatism all the more as embracing all theological attitudes, considering it fundamental: "Apophatic theology is neither only a specific branch of theology nor a methodological introduction to it which considers the incomprehensibility of God. It is rather a dimension and method of all theological ways of thinking".<sup>20</sup>

Yet this "hidden God" acts, interacting with man and man with Him. Hryniewicz sees all of human history and existence as having this apophatic God on the horizon or as its foundation. Such a God, and hence His history, are thus seen as not only unknown, but also amazingly beyond our thoughts and expectations. The Resurrection — so central for Hryniewicz — initiated a dynamism and movement in history which is also "apophatic". Rather God's apophaticism marks human and world history, opening it through the "mirabilia Dei", signs of the wonderful activity of a loving God who projects all creation toward its eschatological dimension. He writes about it with a characteristic theocentric conviction: "Deus semper maior. The eschatological dimension of salvation cannot be known by people living on this earth. *Salus semper maior*. If human love hides in itself an uncommon mystery of gift, the saving love of God is for everyone even more ineffably astonishing. Our God is an astonishing God".<sup>21</sup> "Historic apophaticism" caused by a certain eschatological and theocentric primacy is typical for Hryniewicz and also determines his ecclesiology and overall theological attitude. His vision of Church cannot be separated from it, because "Our earthly theology, even very courageous, has to be limited by this eschatological apophatism".<sup>22</sup>

### *Paschal Way of the Human Mind*

In his "Paschal trilogy", which seeks to present the "whole" Christian vision in light of the Paschal Mystery, Hryniewicz concludes that: "the Paschal perspective is the single dimension of all Christian theology – it is the basic sensibility which indicates what really is placed in the center of our faith, resolving all else. Paschal theology teaches a concentric way of thinking which constantly comes back to this essential truth and in its light penetrates the depth of the other questions".<sup>23</sup> Hence it is clear that the Paschal dynamism, a movement from life through death to resurrection, is a basic movement which organized Hryniewicz's whole way of thinking and marked all of his theology.

This dynamism also applies to the human mind, and thus to theology, too. This is one of Hryniewicz's most original insights. Taking inspiration mostly from the Byzantine and Slavic tradition, he talks about a "Pascha noeton, Pascha slovesnaja" which is "a specific way of the cross of the human mind which passes from death to spiritual resurrection".<sup>24</sup> He describes the first stage in this movement as "positive", in which the human mind is inspired by creation, Holy Scripture and tradition, reaching the level of Divine Wisdom (*sophia*). However, this is only the beginning stage, as it opens the way to the "negative"

phase: "The real paschal experience of apophatic knowledge is initiated when the human mind (united with heart) begins to have a foreboding of the insufficiency of the positive way".<sup>25</sup> With this inner battle the human mind passes beyond images, ideas and logic to enter a period of real transformation (*metanoia*). An initial moment of "cross" gives way to silence and waiting: "It is necessary to suspend imagination and desire to see the truth. It is the silence of the crucified, denuded and emptied intellect — it is the stage of sacrifice which reaches the depths of the 'intellectual heart', the spiritual center of the whole person".<sup>26</sup> Finally, the stage of resurrection is reached in "the meeting with God". Causing the human mind to spiritually rise up, this encounter creates an inner Passover which gives the experience of Divine light and its transforming presence".<sup>27</sup> This final stage initiates the entire person to everlasting new life, an unending movement with the realm of God (*epectasis*). Yet, at the same time, it is constantly repeated, since it is brought "down" to a level of confrontation by the reality of creation and history and the message of Scripture and tradition.

With a paschal movement of the mind (*pascha noeton*), such an essential aspect of Hryniewicz's theological methodology, the entire person tends by its desire of God to the dimension of infinity. The way is begun by "doing theology", but during the process of theological perception on a spiritual level, it is discovered that in order to reach the desired goal, one has to "die". By "dying", the mind is brought beyond itself and touches upon the reality of God. Completely transformed by this encounter, the mind returns to reality only to see it in a different light, recognizing all reality in what we call hope. The human mind can have this experience precisely because it all happened in Christ. I will eventually show how this "paschal way of the human mind" is key in Hryniewicz's approach to Church, as is thinking with hope.

### *Dialogical Perichoresis*

If the apophatic priority and the paschal dimension are the basis of all theology, it follows that the mystery of God can be, and really is, expressed by a multiplicity of traditions, systems and models. Hryniewicz explains that "Theologians today realize still more and more that it is impossible to talk about God using only one sentence, because someone immediately has to add more sentences which are complementary to the first one and which explain it better. This is the only way to be 'honest in front of God'".<sup>28</sup> Along the lines of sentences or systems, he uses the idea of "models": "talking about God should be based on many models, united among themselves as much as possible. Because each of the models shows its real value in reciprocal relation. ... Each of the models can be enriched and completed by being confronted with the others".<sup>29</sup>

Such a conviction results in openness to other people and traditions, in an attitude of dialogue. In theology, it means the necessity to listen to others. According to Hryniewicz, anyone who wants to know and understand God and the mysteries He has intended for us must turn to others: to listen, to learn, and to appreciate the diversity which reveals the God who is completely Other. Inspired by M. Buber and E. Lévinas, Hryniewicz affirms the necessity today to rediscover "the priority of turning to the Other before speculating with concepts, of becoming an open person not dominated by 'self', and of modestly

accepting the Other before the pride of one's own reason. This ethical dimension has priority over the ontological one".<sup>30</sup> Continuing his reflection, he writes about the "Epiphany of Otherness"<sup>31</sup> which requires an attitude of attention and listening to the Other: person; tradition; and finally, God. In fact, he shows that the apophatism of God and apophatism of man are actually complementary and mutually revealing. He writes: "The extension of the mystery of the 'hidden God' (Is 45,15) is the mystery of the 'hidden man' whose value lies in his capacity to love others, in the depth of his heart open for others. In the earliest time of Christianity, the author of the first Letter of Peter was writing about this heart of man, hidden in the depth of his spirit and his own humanity. He used an expression very difficult to translate: *ho kryptos tes kardias anthropos*, 'a hidden man of heart' (1 Pt 3,4). These words contain, in fact, the essence of apophatic anthropology".<sup>32</sup>

Hryniewicz's thinking shows that there is a link between the mystery of God and the mystery of man, reaching the Truth by reaching God and man. The one and hidden mystery of God, so essential for man, a mystery which is so "far" and so "close", a mystery never reached and never drawn out, is in a certain way dispersed and hidden in Others. Each expresses this mystery partially, and all together reflect and penetrate it with reciprocity and complementarity. In order to explain this essential dimension of being and doing theology, Hryniewicz refers to the ancient, traditional concept of "perichoresis", applying it in a new and fruitful way: "The thinking which takes into consideration the entire Christian tradition as a source of inspiration can be called a thinking 'according to the whole (*kat'holon*), an integrative thinking. This way of thinking is characterized by the tendency to unite the lasting values which are present and alive in particular confessional traditions. It is a thinking animated by the principle of reciprocal penetration of consciousness (*perichoresis*). This principle was formed in ancient Christian teaching about the Holy Trinity, but it should also be used in the life and thinking of the Church as a community of human persons".<sup>33</sup>

The profound bond between God and man, as well as the one between human persons, are in some way for Hryniewicz links creating the context or environment in which his theology is made. On the one hand, the incomprehensibility of God and, on the other, the dialogical toward other men and their traditions, all seen in the light of the paschal dimension, are an important basis for his way of thinking about the Church.

### *Doxological Dimension of Dogma*

Following the convictions of many contemporary theologians, Hryniewicz underlines the historical and somewhat "limited" dimension of dogmatic formulas. He writes, for example: "Dogma has a function of service to the testimony of Scripture. It is an open horizon in understanding the Scripture in the community of the faithful, and it is also a result of the Church's historical experience of trying to listen to the testimony of Scripture. Dogma directs the faith and hope of the Church to the reality that is bigger than any human approach or way of understanding divine truth. Hence, though on the one hand, dogma is decisive; on the other hand, it still has a provisional nature, as is everything that is earthly and not yet finally complete".<sup>34</sup> In another place, he emphasizes



the primacy of faith over dogmatic formulas, because "dogmas are only interpretations which should help the faith, but which were made in one precise moment of history and in a specific cultural context. The faith has to be one and unique for ever, because it is in its essence the hopeful trust in God. But the interpretations of it could be different, and the unity does not exclude diversity".<sup>35</sup>

Because "the language of dogmatic formulas is provisional and metaphoric"<sup>36</sup> there is a paradox of power, greatness and weakness in them. They try to express something inexpressible. Hryniewicz writes: "The unusual dimension of the language of dogma is in its having to transmit a truth which is bigger and, from a religious point of view, more important than what the human language can express".<sup>37</sup> In his understanding, dogma points to the truth but does not exhaust it. Dogma "is in a certain way the sign which indicates the way towards the truth, but on the other hand it is also a 'narrow gate' (Mt 7,13)".<sup>38</sup> He refers to the teaching of P. Evdokimov to describe dogma as "an icon of truth made from words".<sup>39</sup>

Understood in this perspective, all doctrine is considered open, not only for "new" interpretations but open to God Himself. The human mind, in fact, faces a paradox in dogmatic formulas, a certain "cross" as described above, as it learns the limitations and the unfeasibility of embracing God with human forms of expression. However, that would only be the negative function of dogma. There is also a positive one as dogma allows the mind to enter the dimension that it indicates. Purified, the mind then discovers its capacity to praise and glorify God. In fact, the term "ortho-doxo", used so often in reference to doctrine and dogma, implies "the right way to praise". Hence, the essential function of dogma is to praise God, to give Him glory. Hryniewicz calls this function "the doxological dimension of dogma".

Referring to patristic concepts — seen, of course, in light of his own interpretations — he writes that in antiquity, "The dogmatic formulas were understood first of all as a doxological confessions of faith and were integrative parts of liturgy. Dogma was not understood as a static doctrinal formula, but first and foremost as an act of worship and thanksgiving for His saving work. The dogma was something much greater than the content pronounced in formula. It was also clear that it was reaching beyond the current and actual capacity to express it in a certain formula".<sup>40</sup> Hryniewicz adamantly underlines that the ancient Church "realized early on that loyalty toward conciliar formulas consists in something more than a simple repetition of once established formulas. The Church was aware that dogma is not only being rooted in the past but also being open for the future".<sup>41</sup>

It does not seem necessary to further elaborate this part of the presentation, interesting and important though it may be. The doxological dimension of dogma is one of the aspects deeply related to the apophatic, dialogical and paschal dimensions of Hryniewicz's way of thinking. The whole system of his theology provides a solid basis for an open, dynamic and hopeful vision also of the Church, as we shall see on the following pages.

## THINKING ABOUT CHURCH

It cannot be said that ecclesiology is the main discipline elaborated by Hryniewicz in his theology. He is not an "ecclesiologist", and he did not write any book exclusively dedicated to the topic of Church. Nonetheless, Church is the object of many of his reflections throughout his works. The second volume of his paschal trilogy contains a rather complete and synthetic presentation of his ecclesiology.<sup>42</sup> It was actually in this last decade that he developed various aspects and intuitions about the Church. His increasing ecclesiological interest in the last decade can be explained by his participation in ecumenical dialogues, which exposed him to questions that he wanted both to explore and address. Another reason can be found in the crisis in the life of the Church and in ecclesiology, which called him as a theologian to think and talk about the Church. Hryniewicz himself, makes it clear that he understands himself to be a theologian of the Church after the Second Vatican Council, insisting that the Church not only continue the way initiated by the Council but actually develop it and courageously proceed to face the future. Thus, his reflections about Church have a paschal background, while at the same time, they embrace a large number of topics concerning the ecumenical question of the unity of the Churches, as seen in the general perspective of an "open Church".

It is not the purpose of this study to present a complete study of Hryniewicz's ecclesiology. Rather, it aims to underline some of the more characteristic aspects of his ecclesiology, which are actually in the perspective of his theology of hope. In the interest of clarity, the following four sub-titles correspond to the previous sub-chapters explaining Hryniewicz's way of thinking.

### *Church from and for God — Ecclesiological Apophatism and Theocentrism*

Discussing the origin of the Church in order to understand her nature and mission, Hryniewicz emphasizes her Trinitarian roots. The Church is *Corpus Trium*.<sup>43</sup> This fact has some very important consequences both in the nature and understanding of the Church. The most important is the primacy of God "over" the Church, or as he prefers to express it: "God is bigger than the Church".<sup>44</sup> In another place, he also writes that the Church "participates in the mystery of the Triune God to Whom belongs all priority".<sup>45</sup> Thus, the whole mission of the Church is caused by the Trinity, who revealed Its loving nature most perfectly in the Paschal Mystery. Hence, "it is not the Church which disposes of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. This mystery is bigger than the Church, which has only to serve it".<sup>46</sup>

The extremely theocentric attitude of Hryniewicz in his thinking about the Church is of the same nature as his highly apophatic approach toward theology. To say that God is always greater — *Deus semper maior* — not only means that everything in the Church (authority, discipline, sacraments, tradition, etc.) comes from and depends on Him, but also that nothing really corresponds perfectly to His perfection. In front of Him, everything in the Church is relative, even the Church, herself. Since all things are related to God, they can receive different forms, expressions and structures accordingly. In the Church — as in the case of dogma — the apophatic rule is essential: everything serves

only to indicate, and imperfectly at that, God Himself. The Church is seen as a "small point" projecting toward the immense horizon of the infinite and mysterious Trinity. The Church is in a certain way hidden in God. In fact, this theocentrism gives Hryniewicz great freedom and courage in his being in, and thinking about, Church. It is also the basis of his hope. According to his understanding, God's gift of Self to all of creation finds its answer in the attitude of trusting faith and hope. The Church finds her importance in this space of hope. The hope is God Himself while the Church is along the way to that hope. As can be seen, Hryniewicz's theology is far away from any kind of eccelsio-centrism.

His theocentric approach to Church is not only because she came from God, but also because she has God Himself as her destination. Existing not only from, but also for, God, the Church is correctly understood when seen in its eschatological perspective. Hryniewicz bases his explanations of this dimension of Church on three texts: two from the Bible and one from the Second Vatican Council. Referring to the book of Revelation (Rev. 21:1) which talks of a "new heaven and earth" and the "New Jerusalem", he writes: "It really makes one think that the eschatological perspective of the Bible does not end up with a new Church, but with a 'new heaven and new earth'. ... The creative power of God will be finally revealed in the form of a new creation and not a new Church".<sup>47</sup> Commenting paragraph 48 of *Lumen gentium* where it is said that "until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells (cf. 2 Pet. 3:13) the pilgrim Church, in its sacraments and institutions, which belong to this present age, carries the mark of the world which passes", Hryniewicz underlines with insistence that "the sacramental and institutional dimension of the Church belongs to the 'present age' and it will pass away with actual human history fulfilling its mission. ... The awareness of the passing and temporary character of the Church's institutions is one of the most important elements of paschal ecclesiology. ... It is not the Church which is the center and content of the announcement of Good News. The mission of the Church is to pass over herself and indicate the mystery of the Triune God, thus giving an eschatological orientation to all human history. ... She is neither the purpose and goal of human history, nor is she an ever-existing reality in her actual form".<sup>48</sup> Referring to 1 Cor 7:31, he says: "Not only is the form of this world passing away, so also is the form of the Church passing away".<sup>49</sup>

His thinking as such does not take any importance away from the Church. Rather it seeks to put the Church's importance in the right perspective, by pointing to the deepest relation between Christ and the Church, rooted in the paschal mystery of Christ. He compares the earthly existence of the Church with that of the Son of God, as a passage to the resurrection. The same dynamism indwells His ecclesial Body. Hryniewicz explains this analogy: "The paschal existence of Jesus becomes the model of the entire existence of the Church also in her institutional and hierarchical dimension. And just as some people have a tendency to glorify a specific form of the Church, others prefer to criticize her and be scandalized. But in both cases there is a danger of insisting too much that this concrete and passing form of the Church should exist forever and never be replaced by the eternal Kingdom of the incomprehensible God".<sup>50</sup>

We can see how a theocentric and eschatological orientation of ecclesiology gives Hryniewicz real freedom. Such thinking also requires profound courage and renunciation

— courage to become a pilgrim and renunciation of any kind of earthly glory. His freedom results in being able to think about the Church with hope, because in any case *Deus semper maior*.

### *Paschal way of the Church*

Hryniewicz shows a certain dynamic in the nature of the Church, extended as she is between coming from God and tending toward Him. This movement occurs not only in the physical or historical realm, but also and even more importantly, in the dimension of holiness: the Church comes from the Holy God and must become holy for the final union with the Most Holy One. But historical reality shows the Church to be rather far from this desired perfection. According to Hryniewicz, who in this part of his ecclesiological reflection refers mostly to the protestant theological tradition, there is an urgent need to re-read in a new light the ecclesiology of glory which for so long dominated Catholic teaching, deforming the truth as a consequence. About this *ecclesiologia gloriae* he writes: "Ecclesiology of glory is central to an ecclesiology of eschatological fulfillment. Without the eschatological dimension, it too easily forgets about the pilgrim nature of the Church composed of people, about the provisional and passing form of her existence which is marked by sufferance, service and human guilt".<sup>51</sup> He proposes to balance the ecclesiology of glory with an ecclesiology of the cross: "Confessing the holiness of the Church (which automatically directs the vision of the Church towards the vision of the glorious Church — *Ecclesia gloriae*), the pilgrim existence of the sinful Church should not be forgotten (which directs thoughts to the Cross — *Ecclesia crucis*)".<sup>52</sup> He further adds: "The mystery of the Church is paradoxical because it unites in itself two extremes. It is both a historical and eschatological reality, on the one hand marked by the memory of Christ Crucified, and on the other hand, by the presence of Christ Risen. But the Church remains the Church of Resurrection only when she is able to embrace the full truth of the Crucified".<sup>53</sup> It is clear that what Hryniewicz is really doing in his theological reflection about the Church is putting the whole question of the Church's holiness and her sinfulness in the paschal perspective. He thus rejects any kind of ecclesiastical and ecclesiological glorification and triumphalism. If there is an aspect of criticism in his thinking about the Church, it is mostly directed against any kind of ecclesiology of glory. He reasons that such a vision and practice lead the Church to miss the purpose of her mission, and so not to reach the hearts of the people. (He is very aware of the actual problems facing the Church in the world today.) More importantly, however, an ecclesiology of glory causes the Church to overlook her paschal roots.

Seeking to understand the Church in the light of the Paschal Mystery seems to be one of his most original insights into the whole question of the holiness and sinfulness of the Church. This approach makes it possible to look -- worried but never despairing -- with hope on the Church and the world. With a solid paschal faith as the interpretative key in his theology, he can freely look at both the empty glory and the sinfulness of the Church, and direct his vision toward a "Christic" Church. Uniting Christ, Eucharist and the Church in one perspective, he says: "The Cross of Christ becomes a stumbling block and absurdity for many (cf. 1 Cor 1:23). Likewise, the sinfulness and weakness of the Church for many will be again and again a scandal. Behind the human dimension, it is not very

easy to see the presence of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit in her. Nevertheless, the Church preserves her sacramental and eucharistic character in spite of sin. The comparison with Eucharist is not coincidental. Faith is necessary in order to recognize the presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine. A very deep faith is also necessary in order to recognize the face of the Risen One under the appearance of the Church"<sup>54</sup>. This paschal approach allows Hryniewicz to take into consideration all the different aspects of the Church with depth, freedom and hope.

Reinterpreting the four traditional marks of the Church in the light of the Paschal Mystery, Hryniewicz portrays the actual existence of the Church as marked by the Paschal Mystery. Continuing his reflections about the sinful dimension of the Church, he goes on to show her dimension of kenosis. Just as in Christ, whose existence can be characterized by His kenosis as part of His paschal way of being, the same occurs in the Church. In her actual state, she is in the state of kenosis as a consequence and sign of the real union with her Lord, but on the other hand the Church has to be still more and more kenotic in order to be faithful to her paschal dimension which is the "Christic" one par excellence.

An ecclesiology and attitude of kenosis is, according to Hryniewicz, first of all an option that the Church has to constantly choose in order to be faithful to Christ who "did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself" (Phil 2:6-7). Hence, he is able to say that the "kenosis of Christ gives the most proper mode of existence for the community of faithful, which is the Church. It is not an event related only to the Christ. It is not limited only to Him. By choosing kenosis as the way of salvation for humanity, God determined once and for all the way of acting for the Church. It is first of all the way of disinterested service, freely accepted weaknesses and resignation from earthly success".<sup>55</sup> Once more here Hryniewicz's vision of the Church is far from any triumphalism, which he considers a form of treason of her mission, infidelity to the humble Christ and consequently a loss. Transforming the words of M. Buber who said that "success is not among the names of God", Hryniewicz underlines that "success is not the norm for the Church".<sup>56</sup> Because of this he insists that "Church has to be defenseless if she wants correctly to accomplish her mission. The power of the Church cannot be based on a temporary position in society. The Church should not use her power to seek only human security".<sup>57</sup>

His intuitions bear great insight into the changing role of the Church in today's society. He is writing from within the Roman Catholic Church which sometimes tends to take pride in a triumphalistic vision and attitude of the Church. However, with the changes in the modern world, the Church is actually becoming less "important" and numerous. Although some could be saddened or discouraged by such a diminished role of the Church, this theologian affirms that the Church has nothing to lose by becoming a poor, humble, humiliated and, humanly speaking, a meaningless community. Hryniewicz seems to be preparing the way for a new understanding and way of being Church. Aware of this "ecclesiological news" of our times, he writes: "It is not easy for the faithful to accept the vision of the Church as defenseless and disinterested from a human point of view. We desire, rather, a big, great and victorious Church. That kind of Church is more

conformed to human imagination. Triumphalism is closer to the criteria of efficacy and power than to the difficult demands of the Gospel".<sup>58</sup>

Hryniewicz develops the whole teaching about authority, hierarchy and primacy in the same perspective. They are to be marked by service, poverty and the courage to empty oneself. Becoming evermore a pilgrim in this world, the Church should always be ready to reject or sacrifice the treasures of the past, abandon them into the hands of God, and with this nakedness face the unknown future. Only by living this dimension of *kenosis*, as the prolongation of the paschal one, can the Church be a sign of hope for the world. This is how Hryniewicz can think about the Church with hope. Kenosis is part of the movement toward resurrection, which is the real basis of hope also for the Church.

### *Dialogical perichoresis of the Sister Churches*

For as much as Hryniewicz's ecclesiology is formed by its paschal character, it is also marked by its ecumenical dimension. There is no doubt that for Hryniewicz, to think about the Church is tantamount to thinking about the churches; and thinking with hope about the churches is for him to think about them in the prospective of unity. Reviewing these elements essential to his reflection, we can see how he is able to approach the dramatic situation of divided Churches with hope.

Hryniewicz is convinced that the unity of the Church is basically a gift of God which cannot be removed by any kind of human activity — even by sin, which only removes this unity from sight. He is adamantly convinced that where there is Christ, there is Church (one Church!). Hence, even if there are different churches, which he refers to as confessional differences, he emphasizes that there is only one Church of churches. He affirms the need to distinguish "the ontological unity of the Church from the empirical and visible one. The first one is the more fundamental. The second one is only derivative. The ontological and invisible unity of the Church has never been destroyed. The divided Church remains still the one Church of the Risen Christ, Lord of human history. But human community and brotherhood do not find their visible expression. Human weakness and sinfulness hide the full dimension of the divine-human mystery of the Church".<sup>59</sup> Analyzing the history of Christianity, Hryniewicz underlines the fact that the Church on an "institutional and dogmatic level has never reached in history her full, complete and perfect unity".<sup>60</sup> Of course, that does not mean such effort and the search for unity are not necessary, especially since division continues in a certain way the passion of Christ and creates scandal for the world. For this reason, he proposes the questions: How should the division of the churches really be considered? How are we to think about the churches of the Church; and how are we to act in front of this reality?

The one concept which often surfaces in his ecclesiological reflection is the patristic and conciliar (DE 14) concept of "Sister Churches", affirming that "the expression 'Sister Churches' is something more than just terminology. It includes in itself the essential element of the Christian way of seeing the Church and living her mystery. ... The ancient Christian idea of 'Sister Churches' indicated a logic of brotherhood in the context of ecclesiology. The question of the primacy of the bishop of Rome must also be considered

in light of this logic. The particular authority of the Roman See does not elevate it over the other Churches. Rome still remains a Sister Church in front of all the others".<sup>61</sup> Of course, Hryniewicz is writing from the point of view of his own, Roman-Catholic perspective and trying to place himself in the position of the other Churches, which are often not in agreement with the concept and practice of Roman primacy. But his point is also clear: if we are recognizing the concept of "Sister Churches" as an important one for ecclesiology, it also means that we — each of the churches — have to reject the vision that eventual unity will be made by the return of one church's community to that of another, to the "Mother Church". In this case, there are many mothers (it is not just the Roman Catholic Church that thinks of herself in front of the other churches as the "mother"), and it would no longer be possible to speak of "Sister Churches", but about "Mother Churches". It would make no sense, because there can only be one mother. But where is she? According to Hryniewicz, this One Church is hidden yet present, somewhere between the mystery of the ontological unity, rooted in the Trinity and in the origin of the Church, and the final, eschatological unity which encompasses all creation, much beyond actual human forces and ideas of unity. The Mother Church is, in fact, the Heavenly Jerusalem, the New Creation, the new heavens and earth from the Book of Revelation. Once again, a solid Trinitarian theology and a strong eschatological intuition enables this theologian to think about the Church with hope and courage.

But the reality here and now shows that the Church is divided, like a prolongation of Christ's agony. A scandal for the world, such division deprives each ecclesial community of the other's treasures, resulting in a poverty for each. He writes: "Each division makes us become poorer. The exchange of the gifts and charisms proper to each of the churches is broken. And without this reciprocal penetration of charisms (*perichoresis ton charismaton*) the life of the Church is deprived of its fullness of catholicity".<sup>62</sup> The division between Christians is thus considered a sign that there is still much to be accomplished in the evangelization or christianization of the world. In the words of Hryniewicz: "Division is a blemish of the lack of christianization. Christianity is not easily rooted in man. History bears witness to the reality of christianization and de-christianization. This not only applies to people who were not deeply penetrated by the spirit of Christianity. It can also be said of each individual person who believes in Christ. We are destined to become more and more Christian".<sup>63</sup> His assertion shows a logical connection: if division is a sign of the lack of Christianity in each Christian and Christian community, and evangelization includes the effort to combat division and build up unity, then an ecumenical attitude can be seen as an essential dimension of the Christian mission and evangelization process.

Hryniewicz underlines the necessity that all the churches turn to one another as a result of their ontological unity, their relation as Sister Churches, and their own impoverishment without each other. In his vision, each of the churches can both enrich and be enriched by the other. Not an easy task, as he says: "perhaps the most difficult challenge is for the churches to turn to one another. Something must change. The Bible refers to this process of changing as renunciation, kenosis; and it happens when someone rejects everything that does not contribute to unity. Many may perceive this as stupidity. But it is the foolishness of God Himself".<sup>64</sup> Hryniewicz says in many places that the churches should

reject their pride in front of the others; they should even be able to reject the treasures of their own particular traditions if they do not build unity. Moreover, in order to re-establish unity, the churches should try to study, understand, and appreciate more each other's traditions. Then, from this gained perspective, learn also how to see her own tradition. Hryniewicz calls this attitude a spirituality of wholeness, a dialogical perichoresis in which one church enriches another: "The spirituality of wholeness comes from the conviction that the one 'catholic' Church is bigger in her spiritual richness than each of the particular and confessional ones. ... The spirituality of wholeness helps each church understand that it has to accept help from the others. Each needs to be completed and corrected in some of her own ways of acting and thinking. ... This allows each to see its own confessional tradition from a certain distance, from outside; yet, on the other hand, it helps to see the common reference point of apostolic testimony. Without this kind of ecumenical capacity, the future is at risk. 'The holy mystery of unity' (DE 2) requires not only that the churches turn to Christ, but also that they turn one to another".<sup>65</sup>

In his thinking about the unity of the churches, Hryniewicz also emphasizes that Christians should be more creative and imaginative in their search for unity. If the Spirit of God acts, if the churches are sisters, and if there is a constant dynamism of history which surpasses our way of thinking, why then is it impossible — he asks — to imagine a completely different structure of the whole Church. He writes: "We do not know what form a united Christianity would have. The concept of the Sister Churches expresses the great hope to reach a stable unity which is not threatened by the domination of one church over another or with one impoverishing the other".<sup>66</sup> And in another place, referring to the reflections of Y. Congar and from his position as a theologian in the Catholic Church, he adds: "It is possible to imagine the structure of the Church once more united in the form of the very concrete collegiality of the existing patriarchates (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria) as well as those which should be created — for example, Canterbury, Africa, South America, India and others. Is that utopia? ... Not, if we look on this problem from the perspective of ancient ecclesiology. Perhaps in the future, the Roman Church will have the courage to begin that kind of reform which requires such a different logic. Concretely, it means that autonomy has to be given to the local and regional churches and direct jurisdiction over these churches rejected, a jurisdiction which still dominates today. Doing so would show the way in which primacy is understood as service for unity. For now, however, it is rather only a dream of the future... Nothing indicates that it could happen soon. ... On this point, we do not have enough courage and theological imagination".<sup>67</sup>

Yet, even when human imagination and possibility in the churches fail, there is still God, whom Hryniewicz never loses from the horizon of his thinking. And this God is always greater (*Deus semper maior*) — also in the case of ecumenism and the divided churches. He writes with insistence: "God is infinitely greater than our divisions and our never-ending disputes. Divine ecumenism is always bigger than the human one. Human ecumenism on earth is the ecumenism of sinful human beings, which all the time lack love and generosity. But nevertheless, God calls everyone to His divine ecumenism. So,



why should we not accept one another".<sup>68</sup> It seems that Hryniewicz never gives up, never wants to enclose the open space of hope.

### *Thinking about the Church with Hope*

The horizon of Hryniewicz's reflection in all its dimensions is extremely open and (or thus!) courageously rooted in God and in hope. Far from being naive, he is deeply aware and concerned about the problems of the Church and the dramatic situation of the world. Yet, his hope — which he cannot understand until the end — seems almost to oblige him to remain open, free and trustful. He writes about the hope that he has: "I think that life with hope reaches the depth of the human being. And this hope is the basis of trust and confidence. Each person experiences hope from within. It is difficult to experience it from without, just accepting already-made formulas. Hope, in a certain way, is where we find our link with tomorrow, with the future, with God and with others. ... The light of hope comes from certain inner enlightenment, and it cannot be understood in any other way".<sup>69</sup> It is with this inner light of hope that Hryniewicz looks on the Church and thinks about her. Because of this inner "constraint" of hope, he prefers "to light one small candle than to curse the darkness".<sup>70</sup>

It was this inner movement that commanded him to think about the Church with hope. From within "the hope of salvation for all", he views the Church as participating in the universal salvation. The Church, together with the whole creation, tends toward God and his Kingdom. This historical and eternal future of the Church and the world remains "apophatic", because: "We do not know where God finally leads us. This mystery can be penetrated only by faith and hope, and both of them reach farther than we can comprehend".<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, Hryniewicz — especially thinking about the Church — tries to be concrete, because: "Her face of tomorrow is formed today. The Church, hence the Church of tomorrow, has to be closer to people. Has to be wiser ... As a living organism composed of living people who have hope, the Church has to learn how to discern spiritually with wisdom, how to see deeper and farther in the light of her faith and hope; has to be open to continuous renewal and reform".<sup>72</sup> It is in this perspective that his ecumenical desires and "dreams" return, as he writes: "Ecumenical hope finds its beautiful and deep expression in the formula 'Sister Churches'. We need more of the spirit of unity and brotherhood between Christians. Then the wisdom of the many churches will become larger than that of the one based on the confessional wisdom of one particular church. We learn one from another. Together we can better face the problems that our Christianity faces today — in front of the challenges of nationalism, ideologies and the human aggressiveness. The purpose of Christianity is to bring the ferment of reconciliation, to call for a change of hearts and way of thinking. The churches must turn to one another. Without this, Christianity will not be able to give a good word of hope — a hope tested and made wise which could reveal the beautiful face of a unified Christianity. ... Maybe the Christianity of tomorrow will become smaller and smaller, perhaps a Christianity of diaspora. It may be only then that we will try to find brotherhood among us".<sup>73</sup> So, the horizon of Hryniewicz's reflection is rather dramatic on the historic level and full of hope on the level of faith. One may be tempted to ask: But what if nothing happens? What if the division and antagonism among the churches

remain? What if our Christianity remains tepid and without expression? What if our hope is deceived? His answer — based on old Irish proverb — is: "God is even more powerful than hope (*Is treise Dia na dochas*)".<sup>74</sup> Of course, the proverb also applies in the case of the Church.