

Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change
Series IVA, Central and Eastern European Philosophical Studies, Volume 49
Series VIII, Christian Philosophical Studies, Volume 9
General Editor
George F. McLean

THE SPIRIT: THE CRY OF THE WORLD

Polish Philosophical Studies, XII
Christian Philosophical Studies, IX

by
Waclaw Hryniewicz

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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Cardinal Station
Washington, D.C. 20064

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication

Hryniewicz, Waclaw.

The Spirit : the cry of the world / by Waclaw Hryniewicz. -- first edition.
pages cm. -- (Cultural heritage and contemporary change. Series IVA,
Central and Eastern European philosophical studies ; Volume 49) (Cultural
heritage and contemporary change. Series VIII, Christian philosophical studies ;
Volume 9) (Polish philosophical studies ; XII)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Incarnation. 2. God (Christianity) 3. Holy Spirit. I. Title.

BT220.H79 2014
231'.7--dc23

2014012762
CIP

ISBN 978-1-56518-294-3 (pbk.)

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FOREWORD

KENOTIC CHALLENGES TODAY

*In your minds you must be
the same as Christ Jesus:
His state was divine,
yet he did not cling
to his equality with God
but emptied himself
to assume the condition of a slave... (Ph 2:5-7)¹*

There are in the New Testament no other words which would speak about the self-emptying and self-limitation of Jesus Christ in a more simple, profound and moving way. Let me begin with a personal recollection. It was given to me to hear those words again on September 28, 1994 during a pilgrimage celebration of the Eucharist in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Calvary Tomb of Jesus. One of the readings was taken then from St. Paul's letter to Philippians about the kenosis and glorification of Christ (Ph 2:5-11).

The words so well known resounded anew at that holy place in my ears with unusual strength and depth of their meaning. I accepted them with gratitude as an unexpected and challenging gift. They come again and again to my memory, disclosing their rich connotations and implications, not only christological but also pneumatological. The kenosis of Christ is closely connected with the kenosis of the Holy Spirit. Writing to a beloved community of Philippians the Apostle adopted, and perhaps modified an ancient, already existing hymn in praise of Christ. He made it a part of his own reflection on the mystery of the cross and resurrection.

In this book I will be constantly returning to this biblical idea of Christ's kenosis, applied and extended also to the person of God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the kenotic Guide for a pilgrim people of God. Thus one can combine **the two leading insights of kenosis and epiclesis**. They will become guidelines in my research and will direct our reflections as the **twofold central principle: the one kenotic, the other one epiclesis**. Kenosis means self-limitation and self resignation. Epiclesis is the invocation of the Holy Spirit to come down and transform our life. Therefore it is the eloquent expression of **human cry for help**,

¹ Unless otherwise indicated the Holy Scripture of the New Testament is quoted from *The Jerusalem Bible* (JB, 1967) and the Old/First Testament from *The Holy Bible. Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition* (RSVCE, 1966). Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (1998), and those marked NEB from *The New English Bible, New Testament* (1961).

enlightenment and transfiguration. The Christian hope finds in this way its support in the person of the divine *Paráklētos*, the Counselor and Comforter.

Some countries neighboring Israel developed various mythologies which tried to explain the existence of evil in human history. In contrast to it, in Israel both the authors of the Psalms and the Prophets refrained from rationally explaining all dreadful events and committed atrocities. They **direct the cries of the suffering people to God himself** and await his forthcoming judgment. In this sense Israel appeared as a land of people crying to God for help and defense. This resulted from the conviction that no human power nor justice was able to repair historic tragedies. The only hope and refuge remained with God himself. That is why there so often resounded **a cry out of the depths**: “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy” (Ps 130:1-2). When in the Bible people cry for the divine help, this is mostly a sign of hope that the brutality of human power, the arrogance of despotic rulers and oppressors, will not have the last word. God is here the last hope and expected help of all oppressed people. The human cry continues throughout centuries.

Christian churches undergo today a serious crisis as they face, on the one hand, a growing secularization of society, atheism gaining followers 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. But the crisis brings also new opportunities and challenges. It compels us to continuous conversion. Instead of speaking complacently about *being* Christians today, we have to humbly admit that we *become* Christians during our whole life.

To overcome the crisis Christian churches have to work together. Ecumenical efforts of the last years 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 declarative words, without practical consequences. The reception of many agreed statements in bilateral and multilateral dialogues remains still unsatisfactory. Some dialogues experience serious difficulties and do not advance. Many ecumenically-minded people have become tired and discouraged. The majority of Christians, especially in Eastern Europe, simply lack interest in ecumenism. This can indeed lead to resignation and discouragement. However, are not the Christians those who have to learn to hope “against hope” (Rom. 4:18)?

What we experience today is mostly labor 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. The dialogue gives joy and raises hope. Still we cannot see

many decisive results. For this reason I prefer to speak about an ecumenical labor and hope.

Christians quarrel among themselves, while faith and hope die out in human hearts, both in the West and in 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. The confessional identity continues to be in higher esteem than the Christian one. An old temptation to live complacently within confessional boundaries has not yet been overcome. The newly born brotherhood of the 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 the clear need to discuss the ecumenical method and ecumenical 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 Christian faith. **Our Christianity has to become more paschal, i.e. more modest and less triumphalistic, more kenotic and epicletic.** The paschal mystery of Christ is the very core of the Christian message of hope. The drama of the Cross is a drama of human freedom. The freedom of humans 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. 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 and the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Are we able to discern some main features of a more paschal and pentecostal Christianity? How can we understand its truly paschal, kenotic and epicletic dimension? In the reflections of this book I will try to outline **a vision of the Church in search of the kenotic God, the kenotic Christ and the kenotic Spirit.** This will be a vision of the Church more sensitive to the kenotic, paschal and pentecostal ethos of Christianity – a vision of the Church more friendly to people, open to dialogue also with those who do not believe. How can we reach those now abandoning religion as something obsolete, delusive and harmful?

This is, as Fr. George F. McLean puts it, “to promote the work of the Holy Spirit at the roots of the secular culture in which all now live”. There is no other way to promote the task of evangelization not only to the Poor, but also to the Abandoned: to “those abandoning the Church, those

abandoned by the Church, and the totally unchurched”.² These are, as Pope Francis likes to repeat, our modern peripheries, waiting for the message of the Gospel.

“The Poor” today are especially those who have lost hope and meaning in their lives. Whoever loses hope, deprives himself or herself of the joy that gives us strength to live and work. The wisdom of the Bible reminds us of this: “Do not mourn or weep (...). Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Ne 8:9-10; NIV). The new evangelization is addressed to everyone, but above all, however, to those who lack the joy of faith, the light of hope and the feeling that their life has meaning. For this purpose one has to reengage lay people in the Church, to be able and willing to promote the work of the Spirit at the roots of the secular culture.

I also share the view that the most sensitive and difficult aspect of the present problem of faith in this secular age is the critical situation of the Church itself, to which I am going to devote a large portion of my reflections. In changing times one has to cooperate intensely in the transformative working of the Holy Spirit, looking not only to past experiences, but envisaging above all new challenges and possibilities. Already centuries ago human interests shifted from heavenly realities to this visible world in its development, and to human beings themselves at the center of history. The theocentric tradition has slowly given way to the anthropocentric vision in Western civilization. We speak today about an anthropological turn and a paradigm change in human thinking. The Gospel message and its values have lost their privileged position in human life.

The result of the new situation of humanity is **the emerging disjunction** between the intellectual, in large measure, traditional outlook of the Church and that of the people.³ No wonder many have been looking outside the Church for the spiritual meaning of life. The phenomenon of the new atheism has become again a new challenge for believers of different denominations and religions. This certainly requires also a new mode of guidance and functioning of the Church teaching office in the world, marked by a plurality of views and spiritualities.

This is the theological context in which the present book is going to seek in its kenotic and epicletic orientation for new modes of the presence of the Church in today’s world. The basic question is: What are the main concerns of faith in a secular age? Serious work lies before us to become in the new situation more effective bearers of the Gospel message. We have to proceed with the **search of the Spirit in his kenotic presence in the world**. This is the search for the ways of his patient and hidden working in the

² *Evangelization in a Secular Age*, in *Oblatio Studia 2: From the French Revolution to the New Evangelization*, ed. by Paweł Zajac, Rome: Oblate Studies and Research Office 2013, pp. 177-185, here 182.

³ See C. Taylor, J. Casanova and G.F. McLean (eds.), *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012.

hearts and minds of people. **God's Spirit with his creative inspiration is the great cry to be heard in the world.**

Speaking about the Holy Spirit should reckon with contemporary sensitivity which attaches much importance to inclusive language. I have decided to use the traditional form of the pronoun "he" without implying any gender specification. As transcendent and transsexual reality, God surpasses any gender difference existing in the created world.

My heart-felt thanks are due to Ronald E. Day from Philadelphia for reading the manuscript and brushing up my English. I am very grateful for his friendly help. I also want to thank very warmly George McLean, who has accepted this book to be published by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

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Lublin, Poland
February, 2014*

Motto:

Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches
(Rv 2-3).

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.
(The II. Vatican Council, Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, par. 22).

CHAPTER I

WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is not easy today to proclaim to people the truth about God, “the Almighty Father, maker of heaven and earth, maker of all things, visible and invisible”, as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed puts it. Not easy is it also to speak about the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Even more difficult is it to transmit the faith in the Holy Spirit, whom Christians confess as “the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father”.¹ Unlike the person of the Son of God, the Holy Spirit has no human incarnation as his own attribute. His person has not revealed itself in human form. We depend on speaking about him only by means of symbols, metaphors and comparisons. The New Testament compares him with wind and fire (cf. Jn 3:8; Ac 2:2-3), or presents him like a dove, descending on Jesus (cf. Mk 1:10).

The Holy Spirit is the source of life – like air, light, water and warmth. The One who is everywhere present, who acts in human persons and in the world, remains invisible, imperceptible and evasive. He does not reveal his own face, but always points to the risen Christ and recalls him. In his overwhelming activity there is something of anonymity and disinterestedness. He expropriates somehow of himself, diminishes himself and hides his own face, in order to find himself even more present on the face of Christ and of people touched by his transforming power.

Only through an action of the Spirit in the depths of our being can we believe and confess our faith in the Triune God. The belief in the Holy Spirit is inseparable from the faith in the Father and the Son. We confess and worship him in connection with the Father and the Son. It is he who gives us participation in the divine life.

Believing in the Holy Spirit and in his life-giving action we can more deeply conceive of the mystery of the Church and its sacraments, and expect more consciously the resurrection and future life. Through our whole life we come closer, by the inspiration of the Spirit, to experience what is now still hidden in the mystery of the Church. We learn how to feel and appreciate in ourselves and in other people the spiritual beauty of transfiguration. The action and the beauty of the Spirit transform and rescue our humanity.

FAITH MEANS CONFIDENCE IN GOD

“We believe (*pisteuomen*) in one God”. These are, in the plural, the original words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol (381). The

¹ The words [“who proceeds from the Father], and the Son” (*Filioque*) were unilaterally added to the Symbol of the faith in the Western Church.

Christians of various western denominations prefer to confess more personally, in the singular form of “I believe”, their faith in the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This faith is transmitted as a divine gift from generation to generation in a church as communal environment. Therefore the Creed ends with the confession of faith in the existence of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in which the hope is alive for the final fulfillment of the history of creation in the new world of the resurrection. This confident faith is not only a question of an individual person, but above all a common good of the whole community. The confession of faith belongs to the church as a whole.

Because of the plural “we believe”, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed differs from the formula “I believe” (in the singular) of the so-called Apostolic Creed from the 4th century. In fact, each confession of faith in one’s own name (*credo*) is connected with the confession of faith of the whole Church (*pisteuomen, credimus*). Confessing my own faith I am guided by the faith of the entire community of believers. My personal faith becomes thus the faith of the Church confessed on earth, and not only now but throughout the centuries. Baptism creates a basic bond of unity among all Christians. When I confess the faith of the Church, I join all its witnesses, both those who are alive and those who have already departed.

The liturgical confession of faith is the Church’s answer to God who loves people and continually manifests his goodness. Confessing our faith we trust him as our Creator and Savior. This confidence in the same God creates a spiritual bond among all those who confess together their common faith. This bond has not been destroyed even by the centuries-long divisions among the churches, but unfortunately it can no longer find its visible expression. That is why all ecumenical efforts at reconciliation are an imperative contained in the very words “we believe in one God”, “we believe in one Church”.

The Latin tradition clearly distinguishes three aspects of an act of the faith. In their sequence each of them designates an intensification of personal commitment by a believing person: 1) to believe that God exists (*credere Deum*); 2) to believe God in what he says to people (*credere Deo*); 3) to believe in God, to confide ourselves to him (*credere in Deum*). The last aspect, inseparable from the previous two, is expressed by an intense personal commitment, full of trust and hope. It involves what is most important and existentially most meaningful. The call coming from God finds in faith our confident answer.

This is the very core of what we call today a dialogical concept of faith. We humans receive from God the gift of the ultimate meaning of our existence, which we are unable to give to our life by ourself. This gift is received not only intellectually, but our turning towards God implies the involvement of the whole human being with all the faculties of our human spirit and body. The ability to know and to love are then intertwined, and mutually condition each other. Faith unites mind, heart, will and emotions in the one act of trust in God. One can see therefore the whole unusualness

of faith that leads the human person beyond visible reality and directs him towards the invisible world.

In the Apostles' Creed this "I believe in God" (*credo in Deum*) appears exclusively in relation to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, but not as far as the Church is concerned: *credo Ecclesiam*, without "in". Instead the Greek text of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol uses the formula "we believe in" also with regard to the one Church: [*pisteuomen*] *eis mían...ekklesían*. The Greek wording has a larger denotation and indicates in a general way the object of the act of faith. The Latin translation of this Creed keeps the logic of its own tradition. The confession of faith concerns above all the very fact of the *existence* of the Church endowed with four fundamental attributes (*Et unam sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam*).

It is worth emphasizing once more this significant detail. The tradition expressed in Latin translations of the symbols of faith speaks about it as a confident act of trust only in relation to God alone. Only in him can one fully trust: the Father (*Credo in unum Deum, Patrem*), the Son (*et in unum Dominum, Iesum Christum*) and the Holy Spirit (*et in Spiritum Sanctum*). Only to his care can one commit the destiny of one's life. Everything else is deceptive, uncertain and precarious. The confession of faith concerning the Church is of a different character. It is difficult to find in the Latin tradition the qualification that would suggest an unconditional and limitless confidence in the Church in a sense as strong as trust in God himself. The words *credo in unum Deum* have no counterpart in the formulation *credo in ecclesiam*. There is only a confession *credo ecclesiam* which means "I believe that the Church exists". The further words describe this Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. These attributes, as we shall see later, indicate not only what comes from God, but also the historical task to be realized throughout the ages by succeeding generations.

Those striking nuances of meaning, so accurately, precisely and cautiously chosen in the Latin terminology of the Church Fathers and the symbols of the faith should make us think seriously about our faith. Owing to such nuances we can better understand that faith in God consists in committing to him with confidence the whole of our existence. I commit myself to God in the communion of the Church, thanks to her faith and hope which have come through centuries also to me personally. However, it is not the Church as such which is the ultimate addressee of my trust. It is only God himself. The mere experience teaches us, also in our days, that many become very much disappointed with the Church of sinful people. Yet, one cannot be let down and defeated in one's hopes by God. If I were disappointed with God, he will lead me once out of this erroneous supposition. He always remains the God who loves people (*Philanthropos*).

In the beautiful hymn *Te Deum laudamus*, "We praise Thee, O God", there is an unusually strong encouragement: "In Thee, O Lord, have I trusted; let me not be confounded forever" (*non confundar in aeternum*). Whoever has trusted in God will not be deceived, even if God proves true

very late indeed. God is stronger than our faith and hope. For not in vain has it been said: “God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (1 Jn 3:20; NIV).

OUR FAITH AS A CRY OF TRUST IN GOD

The divine reality is not directly accessible to our senses. It cannot be empirically proved nor deduced by purely logical methods. That is why the truths of faith confessed in the Creed, including the truths about the Holy Spirit, are by no means susceptible to any visual verification or concrete logical proofs. By this they differ from physical or mathematical truths in the natural sciences. Speaking in human terms we do not know what there is beyond the horizon of our immediate experience. The ultimate depth of the meta-empirical reality of God cannot be an ordinary object of our knowledge. God would otherwise be no God at all. He would only constitute a part of our visible reality, at the outmost a privileged being among other beings accessible to the human mind. We would reduce him to one of the dimensions of our multidimensional reality.

But as the tradition of apophatic or negative theology has taught for centuries, God is an infinite, incomprehensible, invisible, imperceptible, immense, unlimited reality which evades any definition, remains hidden, although omnipresent. As such it transcends any purely rational demonstration in philosophical terms. Our discursive reason does not reach so far, because it is bound by time and space. It is unable to prove in all evidence either that God exists or that he does not. Nobody has provided an irrefutable argument for his inexistence. On the other hand mere philosophical thinking can force no one to accept the existence of God.

On one side belief in God is no result of rational argumentation, but on the other, it is not an irrational feeling nor a decision of the will alone. It is above all an act of **rational trust by the human person endowed with intellect and heart**. We have good grounds to say: “We believe”, motivated by a justified confidence. This is our human YES before the invisible reality. Whoever believes is ready to commit hopefully his or her whole being to the incomprehensible Ultimate Ground of every being, called God. This rational trust is **the cry of our faith** directed to the Invisible. Although it is an act of mind, will and feelings, it does not exclude questions, doubts and searching for the final reasons of our commitment.

Each one of us experiences in some measure indecision, feelings of perplexity and hesitation. My own faith knows also its dark moments. That is why I often refer to the wise words of the apostle Paul: “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Co 13: 12; NIV). These are very encouraging words, and so dear to me. One can see in them an unavoidable tension between “now” and “then”. Even the greatest believers feel in their hearts the real difference between “already” and “not

yet”, which assumes sometimes a bitter taste of being at a distance from expected fulfillment.

Blessed are such moments of awakening of a real consciousness in believers! They teach us modesty, sobriety and a better understanding of those who are not able to believe. To my mind, there is more truth in such an awareness than in a thoughtless conviction that we have no difficulty at all, when we believe in God and in the life to come. A genuine faith demands sincerity, courage and honesty. I have to admit before myself that in my faith there is still much disbelief, shadow and darkness. Whoever has experienced much pain and disappointment in his or her life can be exposed to a risk of losing or at least diminishing the ability to trust in God and other people. Such a situation becomes itself **a cry for more confidence in the presence of the Holy Spirit**, the divine *Paraklētos*, the Comforter and Counselor called upon for help.

Christian faith is inconceivable without a difficult ability to confide in the stunning promises of God. The God of promises has been called “the God of hope” (Rm 15:13). Confidence and trust do not exclude the struggle of thoughts and questions within us. The mystery of God and the future life is greater than anything we can understand, imagine or have a presentiment of. No wonder we have moments of uncertainty and doubt. Such is the adventure of the road which leads where we have never been before. We are people of the road and not of the ultimate goal already achieved. Nothing can change this fact. That is why I think that doubts concerning God and the promise of everlasting life are a normal part of human destiny – a part of the experience shared by all of us in the consciousness of our contingency and limitations. Even the most sophisticated theological theories can be of no help.

Faith is not a vision nor knowledge. Concerning the ultimate destinies of humankind and the world we have to rely on the language of metaphors which give no easy access to the invisible reality. We have to confess our ignorance in this respect. “Learned ignorance” does not prevent faith and hope. On the contrary, it makes them even more necessary. After all, it is not complete ignorance, which would deprive you of the ability to orient yourself to the direction you are pursuing. The Christian Creed in which we confess our faith in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit fulfills in our life the role similar to that of a lighthouse. One has to have a permanent point of reference during a journey to avoid the serious danger of getting wrecked. A lighthouse helps sailors to choose a right direction and safely to reach a port of destination.

We believe in one God. This is the most ecumenical confession of the faith of all Christians. However, the confession of faith is not the faith itself but only its expression in certain formulas. Similarly we do not believe in the Bible but in the One to whom it gives witness. We do not believe in the Tradition itself either, but in the One to whom it witnesses from generation to generation. We do not believe in the Church as an institution and in its teaching office, but in the One whom the Church preaches to all

people of good will. Confessing together the apostolic faith we praise with joy the one and the same God who is the unique source of our life and of our hope.

Faith in one God has important consequences for our ethical behavior. It constitutes a counterweight to any form of cynicism and selfish interests, is a basic school of respect for durable spiritual values, and an effective help for the survival of humanity. A rationally justified trust in God excludes fanaticism in all its manifestations. It indicates a steady point of reference to what is truly fundamental. A belief in the transcendent reality arouses a feeling of responsibility before God and of freedom concerning everything that is relative and transient. It helps us to discover the way of hope and confidence in our everyday life. We know where this life leads us.

To a distrustful person it often seems that such good news about God is mostly improbable, simply unreal, too beautiful to be true, not corresponding to the dark realities of this world full of suffering and evil. Uttering the words “we believe”, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, we confess faith in God before whom we may nevertheless rejoice “with the joy given by the Holy Spirit” (1 Th 1:6) and sing, and be happy. It is also a God who has the face of a Child of Bethlehem, to whom we may easily do a wrong. It is a God of everlasting youth who continuously creates a world anew through the power of his creative Spirit; a God whom we may not receive and whom we may fail to notice in our life; the God from whom we may run away, but to whom we can always come back in humility and repentance, and for this it will never be too late. It is the God whom we can and should trust; the God who does not cry like an angry person; the God of silence who has spoken most loudly through his Son; the God of our thoughts, hearts, conscience, longing, hope and expectation; the God of our life and our death. It is the God of a helpless, seeking, asking, lost and suffering people; the God always greater and closer than he seems to us; the God of the world, of our earth, mountains, oceans, lakes, rivers, forests, human beings, animals and plants; the God of the first and the last human being; the God of all creation. It is the God of the disturbed world and divided Christianity; the God who comes to bring peace, mutual understanding and unity; the God of our everyday toil, work and “joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rm 14:17); the God of our celebration, and the God for all, the God truly ecumenical.

There is so much to be thankful for. Faith and thanksgiving go inseparably together. Through the Holy Spirit God is a living reality in our life, and Jesus Christ does not live only in the distant past.

PENTECOST AS AN EVENT TURNED TOWARDS THE FUTURE

God’s Spirit was present at the beginning of creation and will be present with all his transfiguring power also at the end of history. Among events accounted for in the New Testament and drawing attention to the

future is surely also the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It reveals something of the eternal plan of God who wants his Spirit to work in us, to urge us on and to create something new in the history of humanity. It is the Spirit of life, newness, courage and confidence. All he does is a sign of new life.

In the Gospel of John Jesus assured his disciples: “It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. (...) When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth” (Jn 16:7-8.13). In other words, the Spirit will open our eyes and reveal what is going to come.

Pentecost is the sign of growing maturity in our faith and hope. How daring and courageous is God! How courageous also is Jesus when he counts on our attention, our readiness to hear and follow the voice of the Spirit! To follow the inspiration of the Spirit means to be always searching and open to new possibilities.

To be close to the Spirit’s presence is to approach the divine fire and wind. No wonder the biblical account of the event of Pentecost uses such images and metaphors. Fire is a symbol of light, warmth, love, transformation and new life. Jesus said about himself: “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Lk 12:49). But the encounter with fire can also cause the pain of being separated from what is guilt, sin and evil, and what deserves judgment. The image of the wind points above all to our breath, “the inner wind”, a necessary condition to live. It also indicates that the power of the Spirit creates space for change and something new. The Spirit’s presence gives a new meaning and strength to our words, able to touch human hearts, to convince and to transform.

The event of Pentecost means a new exodus for humanity, the beginning of a pilgrim way toward ultimate fulfillment. The Spirit is our Guide into the future. What he has once begun he will bring to conclusion in the very end. **Pentecost is indeed turned towards the new world, unknown in its full shape to our eyes and to our present understanding.**

Intensive reflection on the presence and action of the Holy Spirit is an urgent task in this hour of history. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013) Pope Francis constantly emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church’s mission:

In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on *by the power of his Spirit*. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways. (...) This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task

so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life
(par. 12; italics are mine, W.H.).

The exhortation is due to “the promptings of the Holy Spirit who helps us together to read the signs of the times”. Such was the wish of the Synod of Bishops gathered from 7-28 October 2012. One has to “discern the paths of the Spirit” (45) and be “moved by the Spirit” (47; cf. 105). “Seeing reality with the eyes of faith, we cannot fail to acknowledge what the Holy Spirit is sowing” (68) to support the values of an authentic Christian humanism. And again about trust in the Spirit: “With the eyes of faith, we can see the light which the Holy Spirit always radiates in the midst of darkness, never forgetting that ‘where sin increased, grace has abounded all the more’ (*Rom 5:20*)” (84). It is “the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centredness cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God” (97). We all need a “docility to the Spirit” (171).

These are only some selected references to the Holy Spirit and his work that appear very often in the exhortation.² This means a lot also for human culture: “Whenever a community receives the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit enriches its culture with the transforming power of the Gospel. (...) In the Christian customs of an evangelized people, the Holy Spirit adorns the Church, showing her new aspects of revelation and giving her a new face” (116). More concretely: “He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God. The same Spirit is that harmony... It is he who brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony” (117; cf. 130,131). One has to trust in the Spirit and call upon him in prayer (145,146). In consequence “there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills. The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place” (280).

Who is that creative Spirit of God?

A DISCRETE FORMULA ON THE DIVINITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The striking fact is that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed does not define the Holy Spirit as God, although it does so explicitly concerning Jesus Christ. To express the faith in his divinity, it calls him the Lord in common with the Father and the Son. An additional confirmation of the faith in the divinity of the Spirit are the words of the Creed, that “together with the Father and the Son he is adored and glorified”.

² Besides paragraphs quoted here, see also the following: 112,119,126,128,132,135,139,148,151,152,154,162,164,178,197,199,225,230,233,246,254,259,261,272,279, 284, 287.

The formula about the equal adoration and glorification (Gr.: *homotimía*) suggests that the Spirit has the same nature as the Father and the Son. It was a specific equivalent of the Nicene term “one in substance” (*homooúsios*, consubstantial), which had been used earlier to express the truth about the divinity of the Son. The Fathers of the First Constantinopolitan Council (381) confined themselves, under the influence of the teaching of St Basil the Great, to the synonymous and more discrete formula suggesting the same adoration due to the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son. Using the equivalent expressions, they wanted to avoid unending controversies that were shaking the Church tens of years after the Council of Nicaea (325). The fear was strong then that an incautious formulation could possibly arouse anew sharp conflicts, this time concerning the Holy Spirit.

Such an approach we would call today a truly ecumenical one. It was at those times an expression of wise accommodation and reticence of the Church, of prudent preoccupation about the unity of Christians. The far-sighted aim was to gain those who were not openly opposing the teaching on the Holy Spirit, but in fact felt some resistance to calling him God consubstantial with the Father and the Son. The council used then on purpose an equivalent formula that acknowledged the same adoration and veneration as due to all persons of the Holy Trinity. One had to oppose on the one side the spread of the heresy of those who were denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit (pneumatomachians), and on the other side to strengthen Christians who were hesitating in their faith, and to solicit the return of those who went away from the Church. In this way early Christianity has decidedly proclaimed itself in favor of the teaching on the Holy Trinity.

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed expresses the belief that God’s Spirit who acts in human history is no impersonal power of God, nor only his personal nearness to people’s life, but truly a Divine Person, like the Son of God made man in Jesus Christ. Early generations of Christians saw a close link between Christ and the Holy Spirit. They believed that the same Spirit who had appeared already at the very beginnings of the world’s creation (cf. Gn 1.2) and who spoke through the prophets, was also the author of the new beginning of the history of humankind in the incarnation of the Son of God (cf. Lc 1:35). They believed that this Spirit “rested” on Jesus (Jn 1:32) during his baptism in the river Jordan and was present in his earthly mission. They also believed that “Christ...offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14), and that he was that Spirit of God “who raised Jesus from the dead” (Rm 8:11). Before his death Jesus assured his disciples: “I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate (*Paráklētos!*) to be with you forever” (Jn 14:16), “the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father” (Jn 15:26). It is this Spirit of truth who will lead people “to the complete truth” (Jn 16:13).

The words of the Creed about the issuing of the Spirit from the Father are a clear parallel to the confession of faith in the Son. When the fathers of the First Constantinopolitan Council confessed that the Son had

been begotten from the Father, they wanted to say that he had not been made in the same way as other created beings. In turn, when they confess that the Spirit proceeds from the Father, they justly affirm that he is no creature but the Divine Person. In this way the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol transmits the discrete confession of faith in the divinity of the Holy Spirit, in agreement with the subsequent statement of this symbol that he “spoke through the prophets”.

THE LORD, THE GIVER OF LIFE

The event announced by Jesus of the descent of the Holy Spirit as a gift of the end times has confirmed and deepened the conviction that this Spirit is precisely the source of life in the Church, the giver of faith and various gifts (cf. 1 Co 12:3-13). It is he who leads the world to its ultimate fulfillment in God. The different gifts of the Spirit are offered to people for the common good of the Church and her mission in the world. They should never become the cause of division and dissension. People regenerated and initially transfigured by the Spirit already now become, thanks to the resurrection of Christ, the beginning of the new world. With the whole creation “all of us who possess the first fruits of the Spirit, we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free” (Rm 8:23). There is a clear promise that God “will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you” (Rm 8:11), whom the Creed rightly calls “the Lord, the giver of life”. It will happen in the day of our resurrection which in fact begins for every one of us already at the moment of our death when we receive a new “spiritual body” (1 Co 15:44).

The supreme divine gift of initial creation and the final salvation and fulfillment comes, according to a traditional formula, “from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit”. The Spirit is present far and wide, in his own way, wherever the Father and the Son act, inside and outside the visible Church.

In this regard I often refer to the remarkable witness of Ambrosiaster, an anonymous author of the fourth century. He wrote: “whatever truth is said by anyone is said by the Holy Spirit” (*quidquid enim verum, a quocumque dicitur, a Sancto dicitur Spiritu*).³ This sentence was many times quoted in the works of Thomas Aquinas in a slightly modified form: “everything that is true, no matter by whom it is said, is from the Holy Spirit” (*omne verum, a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*).⁴ It is a very wise saying which could be referred not only to whatever is true, but also to what is good and beautiful. The Divine Paraclete is the inspirer of all good,

³ Ambrosiaster, *In Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios primam* 12,3. PL 17,245; CSEL 81/2, 132.

⁴ Cf. *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 172, a. 6, ad 1. During his time Thomas thought, with many other scholars, that the author of this saying was St Ambrose of Milan.

beauty, true knowledge and openness of the human spirit to God. He also reveals to humans the presence of God and leads everything to its final fulfilment.

I deeply believe he operates in all people, even in those who confess their unbelief in God. His Spirit is sovereign in all actions, and nobody can dispose of him by personally willing to do so. His presence and activity remain hidden and out of our sight. Not accidentally he is called a life-giving power of God, his Breath (cf. Jn 20:22), the Spirit of transforming love and liberating truth.

The sovereignty of the Spirit is the opposite of domination, which brings oppression and enslavement. It is not a Spirit who constrains and enslaves, but the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of freedom who radiates from the entire earthly mission of Jesus. The words and deeds of Jesus are for Christians an irreplaceable model of life which allows us to distinguish between what truly comes from the Spirit and what is only a human invention. We should never “suppress the Spirit” or “put out the Spirit’s fire”, but think before we do anything and “hold on to the good” (1 Th 5:19-21; JB, NIV). Nobody can refer to the Spirit while disregarding the Good News about Jesus. Any pious fanaticism, any false self-confidence and self-assertion in the faith, and any tendency to become an exclusive possessor of the Spirit openly contradicts the truth of the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit of God breathes whenever and wherever he wills. Confessing that he is “the Lord and the giver of life” we believe that his action liberates us to the true freedom of God’s children: “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Co 3:17). What is at stake is not only freedom from guilt, but also the freedom of life and activity linked with the feeling of their meaning, with joy, hope and thankfulness for the wonderful gift of existence which leads us to the final fulfilment. I can fully trust the Spirit in true freedom and commit my hope to his care.

The presence of God’s Spirit is always a gift to the human person, a gift which should be received with great confidence. No human can control him. Nobody can possess him as his or her own property. We can only invoke continuously his coming. A human person touched by the power of the Spirit and freed by him is able then to struggle with various forms of evil. He or she can look at the history of the whole of creation with different, i.e. transfigured eyes. We discover through faith the all embracing presence of God and of the gift of life in all living creatures to whom we owe respect and care. Belief in the Spirit as giver of life becomes an additional motif for Christians to care about the destiny of all creation, and especially for our closest environment, exposed today so often to the danger of brutal exploitation and destruction.

THE PEDAGOGY OF THE SPIRIT

The Christian is a person for whom Christ has become the principle and model of a new life (cf. Ph 1:21). It is the Holy Spirit who makes the

presence of Christ deeply permeate human existence. Thanks to the Spirit the Gospel of Jesus can transform our life, penetrate it to the very depth of our humanity, where the basic orientation of our personhood is inwardly crystallized. This inner process can be called interiorization, touching human “hearts” by divine grace. The Spirit is indeed the God of our innermost intimate depths. It is the same Spirit who, as the Apostle says, reaches “the depths of everything, even the depths of God” (1 Co 2:10).

Since the times of St Augustine the tradition of the Western Church willingly described the Spirit as “the inner Master” (*Magister internus*)⁵ who teaches, illuminates and transfigures the life of believers. It is also worth noting that the Syrian *Acts of Thomas* calls the Spirit “the great Pedagogue of faith”, “the Illuminator who urges us to come to know Christ, reveals the hidden treasures, gives light to those who dwell in darkness”.⁶ St Irenaeus of Lyons calls the Son and the Holy Spirit the two “hands of the Father”.⁷ Through both of them, as if by the two hands, the Father acts in the history of salvation. This early Church Father wrote in the 2nd century of the Christian era: “the Lord has entrusted to the Holy Spirit the human person – his belonging or good” (*commendante Domino Spiritui Sancto suum hominem*).⁸

A human being is a creature called into existence by the Divine Logos, and therefore belongs to him as his own good and possession. Hence the surprising expression *suum hominem* – his own good, which means his belonging to Christ.

The risen Christ sends to our world the Holy Spirit. Therefore Pentecost appears as the fulfilment of the incarnation of the Son of God, whose salvific work becomes then accessible to all human generations and to every individual human person. Invoked in the **epiclesis** of the praying church, the Holy Spirit transforms the Eucharistic gifts into the Body and the Blood of Christ in order to unite in him all who receive them. This mystery is the most profound reason for the epicletic nature of the Church. The descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost opens the era of a new presence of God in the history of humanity. Each Divine Person fully participates in the whole economy of salvation. The distinction of persons does not diminish their proper action, but admits only a difference in the mode of this action. Everything comes from the Father who is its principle and final goal, but everything is performed by the action of the other two Divine Persons.

⁵ Cf. Augustine, *De Magistro* XI,36-XIV,46. PL 32,1215-1220; *Sermo* 179,1. PL 38,966. For St Ignatius of Antioch this “inner Master” is Christ himself. See *Ad Ephesios* 15,2. SCh 10, p.7.

⁶ *Acta syr. Thomae*, 121,157, in *Acta apocrypha* II,2, Leipzig 1903, 231, 267.

⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. haereses* IV. Pref., 4. SCh 100, s. 390; V,6,1; V, 28, 4. SCh 153, s. 72, 360

⁸ *Ibidem*, III,17,3. SCh 211,336.

For this reason Christian spirituality has a Trinitarian character. We adore, praise and glorify the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Our services begin in the name of the Holy Trinity and end with the blessing of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Praising God and giving him thanks for his wonderful works are the basic dimensions of Christian prayer. The church asks also the Father to constantly send the Holy Spirit on all areas of her life, so that he can strengthen all in unity and renew the face of the earth.

A comforting and encouraging fact is that Christian churches have discovered the epicletic dimension of their life. It was not so in the past when the invocation of the Holy Spirit was rather a rare phenomenon in the Western tradition. The spirituality of the epiclesis deepens the feeling of permanent dependence upon God's Spirit. It teaches us to live in an epicletic atmosphere, in the consciousness of our inner poverty and insufficiency. The epiclesis, as we shall see, is an invoking of the Spirit from the depths of our being, a cry addressed to him to transform everything, which still awaits a radical improvement.

A remarkable fact is that the apostle Paul links the origin of the human person as God's work of "a new creation" (2 Co 5:17) with the Passover of Christ. The paschal mystery is the beginning of a new, personal mode of presence and communication of the Holy Spirit to humanity. It is impossible to suppose that the salvific mystery of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, and the descent of the Spirit have not brought into the world anything new, and have not changed anything. This newness consists in the very fact that the mission of the two Divine Persons is then fulfilled in the innermost recesses of the human heart and in freedom with greater distinctness and urgency. Of course, it is not yet the full and ultimate gift, but nevertheless a real one. The Bible calls it a gift of being the children of God, and of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (cf. Ga 4:6), who truly "has made his home" and his "temple" in us (Rm 8:9.11; 1 Co 3:16; 6:19). The Spirit is with us and in us (cf. Jn 14:17), which is also true of Christ who lives in our hearts (cf. Ep 3:17). Thanks to Christ and the Holy Spirit we become participants in the life of the triune God (cf. 2 P 1:4).

The concept of the indwelling in human hearts expresses a certain stability, a state of nearness and communion. It means something more than a mere presence. Therefore, it is not a mere breathing which passes or a momentary inspiration, as the analogy with the wind used by Jesus (cf. Jn 3:8) might suggest. The question is rather about the state of **being filled with the Spirit**. Christians take part in that reality which primarily was shared by Christ himself, "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Lk 4:1). They can also become "filled with the Spirit" (Ac 6:3.5; 7:55; 11:24). The evangelist Luke often speaks about people "filled with the Holy Spirit" or "full of the Holy Spirit" (Lk 1:15.41.67; Ac 2:4; 4:8.31; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9.52). These witnesses tell us that God is as present and as close to us as is the Spirit, in the Spirit and through the Spirit. The risen Christ as the Lord (*Kyrios*) also "is the Spirit" (2 Co 3:17) and acts as "a life-giving spirit" (1 Co 15:45).

THE REVEALER OF THE DIVINE BEAUTY, TENDERNESS AND WISDOM

The beauty of transfiguration comes from the Holy Spirit. Our humanity, touched by the transforming grace of the Spirit, bears on it an eschatological trait, because it allows us to have a presentiment of the reality and beauty of God's world. The Holy Spirit is the revealer of the divine beauty. Human spirituality seems to be nothing else than our spiritual countenance, our inner beauty, our life submitted and entrusted to the transfiguring power of the Spirit. Thanks to the inner genuineness of our spiritual countenance, we somehow give to him our own face. On our own face is manifest, to some degree, the countenance of the Spirit. His beauty reaches the very depth of our humanity, where the human spirit meets the Holy Spirit and tends to come closer to the divine world. It is the beauty of a transfigured human heart.

There is yet another important aspect linked with the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. The Christian tradition emphasizes the truly motherly role of the Holy Spirit in human life. In his divine pedagogy he fulfills the role somewhat similar to the one realized in a child's life by a human mother. It is he who encourages us to address God and cry out to him "Abba, Father" (Rm 8:15; Ga 4:6). He also reveals Jesus as the Lord: "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit" (1 Co 12:3). On the other hand the Spirit manifests Jesus to be "the eldest of many brothers" [and sisters!] (Rm 8:29).

This pedagogy of the Spirit extends to all life as an everyday presence and intimate permeating of the recesses and secrets of the human spirit. Here one can see a close link between the patristic concept of "the inner Master" and the pedagogy of the Spirit. This is not only about his purely intellectual influence, but about his fully personal action, embracing the whole human being which transforms us from the inside. One can compare this action to the intimate influence of a human mother on the consciousness of her child. The figure of a dove coming down on Jesus when he was baptized in the Jordan is a symbol of what gives life, what is female and motherly, a symbol of love and peace.

The Hebrew Bible sometimes identifies God's Spirit with Wisdom (cf. Ws 9:17), conceived of as a female reality: "She will come to meet him [the man who fears the Lord] like a mother, and like the wife of his youth she will welcome him" (Si 15:2). Some church Fathers before the First Council of Nicaea (325) clearly identified the Holy Spirit with Wisdom.⁹ The Syriac tradition linked the feminine and motherly features of God in a specific way with the Spirit. In the Hebrew and Syriac languages the very word "Spirit" (*Ru'ah, Ruho*) is feminine, and only exceptionally masculine.

⁹ See for example Irenaeus, *Demonstr.* 10. SCh 62, p. 46; Theophilus of Taniach, *Ad Autolyicum* I,7; II,15.

No wonder that in the area of Judeo-Christian and Syriac cultures one can find many eloquent examples of addressing the Holy Spirit as Mother.¹⁰

With the ancient Syriac authors the Spirit is shown as the Person who distinguishes herself unmistakably by feminine and maternal attributes. In the liturgical Syriac books the word "Spirit" appears as masculine, where the question is about the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Holy Trinity. This is certainly an expression of circumspection not to introduce the female element into the vision of the transcendent being of God. A significant fact is, however, that feminine gender appears in those cases when the liturgy points to the specific role of the Spirit concerning human persons: the Spirit speaks through the prophets, bears the neophytes by baptism, opens the gate of repentance to sinners, comforts the martyrs, prepares the crown of glory to conquerors and the righteous. This way the fact is emphasized that the Holy Spirit gives strength to the witnesses of the Gospel of Christ in the world, encourages and confirms them in confessing their faith. The words of the Spirit are then full of truly maternal tenderness. In the Syriac liturgy one can often find a comparison of the Spirit to a merciful Mother.¹¹

The Greek and Latin Fathers concentrated instead their attention on the problem of the procession of the Holy Spirit and had no interest in reflecting upon his maternal features, so much emphasized by the Syriac tradition. This fact reveals an impoverishing limitation of the subsequent tradition and makes us think. When one tradition appears in some respect poorer, another one should complement and enrich it to our common good.

THE SPIRIT "WHO SPOKE THROUGH THE PROPHETS"

These words of the Creed stress the continuity of experience of God's Spirit in the Old and the New Alliance. It is the same Spirit who was the inspiration for Israel's prophets and who also "rested" on Jesus of Nazareth. Under his inspiring breath the books of the Hebrew Bible and the writings of the New Testament came into existence. The prophets announced the coming of the Messiah, who would renew the face of the world in the end times. Christians believe that the promised Messiah is Jesus Christ, in whom the prophetic predictions have found their fulfillment. The God of the prophets is the same God as the Father of Jesus Christ. It is for being the prophet that "*God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power*" (Ac 10:38; cf. Is 61:1).

Thanks to this event the gift of prophesy has its continuation in the Church of Christ. It is still granted by God in various forms: in the courage to confess the faith in Jesus and to witness to the truth of the Gospel amid the most unfavorable circumstances, in the movements of Pentecostal and

¹⁰ See R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syrian Tradition*. Cambridge 1975, pp. 312-320: "The Holy Spirit as Mother".

¹¹ See E.P. Siman, *L'expérience de l'Esprit par l'Eglise d'après la tradition syrienne d'Antioche*. Paris 1971, pp. 155,211-212.

charismatic renewal, in the striving to overcome mistrust and division among denominations and religions. If need be, it is the Spirit who arouses “prophets” and “confessors” who help the Church to preserve the identity of the Gospel.

Throughout ages Christians condemned the Jews for not recognizing Jesus as Messiah and for not accepting the gift of redemption. In such a view the Church is considered to be the new People of God, while the Synagogue still persists blindfolded, awaiting the coming of the true Messiah. Accusing the Jews of blindness concerning the person of Jesus, Christians themselves were committing the sin of blindness and intransigence towards Judaism and the fates of Israel. A consequence of such attitudes was often recurring acts of enmity, hatred and aggression.

This is a very bitter lesson which reminds all Christians of the historical forgetfulness of the truth that the Spirit spoke through the Jewish prophets. We have been confessing this truth in the Creed for centuries. The cry of the Spirit should be heard in the face of such a sinful forgetfulness. This is also a real cry of the world to the Spirit of God who speaks also today through the suffering of many people.

The apostle Paul warned Christian Gentiles against the temptation to boast about their superiority in comparison to the Jews: “do not boast (...). If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. (...) Do not be arrogant, but be afraid” (Rm 11:18.20b; NIV). To reproach the Jews with blindness is a sign of pride and conceit, which have to be replaced by humility and an acknowledgement of one’s own faults.

How sadly does our Christian faith look for confrontation with the painful witnesses of history! In past centuries we did not give the Jewish people a good convincing reason to recognize more easily the face of Christ as Messiah through the brotherhood of faith and hope. How could they recognize messianic signs of a real renewal of the world? What happened in Christian Europe urges us to profound reflection and self-examination. It would be enough to mention the periods of persecution and coercion in the command: “be baptized or die!” Jews were ridiculed, stigmatized, condemned, expelled or killed. The spirit of rivalry and confrontation prevailed over the spirit of the Beatitudes. This has become a source of much human suffering. The consoling fact is that human history has not yet reached its end. God grants to all of us the blessed gift of time. It is a time given to experience the newness of life, brought to the world by Christ. He is himself, in the power of the Spirit, the supreme gift for the whole of humankind.

In this world God does not have his two or more Peoples. There is only one People of God, although still divided and at variance with each other, far from mutual reconciliation. The idea of substitution of the Old People by the New People is a serious historical misunderstanding and mistake. The theory of Israel’s rejection by God is even more erroneous. These are the products of a sick theological speculation, very deeply rooted

throughout the centuries in the consciousness of many Christians. The new theology of Judaism teaches today that the divine promises are indeed fulfilled in the People of the New Covenant, but the Church does not replace Israel. The New Covenant is the complement of the Old one, which does not lose however its meaning and destiny. The vitality and endurance of Judaism testifies that it is a permanent partner of Christianity in the dialogue. The Church cannot be regarded as the new Israel. Jesus did not want to replace the Old People with the New one.

The horrifying truth about the Holocaust has become in the 20th century the most serious warning against abusing the words of the blindness to the Synagogue, and the call to reflect upon the shortsightedness of Christians themselves. The truly evangelical life of the church itself should become the most effective encouragement to dialogue with Jews. One can still hope that dialogue on equal footing will lead sometime in the future to a deeper understanding of the messianic mission of Jesus. It is not a matter of conversion but of mutual enrichment of our religious experience. Judaism is a qualified partner of Christianity in this dialogue which may last to the end of time. The Beatitudes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount should determine the tone of this dialogue, make it possible and accompany it incessantly.

Let us hope that through this dialogue God's Spirit will draw closer to each other the two religions of the biblical faith. The task for both sides is to reflect carefully and respectfully on the eschatological hope of both Jews and Christians who await the forthcoming Kingdom of God. As people of this faith we can already now act together for the good of all people.

GOD'S SPIRIT SPEAKING ALSO THROUGH AN "ALIEN" DIVINER

Balaam, a priest-diviner from Mesopotamia is a fascinating mysterious figure in the biblical narratives. As somebody not belonging to the people of Israel, he delivered oracles inspired by God's Spirit. In this way he became an early prophetic 'outsider' obedient to the God of Israel. Although unjustly evaluated and judged, as we shall see, by the authors of the New Testament, he has become the most telling example of prophetic predictions coming from 'others', i.e. from foreigners and 'outsiders'. This is a striking witness of the sovereignty of God and his Spirit. To our astonishment we shall see that also today such figures prompt Christians to ask questions that we usually do not ask ourselves.

All the more it is worth listening to what the fascinating biblical narrative tells us about Balaam in the Book of Numbers (22:2–24:25). The event was vividly described in the form of a popular story or legendary etiology looking for causes of the actual condition then of the world.

Nevertheless, in such accounts an important religious truth is hidden, independent of their partly legendary character.¹²

Balak, the Moabite king, frightened by the steady progress of triumphant Israelites in the Trans-Jordan region, summoned Balaam through his officials to come and curse the dangerous invaders. He believed that a curse would help him defeat the stronger enemy. But Balaam rejected the invitation: “the Lord (YHWH) has refused to let me go with you” (Nb 22:13). Balak was not discouraged and sent a second invitation. Taught by God (in a dream?) he agreed to meet Balak. (According to another tradition which was inserted into the main narrative, on the way to the king, Balaam’s donkey was supposed to speak miraculously against this meeting; this tradition asserted that it was against the divine will that Balaam traveled to meet Balak, presumably in search of an honorarium). In fact, after performing a sacrificial rite the diviner delivered an oracle concerning Israel as a nation set apart by God for a special destiny and mission among the nations.

In spite of several efforts of the king to force Balaam to curse the Israelites, he blessed them on three separate occasions. He assured: “How can I curse whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced? (...) The Lord their God is with them” (Nb 23:8). So he uttered the third oracle when “**the Spirit of God came upon him**” (Nb 24:2). It was an occasion to praise God for what he did for the chosen people.

Very disappointed and angered, Balak ordered Balaam to go home, but he defied this order and delivered a fourth oracle, announcing that Israel would be victorious over Moab: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh; a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be dispossessed (...), while Israel does valiantly” (Nb 24:17-18).

This is considered to be a famous messianic text. The star and scepter are symbols of a royal dignity. The prophesy was understood to have been fulfilled at the time of David, who conquered both Moab and Edom (see 2 Sm 8:2.13-14). From the time of early Christianity, the words about the star and scepter of the ruler predicted by Barlaam were applied to “the son of David”, i.e. to Jesus himself, “the king of the Jews (Mt 2:2), whom the wise men from the east worshipped, led by a star.

This Mesopotamian seer and diviner remained an “alien” to the end. In a critical moment in the struggle between Israelites and Moabites, he uttered four times a real prophesy about the election and destiny of Israel, about its royal leader, and even about Jesus himself. He did not become a follower of the faith of those to whom he addressed his oracles, but returned to his native Mesopotamia.

¹² See inspiring reflections of Gerald O’Collins, SJ, *Salvation for All: God’s Other Peoples*, Oxford 2008, pp. 31-34, 203-204.

This figure not only shows that God bestows his gift of true predictions through ‘outsiders’, but, what is more, it reminds us that these oracles can in fact determine the course of the history of the chosen people itself. There is then no clear division between “the elect” and the “foreigners”, who have been included in the plan of salvation as a whole.

The way Balaam acted reminds us of the ecstatic prophets who were also **overcome by the divine Spirit** and prophesied as charismatic individuals (see 1 S 10:5-6,10-11; 19:20-24). The diviner from Mesopotamia spoke about himself in a similar way: “The oracle of Balaam (...), the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty.” (Nb 24:15-16; cf. 24:3-4). No wonder the “foreign” diviner was numbered among those prophets who predicted also the birth of Jesus Christ.

The long account of Balaam’s blessings and oracles found a wide resonance in other books of the Old Testament (see Dt 23:5-6; Jos 13:22; 24:9-10; Ne 13:2; Mi 6:5). A distorted image of his intentions can be seen, on the other hand, in some New Testament texts. He was unjustly accused of being avid for remuneration (2 P 2:15; cf. Nb 22:7) and profit (Jude 11), or of enticing the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols (Rv 2:14).

This was evidently against a clear witness of Balaam himself when he assured the servants of the king: “Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the Lord my God (Nb 22:18; NIV). The words about “the Lord *my God*” are very significant in this context. Where does the divergence between these evaluations come from? The answer lies in the fact that the New Testament authors interpreted Balaam’s behavior in light of the above-mentioned folk-story of his donkey (cf. Nb 22:21-35). In the light of this popular tradition he agreed to meet the king against the will of God, motivated only by his own desire of profit.¹³

These are unfair interpretations. The books of the Old Testament give witness that Israel’s God spoke and acted through this “foreign” diviner who was not his worshipper, even if he had called him “my God”. Since he offered sacrifices, we can regard him as a priest and prophet who proved faithful to the divine will and call. He truly exemplifies an “outsider” who can pronounce genuine prophesies. Here we can clearly see that the sovereign God’s Spirit can communicate true oracles and prophesies through “outsiders”, and this will not remain without influence in the history of the chosen people. There exists in reality only one great

¹³ For this reason also Thomas Aquinas followed the interpretation of the New Testament authors and listed Balaam among “the prophets of demons”, admitting nevertheless that sometimes they speak “through divine revelation”. STh II-II, q. 172, a.6 ad 1.

history of revelation and salvation, whose supreme Lord is the Creator and Savior himself.

THE HIDDEN PROPHETS AMONG THE “OUTSIDERS”

The narrative of Balaam enriches in many respects biblical reflection on the religious situation of those whom we consider “foreigners” and “outsiders”. Keeping this story in mind we can ask ourselves also today whether we are able to admit the possibility of a continuation of the prophetic activity among those who are not Christians and do not belong to any Church. This enigmatic, mysterious figure of ancient times encourages all of us to look for prophetic individuals in the modern world as well. There was no error on the part of St Augustine (354-430) when he detected “**the hidden saints**” (*sancti absconditi*) and “**prophets**” also among the Gentiles.¹⁴ His strong conviction was that the gift of prophesy had been granted by God to all nations (*omnibus gentibus dispensabatur prophetia*).¹⁵

These words bear evidence of the fact that God raised up prophets like Balaam not only during the time of the Old Testament. The prophetic gift has continued also after the coming of Christ. Early proofs were given in such cases as those of Caiaphas and Cornelius.

The high priest **Caiaphas** uttered, during the prosecution of Jesus, prophetic words whose true meaning he certainly did not understand at the time: “it is better for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to be destroyed”. A comment given by the Evangelist is very significant: “He did not speak in his own person, it was as high priest that he made this prophesy that Jesus was to die for the nation – and not for the nation only, but to gather together in unity the scattered children of God” (Jn 11:50-52). In other words, Caiaphas unconsciously delivered a very dramatic **prophesy concerning Jesus himself**.

The case of **Cornelius**, an upright and devout Roman centurion stationed in Caesarea, took place in a different setting. Not yet being a Christian, he received an important communication from God, who conveyed to him a very personal message. He was asked to invite Peter, lodging then in Jaffa, to come to his house. Taught by the vision he had seen and urged by the Spirit of God (cf. Ac 10:19) to go to Cornelius, he was able to change his own thinking about the salvation of the Gentiles and acknowledge its real universality: “God does not have favourites, but (...) anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Ac 10:34-35). And there happened something unexpected: “While Peter was still speaking the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners. Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter were all astonished that the gift of the Spirit should be poured out on the pagans too”

¹⁴ *Contra Faustum* XIX,2; *De catechizandis rudibus* XXII,40.

¹⁵ *In Joannem* IX,9.

(Ac 11:44-45). It is worth emphasizing in this context a clear, repeated **reference to the Holy Spirit.**

Such figures as these two mentioned above deserve careful consideration. They truly are “outsiders”, but at the same time they have shown an extraordinary significance for understanding the course of human history of salvation. Let us ask then, whether in our modern world there are also such people who, not being Christians, communicate prophetic words, sometimes even a bitter truth about ourselves. Personally I would think above all of a well-known figure such as the “Hindu saint” Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), of his evaluation of the Gospel of Jesus (especially of the Beatitudes) and of the life of Christians. Another case today would be the Dalai Lama (born 1936) and the beneficial influence of his views on many people around the world.

But perhaps one should go still further. Maybe the modern “masters of suspicion” and “apostles of atheism” also have something important to say to the Christians of our time. Their severe criticism of religion as an alienation of the human person (Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud) was aimed in fact at many distortions of the faith and deformed images of God. Nearly 50 years ago the Second Vatican Council explained in the constitution *Gaudium et spes* (par. 19) some reasons why atheism had become such a widespread phenomenon:

Yet believers themselves frequently bear some responsibility for this situation. For, taken as a whole, atheism is not a spontaneous development but stems from a variety of causes, including a critical reaction against religious beliefs, and in some places against the Christian religion in particular. Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral, or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion.

In these clear words the Council proposes an examination of conscience for believers¹⁶. By their shortcomings they have surely contributed to the criticism of those who are unable to believe.

One has to admit that there is something uncomfortable, but nevertheless truly prophetic in the role played by the thinkers who abidingly challenge the Christian faith. The Churches have often abused their authority over people. They have aroused the feelings of fear in the presence of a punishing God, the severe Judge of the world. The Almighty God of

¹⁶ *The Documents of Vatican II*. With notes and Comments by Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Authorities. Walter M. Abbot, S.J., General Editor, London, Dublin, Melbourne 1967, p. 217.

Christians frequently has the reputation of being the God of people in authority. To all the oppressed religion can easily become the only consolation and promise for happiness in heaven. The voice of the “negative prophesy” of the critics of religion, considered as a delusion which threatens the freedom and dignity of humans, should prompt Christians to self-critical reflection. It is a chance to purify our faith and liberate ourselves from various forms of self-deception.

These are open questions, perhaps even disquieting, which await an honest answer. They make us think seriously about the divine ways to reach people of different cultures and religions. Let us not be afraid of such issues, but rather appreciate them. Jesus himself asked questions too. A great strength is inherent in essential questions. The Gospel of John scrupulously notes the fact that the first words of Jesus were uttered in the form of a question: “What do you want?” (Jn 1:38). He also asked many questions during his public ministry. The last of them were personally addressed to Peter after his resurrection: “Do you love me?” (three times) and: “If I want him [John] to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” (Jn 21: 15-7.22-23; NIV). Difficult questions are also our own personal questions aroused by the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the innermost depths of our being.

The biblical case of Balaam should be an encouragement to view more positively all prophetic figures in the modern world. It seems to me that they fulfill, either consciously or unconsciously, some providential role in our human history and have prophetic messages to communicate to Christians. Their critical challenges can be treated as **an audible cry of the world, accompanied by the invisible, truly kenotic cry of the Spirit himself.**

THE SPIRIT’S PRESENCE IN HUMAN CULTURE

Where the Holy Spirit is, there is also a variety of gifts and all sorts of service to be done. The apostle Paul wrote to the community in Corinth: “The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose” (1 Co 12:7). Among many gifts he mentions also prophesy and “the gift of recognizing spirits” (v.10). In conclusion he says: “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, who distributes different gifts to different people just as he chooses” (v.11).

These words had been well understood by the first apostles of the Slav people, the two brothers Cyril and Methodius, architects of **a new religious culture in the lands of *Slavia christiana*** of those days. This was a culture marked by a broad breath of universalism and deep respect for diversity. The inspired insight of the two saint brothers had its main source in the experience of the mystery of Pentecost. That is why this culture concealed in itself something revolutionary, not understood by the uniformed western mentality of the 19th century. To appreciate appropriately the greatness of their work we needed in fact eleven centuries of maturing of ecclesiological consciousness in the western church. We are

finally ready to recognize the two brothers as co-patrons of Christian Europe. Their heritage has been affected by the destinies of a divided Christianity, and only now has it begun life anew. The two brothers themselves became living examples of the encounter of cultures and traditions in the one church.

The activity of the Spirit transcends institutional boundaries in the church. It permeates the lives of all people without exception, including the lives of those who are outside the visible limits of the church. It applies to the area of **human creativity and culture** in their different manifestations. Since Pentecost the history of the world has reached its last epoch. Some evil things described in the Old Testament, as St Paul explains, “were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Co 10:11; NIV). The history of the church is a time of formation for the kingdom of the world to come.

Nothing is alien and strange to Christ and to the Holy Spirit. Nothing remains outside the extent of their all-embracing action. Human creators co-operate with the Spirit, the divine Creator. In its highest achievements **human culture** becomes already now, as we shall see later in our reflections, **a visible icon of the invisible Spirit**, a manifestation of the power of Incarnation and Pentecost in the world. Having “the pledge of the Spirit” (2 Co 1:22; 5:5), Christians perceive the religious meaning of every genuine creativity which brings the human spirit closer to the kingdom of truth, goodness and beauty.

Human culture and earthly creativity conceal in themselves the promise of the ultimate transformation of everything by the power of God’s Spirit. The gift of the Spirit announces the final transfiguration of the whole cosmos. Only the ultimate fullness and beauty of the transfigured creation will unveil the personal countenance of the Spirit, shining then in the multiplicity of transfigured human faces.

The Spirit acts already now through temporary human history and prepares the coming of the kingdom of God. To invoke the Spirit means to invoke the coming of the kingdom of beauty, good and truth. That is why the invocation of the Spirit, the Creator, is an eschatological epiclesis. The history of the world should at once and finally become the everlasting history of a new heaven and a new earth. Christian hope is not separate from the destinies of the whole creation.

INVOKING THE SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit dwells in people in a way proper to him, not excluding however the presence of the other divine Persons. This personal, sanctifying and transfiguring indwelling is his particular attribute. It is he who unites us with the Father and the Son. He wants to transform our humanity according to the image of Christ himself. One can say that he is for us a personal source of the process of penetrating in the depth of our being, like oil which symbolizes his delicate and healing action.

The realism of the incarnation means that the incarnate Logos of God has personally entered into the history of salvation. So also the descent and activity of the Holy Spirit in the world has a fully personal character. Under the influence of the Spirit human persons open themselves to the mystery of the triune God. The common action of the divine Persons in the created world does not exclude personal differentiation in the way of their acting, which is often called grace.

The discourse about **grace** may, however, present a danger in objectifying God's most admirable personal gift. The very concept of grace should not be separated from the personal presence and action of the Holy Spirit. The eastern tradition most often speaks simply of "the grace of the Holy Spirit", i.e. of the uncreated grace, being the Spirit himself. The gift of the Spirit always has an eschatological character. During this life it is only "the seal of the Holy Spirit of the Promise, the pledge of our inheritance" (Ep 1:13-14). The apostle Paul speaks about "**the first-fruits of the Spirit**" (Rm 8:23) in us, and about "the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Co 1:22; 5:5; NIV). Our participation in the divine life here on earth is always imperfect and incomplete. Experiencing the fullness of the presence of the Spirit belongs to the life of the coming world.

The Holy Spirit gives to us the ability to transcend ourselves and remain open heavenward. Although transcendent and sovereign, he is present in every human being. Transcendence and immanence do not exclude each other. There is no contradiction between them. Through one's very existence, even if fallen and miserable, each person can constantly invoke the Creator, often without being aware of it. I am inclined to think that there exists a special sort of **ontological epiclesis**, i.e. a voiceless and wordless invocation, but an equally real one. As epicletic beings, humans are able to call God's Spirit 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 become such dramatic callings. No human being can clearly identify the voice of this wordless and voiceless call. This is only the privilege of 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 Christian faith identifies with the voice of the Holy Spirit.

A human life, even in a state of fall and guilt, is an expectation of the divine Spirit, an invocation which manifests itself by an unconscious longing for belonging, beauty, good, harmony and peace. Without the presence of the Spirit, human life easily becomes prematurely burnt out, wasted, confused and complicated. It finally destroys itself and casts its shadow on the lives of many other people.

Our human life itself is a constant cry to God, an invocation of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life. It is a universal cry of the whole world, of all creation.

CHAPTER II

IN SEARCH FOR A VISION OF THE KENOTIC GOD

In past decades much has been said and written in different countries about the crisis of faith in God. In fact this is no new phenomenon. What is called the “God-crisis” (*die Gotteskrise*) had its origin in some unsolved problems in theological and philosophical reflection of the 18th–19th centuries. The history of this crisis goes back to often vehement controversies and debates that took place in that period of time. Their subject was pantheism, atheism and theism (Friedrich H. Jacobi, Moses Mendelssohn, Johann G. Fichte, Friedrich W. J. Schelling, Immanuel Kant).¹ Theologians were not able to think about God in such a way that he could be shown both as a personal reality and, at the same time, in his close connection with the world.²

It seems that until today theology has not been able to cope successfully with this issue in confrontation with modern philosophy. Here lie also some deep roots of the present crisis of the faith in God.³ In the face of a “new atheism”, a serious question arises concerning the possibility of a new thinking about God today. Faith in God has come again under powerful philosophical criticism. It has to face more and more the challenges of modern times and new experiences of the world by many people. The modern mentality has been strongly influenced by the Enlightenment period. How can we reasonably speak about God today? What does it mean to be in search for a vision of the kenotic God?

THE “SECOND NAIVETY”

In this context one central question is: how seriously can believers take the more or less archaic narratives of the Bible? What of importance do these narratives say for the shaping of our consciously religious life today? Some theologians answer briefly: we have to pass through a “**second**

¹ Cf. Józef Piórczyński, *Spór o rzeczy boskie (Dispute about Divine Things)*, Łódź 2012. The author evaluates the so-called “Streit um die göttlichen Dinge” in German philosophy with special reference to Schelling and Jacobi. In this controversy an important role was assigned to the views of a Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677).

² See Peter Strasser, *Der Gott aller Menschen. Eine philosophische Grenzüberschreitung*, Graz 2002.

³ See Klaus Müller, *Glauben, Fragen, Denken*. Bd. III: *Selbstbeziehung und Gottesfrage*, Münster 2010.

naivety.⁴ This concept was first introduced by a Catholic existentialist philosopher Peter Wust (1884-1940) in his work *Naivität und Pietät* (Tübingen 1925).⁵ Shortly later it was Max Scheler (1874-1928) who worked on it as well.⁶ After many years the concept of a “second naivety” has become a commonly accepted hermeneutical principle, i.e. one of the basic rules of understanding and interpretation. This happened in large measure thanks to the contribution of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005).⁷

What does this “second naivety” mean? What purpose does it serve? In short one may say the following: It consists not only in the very fact of narrating various stories, but also in showing the ways in which they came to be and are still narrated, and how they should be understood. Those who read or hear such stories should have the possibility of being involved in what is narrated, to assume their own freely chosen attitude towards it and to participate actively in the search for truth. The question is then not only the moral side of the message but a real participation in finding the truth and putting it into practice.

How to apply these principles of understanding in concrete situations? The Holy Scriptures are at first critically read, historically analyzed and evaluated in their literary character as historical narration or as myth, legend and poetry. One tries to establish their historical contents. Then these narratives are read again, **as if** the events they report truly happened. For this reason one speaks about the “second naivety” which substitutes the first one, which did not care about asking such critical questions at all. Many passages of the Bible of which one is sure that they do not convey anything or only little of the historically reliable information concerning past events, are **theologically treated as if they were real events**. There is something astonishing in this “as if” approach.

To make the issue clearer the exegetes point to the fact that some important parts of the Gospels are, from a literary point of view, theological

⁴ See Klaus Müller, *Streit um Gott. Politik, Poesie und Philosophie im Ringen um das wahre Gottesbild*, Regensburg 2006.

⁵ See P. Wust, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Vernekeohl, 10 volumes. Münster: Regensberg-Verlag, 1963-1969; *Naivität und Pietät* in volume 2, Münster 1964.

⁶ See M. Scheller, *Der Mensch im Weltalter des Ausgleichs*, in id., *Philosophische Weltanschauung*, München 1968.

⁷ See P. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970 (the original published in 1965); id, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde, trans. Willis Domingo et al. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974 (1969); *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian Press, 1976; *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980; *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed., trans. John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

narratives of a fictitious nature. A typical example is the stories of Jesus' childhood.

Let us briefly illustrate the case with the historic figure of King Herod in the Gospel of Matthew. This drastic example may help us to understand the basic intent of those who speak about the "second naivety". The historic-critical exegesis has reached wide agreement that the murder of infants in Bethlehem cannot be considered as a historical fact. One has to admit that the biblical account is a right description of Herod's personality, confirmed also by non-biblical sources. In the eyes of the population he was a very much disliked despot, prone to blind attacks of madness which did not spare anybody. Suspecting conspiracy against him, he sentenced to death even his three sons (around 7 before Christ). Human memory retained for a long time such an atrocity.

In the Near East Herod was well known. So it was easy to connect with his name also "the murder of the innocents" of Bethlehem. The pathological king could have for this behavior well determined motifs as a person possessed by greed for power and fear of losing it. The historical nativity of Jesus should be *theologically understood as a symbol* of a new life given by God, a life not dominated by fear of death. In this perspective the historical figure of Herod was good material for a contrast with the Gospel image of the Savior who brings hope for a new life. The biblical account was then shaped in such a way as to achieve convincing *theological* depth intended by the Evangelist. The story of the massacre of children by Herod was to visualize the alternative between Jesus and the kingly despot. It was additionally enriched by the episode describing the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. In this light one could then read the wonderful rescue of the infant Moses as the prototype of the destiny of the child Jesus, the new Moses who will announce from another mount a new religious Law, another Torah proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount.⁸

The concept of the "second naivety" applies also to other narratives of the Old Testament which have no historical or archeological confirmation. Many specialists in historical and critical research emphasize today that different stories of exodus, departure and settlement (Abraham, Moses, Joshua) had another temporal course than that described in the Old Testament. A striking example would be what is known as the marvelous Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. One has established that in fact never did the entire people flee from the Egyptian Pharaoh. According to some available historical or archeological traces, also the conquest of Canaan land was not a violent invasion, but a slow permeating of nomadic tribes into the settlements of the local population living there, in the rhythm of the yearly change of pastures.

⁸ In his book *Jesus von Nazareth – Der Prolog – Die Kindheitsgeschichten* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag 2012), Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI critically evaluated this approach and defended the historical character of biblical narratives about the childhood of Jesus.

According to the Old Testament chronology the twelve tribes of Israel should have conquered Canaan about 1200 before Christ. At that time, however, some main cities of this region were long ago uninhabited. There was no need for Joshua to destroy the walls of Jericho (cf. Jos 6), because they were already in ruins. Besides, it is improbable that the wandering nomads would have been able to kill each time half of the population of the conquered cities. According to a new hypothesis, some groups identified later as the Israelites settled for a long time in the mountainous region of Canaan. This was made easier in a time of crisis for urban culture (about 1250 before Christ) caused especially by periods of drought and earthquakes. Our image of history and of the development of the concept of God has therefore to be significantly corrected⁹.

Reading scriptural narratives, one somehow is caught up in such biblical dramas, and this was precisely the intention of such **theological “as if” accounts**. They are rightly called “theo-poetics” (in Greek *poieîn* means to do, to create, to be active). The reader or listener can in this way experience such biblical narratives as true, although in fact the events they describe never took place. This can be seen above all in the case of biblical texts which show God as commanding the Israelites to use violence and to kill people during the conquest of the Promised Land.

IS BELIEF IN ONE GOD A SOURCE OF VIOLENCE?

After the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, a debate intensified over the question of whether the search for the true and only one God had been the cause of violence. Already before this date the belief in the one God in different religions was strongly criticized. In 1998 a prominent Egyptologist, Jan Assmann from Heidelberg, launched his thesis that religious monotheism had brought violence into human existence. It was the result of a mosaic distinction between what is true and false, pure and impure. YHWH is the only true God. All other gods are sheer idols destined for extermination. In consequence people started to struggle for the one and true God using also bodily force on those who did not know or did not recognize this God.¹⁰ Should then violence be the price of monotheism? This view was then adopted and developed by others.¹¹ It has become one of the atheist objections to monotheistic religions and their

⁹ See for example the important contributions of an archeologist Detlef Jericke and an Old Testament specialist Othmar Keel in the periodical “Welt und Umwelt der Bibel” No. 3, 2008.

¹⁰ J. Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter*, München 1998. The author is known as “der bekennende evangelische Christ”

¹¹ See the views of a philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, *Gottes Eifer. Vom Kampf der drei Monotheismen*, Frankfurt/M. 2007 and sociologist Ulrich Beck, *Die Individualisierung der Religion und der ‚Geist‘ der Weltgesellschaft*, Frankfurt/M. 2008.

claim of possessing the truth, which in turn leads to intolerance, unrest and violence. Some Old Testament texts speaking about the violent extermination of the inhabitants of Canaan by order of YHWH were recalled to support this point of view.

Similar generalizations about the monotheistic inclination towards violence are unjustifiable and unsustainable. Polytheism in its various forms was in fact not so tolerant and peaceful as it was often considered to be. It has on its account human victims and doubtful ritualistic practices. Different myths show how many deities fought continuous wars among themselves both in heavenly spheres and on earth. Only monotheism was in a position to criticize and demythologize all these too human presentations, transferred from earthly rulers to the wars of deities themselves. In this respect the criticism performed by the prophets in the Old/First Testament was already a milestone on the way to the humanization of faith and the religious consciousness of people. In light of the monotheistic universalism all people are created in the image and likeness of God who is good and merciful to all.

In this context one has to mention a significant change in the attitude of Jan Assmann during a debate between him (as guest of “Theologischen Kurse” in Vienna) and a theologian Jan-Heiner Tück on truth, violence and other radical claims of religions. The Egyptologist has admitted that a humanizing reading of the holy texts of all religions is possible without rejecting their own claim to the truth. Tück proposed to him the sort of reading of biblical traditions that link the concept of God not to violence, but to a prophetic criticism of violence and a compassion for those who suffer. The biblical God is no “apathetic God”, indifferent to human suffering, misery and oppression. On the contrary: Israel’s God is very sensitive to the destiny of people. Already this points to the forthcoming attitude of Jesus marked by God’s real compassion as opposite to his indifference or violence.¹²

A humanizing view of one’s faith consists precisely in looking at reality through the eyes of others, i.e. being sensitive to their situation. Assmann has agreed that this is an imperative of the hour in order to humanize religion. On this ground he would therefore change or even revoke his criticism of monotheism. A great opportunity for religion is to exercise its powerful influence by rejecting violence. Any sort of thinking about human relationships in categories of “friend” and “foe” can easily lead to sheer violence. The Bible says that “God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (Dt 4:24) who demands a human decision for or against him. The representation of his judgment over the nations and of a necessary punishment of his enemies can also easily lead to the temptation of a “total religion” which wants to impose an obligatory truth upon all.

¹² See Henning Klungen, *Wie gewalttätig ist der Monotheismus?*, “Christ in der Gegenwart” 64 (2012) Nr. 30, p. 334.

From a Christian point of view one has to emphasize that Jesus' teaching and example exclude any use of violence. He proclaimed the coming of the messianic kingdom of peace. In the Sermon on the Mount he blessed "the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9), called us to resign from the use of violence, to love our enemies and to pray for our persecutors (cf. Mt 5:39.43-44). When his disciples wanted to punish with heavenly fire an inhospitable Samaritan village where people did not receive them, he "turned and rebuked them". Some ancient manuscripts (codices) add here the very strong words of the Master: "You do not know whose spirit you are. The Son of Man has not come to destroy the souls of people but to save" (Lk 9:54-56; see the Greek text ad locum).

Recalling the limitless mercy of God, Jesus laid in this way the foundations for a culture of forgiveness that does not pay back evil for evil but breaks down the spiral of violence and counter-violence. Dying on the cross he prayed for his adversaries: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). This attitude was later imitated by early Christian martyrs, victims of violence, often called "atheists" because they did not want to venerate pagan gods and recognize the divine dignity of the emperor.

Many church Fathers also emphasized the need to resign from any violence. A significant means against the use of it was the effort to explain and to understand correctly the Holy Scriptures. Special merit in this respect is due to Origen (ca. 185-254), who used to draw attention to the existence of a manifold sense of biblical texts. According to him, every reasonably thinking believer can detect many narratives in the Bible that claim to recount real events but which in fact never took place.¹³ This principle was already present at that time as a remarkable example of the art of interpretation which we call today hermeneutics.

There exists among Christians also today a tendency towards a literal understanding of the Bible as the infallible word of God. For many the dilemma begins when they become aware that some biblical narratives put them in a situation of inner contradiction. The God of the Hebrew Bible is the God of the Covenant which concludes with the Israelites on Mount Sinai. One of the ten commandments forbids categorically: "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13). Instead quite a number of biblical texts describe terrible cruelties committed during the conquest of the Promised Land, supposedly on the order of God himself. These are terrifying and bloody stories about the death of the Canaanites and total destruction of their cities: "And you shall destroy all the peoples that the Lord (YHWH) your God will give over to you, your eye shall not pity them..." (Dt 7:16). And one more quotation: "And when the Lord your God gives it [a city] into your hand you shall put all its males to the sword, but the women and the little ones, the cattle, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourselves; and you shall enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the Lord

¹³ See Origen, *De principiis* IV,3,1.

your God has given you” (Dt 20:13-14).¹⁴ Even animals shared the same miserable destiny as the people (cf. 1 S 15:3).

God who commands atrocities, orders to kill also innocent children and women – how to reconcile this with the prohibition of murdering from Sinai? Some biblical scholars tried to explain long ago that the facts suggested in some statements similar to those quoted above had never taken place. They are simply an expression of later interpretations conceived of as some sort of a heroic national epos. Besides, one has to add that the Semitic mentality used to ascribe everything that happens to God as its first and ultimate cause, omitting secondary and purely human causes.

That is why I often go back to Origen and re-read his wise words from his commentary on the Book of Leviticus. This rereading helps us to understand why he encouraged us to discover a spiritual understanding (*spiritualis intelligentia*) of the Scriptures, in his conviction that the letter of the Bible could even kill our faith. How to interpret then those cruel texts from the historical books of the Old Testament? Origen’s answer is very convincing: if we stick to the letter (*si vero adsideamus litterae*), it will appear that the Gentiles have been in many respects more noble-minded than those to whom the revelation of God had been entrusted: “I am ashamed to say and admit that God has given such laws (*erubesco dicere et confiteri quia tales leges dederit Deus*). For then more dignified and more reasonable will prove to be human laws (*magis elegantes et rationabiles hominum leges*), for example those of Romans, Athenians, Lacedemonians”.¹⁵

So Origen has formulated an important hermeneutical advice that we should not follow a literal interpretation. Whoever wants to interpret the cruel orders of God literally should feel ashamed to see much the more noble attitudes of the Gentiles. It is a clear sign that the authors of some biblical texts were not able yet to understand properly God’s revelation and his intentions. They expressed their own feelings, legitimizing in this way their earthly interests and ambitions. It was Jesus who revealed, through his life, death and resurrection, the true face of God as the merciful Father of all people. This could not be done in such measure by some great Old Testament figures like Abraham, Moses and prophets.

One has also to take into account the long development of faith in the one God YHWH and the process of purification of its understanding. In many places of the Old Testament YHWH appears at the beginning indeed as “the Lord of hosts”¹⁶ who has the traits of the tribal God of war. At the end of this striking historical development he has become the one and only true God. So the perception of the biblical God YHWH manifests a complex

¹⁴ See also Nb 21:2; Dt 2:31-35; Jos 10:40.

¹⁵ Origen, *In Leviticum hom.* VII,5. SCh 286, p. 340.

¹⁶ See for example 1 S 1:3.11; 4:4; 15:2; 17:45; 2 S 5:10; 6:2.18; 7:8.26.27.

human history of revelation, a religious evolution which has enabled people to gain new insights and change their understanding of God.

We are not obliged to believe that the true and merciful God commanded Israelites to use violence and kill people in different circumstances (cf. also Ex 22:17; Lv 20:9-17). What is needed is a new interpretation of some dark texts of the Old Testament. This would apply also to some Revenge Psalms. A better knowledge of human nature and our wounded feelings would help us to understand that a person can be led by others to such an awesome situation that he or she may curse them and pray to God for the destruction of their worst enemies. One may see in such texts at least a human readiness to resign from one's own vengeance and rather to expect ultimate justice only from God.

The International Theological Commission approved on 6 December 2013 the text, entitled "*God the Trinity and the Unity of Humanity: Christian Monotheism and Its Opposition to Violence*". According to this document, the Christian faith, in fact, sees the incitement of violence in the name of God as the greatest corruption of religion. Inter-religious wars and also wars in the name of religion are simply senseless. Catholic theologians illustrate, on the basis of the truth of Jesus Christ, the relationship between the revelation of God and a non-violent humanism. They propose a deeper understanding of the event of the death and resurrection of Christ, as the key to the reconciliation of human beings.

VIOLENCE AND INJUSTICE CRY OUT TO HEAVEN

Coming back to the question of religious violence one has to draw attention to the fact that the situation changed when Christianity became a state religion at the beginning of the 4th century. Politics and religion entered into a fatal relationship. With the conversion of emperor Constantine the church ceased to be a frightened margin of society. Constraint, suspicion and control became the privileged means of the use of power. Dogma was elevated to the rank of state law. Those who departed from official church teaching were treated as the worst enemies and severely punished. The hatred directed towards unfaithful fellow Christians became a sign of religious zeal. The ideal of obligatory orthodoxy took the place of grace and mercy.

In his polemics with the Donatists who had a different vision of the church, St Augustine justified the use of state violence against all heretics.¹⁷ According to him, it was Christ himself who had forced Saul to conversion and to become the apostle of the nations, and the church only follows the example of its Lord. The acts of coercion are an expression of brotherly love, because otherwise heretics would be damned to everlasting punishment. This sort of reasoning found a lively resonance in the following centuries. It was the beginning of the disastrous history of violence against

¹⁷ Augustine, *De correctione donatistarum*, 14; 21-24; *Epistula* 185.

heretics, which brought much discredit on Christianity itself. But it does not mean that one is allowed to identify the centuries of the whole Christian church with the history of violence. There always were voices of resistance that condemned this practice as contrary to the spirit of the Gospel of Christ.

The crimes committed in the name of the faith in God are therefore in no way to be justified. They are a sad and dark page in the history of Christianity. However, one has to be cautious, and not to generalize and exaggerate. Historical research on these issues proves that even in the period of the Spanish inquisition (1540-1700) there were fewer victims than is generally accepted (in fact after 44674 interrogations followed 826 gallows). Nevertheless, **each act of injustice cries out to heaven**. It should not have taken place at all.

Besides it is good to remember that western tradition has in the past been marked not only by a rigid monotheism. In religious thinking there lived also a clear idea of God's immanent presence in the world: all things exist in God, and God exists in everything (pan-en-theism). This vision shaped another sensitivity which prompted at least some intelligent people to oppose and condemn (inwardly?) any act of violence against dissenters who thought in a different way.

TOWARD A VISION OF GOD WHO REMAINS OPEN TO SELF-LIMITATION

In our speaking about God we humans always risk a danger of anthropomorphism. Already in antiquity a Greek philosophically-minded poet Xenophanes of Colophon (the late 6th and early 5th centuries before Christ) sharply criticized anthropomorphism in popular religion. According to him, Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all sorts of things that are matters of reproach among human beings: theft, adultery, and mutual deception. Their scandalous conduct would be incompatible with the goodness or perfection any divine being must be assumed to possess. Xenophanes was the first Greek thinker to offer a complex account of the divine nature. An implicit assumption of divine perfection may underlie his criticisms of the tendency to imagine the gods in human form. He wrote, probably satirically, that if horses and oxen had hands and could draw pictures, their gods would look remarkably like horses and oxen.

One may find a similar expression in an allusion to Xenophanes' words in the work of the German philosopher and theologian Nicholas of Kues/Cusa (Nicolaus Cusanus, 1401-1464) in his work *Dialogus de genesi*, 1447.¹⁸ As people in their understanding of and relation to God and the

¹⁸ He was made a cardinal by Pope Nicholas V in 1448 or 1449, and was named Bishop of Brixen in 1450. About his life and work see C. L. Miller, *Reading Cusanus. Metaphor and Dialectic in a Conjectural Universe*, Washington D.C. 2003; Norbert Winkler, *Nikolaus von Kues zur Einführung*,

world “hominize” (*hominizant*), so would all lions “lionize” (*omnes leones leonizare*), had they had their own gods.

A lesson from such considerations is clear: our speaking about God needs a perseverant self-critical consciousness of its fragility and imperfection. One sees here again the importance of the hermeneutical principle of the “second naivety”, which has a specific role to play also in our search for the vision of the kenotic God.

The question arises: what is the religious truth of those biblical traditions mentioned above? We have to become more cautious concerning their truth. One has to live with a lively consciousness that there are less phenomena of wonderful nature, less marvels, portents and prodigies in biblical texts. In consequence our faith should become more humble and modest in its theological claims and ambitions.

In this sense our way of understanding **the biblical image of God seems now to be more kenotic** and more realistic. God’s greatest greatness may consist in his capacity to make himself small and invisible, ready for self-resignation and open to self-limitation, in order to leave space and freedom to others, that is to say, also to all of us.

Perhaps this could be a more viable answer given to modern agnostics or even to new atheists who are very critically disposed towards religion. According to the English biologist and publicist, Richard Dawkins, religion is redundant and irrelevant as a mere delusion.¹⁹ He criticizes theology for having separated the literal and allegoric interpretations of the Bible in its moral “blind flying”.

A theology which wants to be true to reality cannot ignore such objections. Critical views find a world-wide resonance not only with those who criticize religion, but also with those who are hesitant in their faith. One of the causes of this situation may be insufficient knowledge of theological accounts in the Bible, “as if” the described events really happened in the history of humankind.

Who is responsible for the insufficient consciousness of the “second naivety”? Certainly, in large measure it is a deficient theology and proclamation of the word in the church. Reflecting theologically on the question of God, one has to take into account that we perceive the transcendent reality only through the finite and limited capacity of our intellect. Human knowledge of God may also be burdened by our sinfulness. Even understood as love, God may appear in our notions and representations in too human ways and images. We would like to have him always on our own side, according to the logic of partiality. Instead, courage is needed to take seriously the disturbing words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: our Father in heaven “causes his sun to rise *on the evil and*

Hamburg: Junius, 2001, 2nd ed. 2009; D. Duclow, *Master of Learned Ignorance: Eriugena, Eckhart, Cusanus*, Aldershot/Burlington 2006.

¹⁹ R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Boston 2006.

the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mt 5:45; italics mine, W.H.).

This means that God surpasses our logic of justice and partiality. He appears to show justice in his own divine way. Like the apostle Peter we have to come to realize that “God does not show favoritism” (Ac 10:34; NIV). In this way we would better understand that the God of Jesus Christ is greater, more generous and bounteous than we are accustomed to think: he is the God of all, the God truly ecumenical.

Something of this vision of God truly universal may be seen in the evolutionistic views of paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ (1881-1955). In his vision of God and Christ as **Alpha and Omega**, the First and the Last – a vision rightly called “**pan-en-theism**” – everything that exists is in God, but does not lose its own creaturely identity.

It would be a serious error to separate God from the world as a Reality totally alien and different. One has to dare, in our thoughts, **not only to speak about God, but also to God**. But how can you speak to someone totally and absolutely alien? If God were totally different, we would and could know nothing about him. To understand God in such categories would only overshadow the event of his self-revelation through the incarnate Logos.

That is why a prominent Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) urged theologians to develop a “kneeling theology” rather than only a “sitting” one. Among some of his most characteristic theological assertions were that Jesus Christ deposited his divine glory and knowledge with the Father before the incarnation (kenotic doctrine); that he experienced in Sheol after his death on the cross a state of abandonment from the Father similar to hell, and the possibility that all people may be saved. Universal salvation, if it happens, would be the result of Christ's utter kenosis and “abandonment”.²⁰

The case of von Balthasar's monumental aesthetics (*The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1-7, 1982-1989) shows convincingly that in the future the shape of theology will require a much closer and more consequent relationship also between theology and poetry. Truth, goodness and beauty are inseparable. A theology which has passed through severe philosophical criticism should have in itself the courage and breath of a new intellectual adventure. At the same time it has to become more modest and be more conscious of its limitations. That is why it is worth continuing the search for the kenotic vision of God.

²⁰ See H. Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved? With a Short Discourse on Hell”*. Translated by David Kipp and Rev. Lothar Krauth, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1988.

THE DIVINE RUAH AND LOGOS IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

Let us begin by showing the contrast between the two images of God. With some exceptions (as, for example, the American philosopher Alfred N. Whitehead) Western philosophy has developed a rather a static image of God as the eternal and perfect being existing by himself, as the supreme goodness, beauty and truth. The basic question it asked was about God's nature.

For its part the Bible is characterized from beginning to end by its thoroughly **dynamic and dramatic vision of God**. It does not ask who God is in himself, but about his acting in the world, his relationship towards all creatures and especially towards human beings. Consequently the Bible shows God as revealing himself in the history of humankind. His name disclosed in Ex 3:14 – “I AM WHO I AM (here)” or: “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE (for you)” – indicates very close relation to his people. The tetragram YHWH is no noun but a verb-form of God's activity. The revelation given to Moses explains this as God's active presence in human history, as his continuous being here and now.

This is the vision of **God-with-us** (*Emmanu-El*). He is the God of the Covenant with his own creatures. It is difficult to describe his attributes. Being steadfast and faithful he is always new, surprising, unpredictable, sovereign and infinitely free. In his divine way he opens the future every day to people and the world as a whole. In spite of all the disruptions and dramas of history due to human sinfulness, he does not cease to give new life to all, until it reaches its final fulfillment in “a new heaven and a new earth” (Is 65:17; Rv 21:1).

One has to emphasize **God's being in relation** with the created world. This permanent “relationalness” reflects something essential of his own inner life too. Mutual relations are a fundamental feature of the Christian doctrine about the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Spirit are individual Persons in ontological dialogue and communion, in mutual exchange of one divine life, in an eternal vis-à-vis and interpenetration (*perichōrēsis*). Each Person is in communion of uninterested and unconditional love with the other Persons without any subordination. This is truly a divine paradox of the fullness of personal being and, at the same time, of resignation; a paradox of the **ineffable kenosis and full personal self-identity**. This paradox constitutes an absolute denial of all solipsism and narcissism.

As humans we are unable to understand this ontological miracle of the divine dynamism of life in perfect and mutual communion, and truly kenotic, although mutually enriching love. God's image seems to us to be a mysterious paradox of personal being transcending the rules of human logic. That is why it is so difficult to believe in the divine Trinity, the Three-Personed God, not only to non-Christians, but all the more to agnostics and atheists.

How to understand the dynamism of **the divine Ruah** (feminine word in Hebrew!), who is God's creative power, his Spirit and Breath, assimilated to the forceful wind? Already the second verse of the Bible says in metaphorical language: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and *the Spirit (or Wind) of God was moving* over the face of the waters" (Gn 1:2; italics mine, W.H.). This active and moving power of God in the world appears as divine creative energy which protects and safeguards every form of life. No wonder in the Acts of the Apostles the divine *Pneuma* (again Breath and Spirit!) is shown as the initiator of cognition which should continue in the history of the church:

When Pentecost day came round, they had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them" (Ac 2:2-4).

In turn, in the Gospel of St John the baptism is shown as an event of "being born from above" through the Spirit: "I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (...); what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above" (Jn 3:3.5-7). This divine Wind "blows wherever it pleases" (Jn 3:8) and brings a new life. It cannot be subject to or made dependent on any human planning. Quite often it can also become a Counter-Wind which overthrows and invalidates what has become a mere fossilization, and sets what is new in motion. One can therefore say that **the divine Ruah creates a new space of life**, overcomes narrowness and leads to broad horizons of true wisdom, **but nevertheless remains hidden in a truly kenotic condition**.

Besides the biblical personification of fire and wind, there is also a personalized wisdom of God, the divine *Sophía*.²¹ It emanates from God and permeates all his created works. The psalmist cries out in wonder and astonishment: "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all" (Ps 104:24). The presence of the Wisdom at the creation of the world has introduced order into the whole nature and determined its sense. For this reason natural sciences can discover today how well-ordered is the world of nature and how precise are its laws. Many scientists do not hesitate to speak about the striking mystery of the universe and of its evolution. In the eyes of believers it is God who remains the Lord of

²¹ According to some church Fathers, the divine *Sophía* can be identified with the Holy Spirit. See for example Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* IV, 20,3. SCh 100**, p. 632: "Sapientia, quae est Spiritus".

everything, also of our knowledge, of our investigations and our achievements.

In the Old Testament Wisdom is presented as **the divine Logos** “coming forth from the mouth of the Most High” (Si 24:3) and performing the miracle of creation. This view has found a forceful resonance in the Prologue of John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word (*ho Lógos*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (Jn 1: 1-3; NIV). According to this witness it was not something material, but the divine Logos who was in the beginning (*en archē*) of everything. The highest nonmaterial and creative energy is divine love. Only love creates life. It is the ultimate source of every being. It connects the visible world of immanence with the invisible world of transcendence.

The cosmic order is linked with the creative role of the divine Logos, identified with Jesus Christ himself. He has entered through his incarnation personally into the history of the world but, as the apostle Paul explains, he “*emptied himself (eautòn ekénōsen)* to assume the condition of a slave” (Ph 2:7; italics mine, W.H.). One could also say: He **belittled himself** by renouncing his divine glory and became as human beings are for our salvation.

So again, **besides the kenosis of the divine Ruah/Pneuma there is also the kenosis of the divine Logos** (we are going to develop these important views later in our reflections). Nevertheless, to speak a language of St Irenaeus (ca. 140–ca. 202), God constantly acts in the world through his two hands, i.e. through his divine Logos and Pneuma.²²

GOD’S IMAGES AND COSMIC EVOLUTION

Theology has to open itself to modern cosmological insights concerning the origin, evolution and possible end or future of the universe. During the 20th century quite a number of speculative cosmological models were developed, among them a very suggestive theory of the Big Bang, which in its later presentation has proved generally acceptable. This model affirms that before ca. 14 billion years the universe came into existence together with space and time, and since then it continues to expand (some wonder whether this beginning could not be merely a new start of the already always pulsating universe).

Not all would share this view of the beginning of the universe. Also some atheists consider the theory of Big Bang to be only a sort of theological phantasm, having something in common with the belief in God. Behind this thinking one can detect an old materialistic view of the eternity

²² Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* IV, Pr. 4. SCh 100**, p. 390; V, 6,1; 28,4. SCh 153, pp. 72, 360: “Per manus enim Patris, hoc est per Filium et Spiritum...”; “per manus Dei, hoc est Filii et Spiritus”.

of matter. But who can prove this presupposition? Maybe the energy known to us is not the only one possible? What is the so-called dark energy and dark matter in the universe referred to by physicists? Even the acceptance of the eternity of matter would not necessarily exclude the eternal God.

Quite a number of atheists are well aware of the limits of the justification of their atheistic views. Some would willingly adopt a kind of purely worldly mysticism: wonder at the gigantic spaces of the unknown universe, listen to the great silence of the majestic stars, without asking questions about God. This experience is also well known to believers, but does not contradict their conviction that the hidden presence of God may be often felt as his absence too. Besides, one can be even more surprised by the wonder of visible creation in surrounding nature.

But there is no need to continue here such reflections prompted by various discoveries in the natural sciences. It would be enough to say that presumably one should not expect from these sciences any answer to the question of whether there was any Creator of the universe, or whether we are included together with the whole cosmos in the perpetual flow of time. Logically, the Big Bang model can be connected and harmonized with the single act of creation.

The image of God resulting from biblical accounts must be confronted with new cosmological models of thinking. The research going on in natural sciences brings some new ideas about God as Creator of the world. The vision of the Creator shaped in the dialogue with contemporary natural sciences requires a serious reflection.

It would not be reasonable to oppose the image of the God of philosophers (or some natural scientists) to the biblical vision of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (as can be seen in the famous "Memorial" of Blaise Pascal). A radical resignation from any philosophical reflection on God, as demanded by positivist philosophers who reject any metaphysical considerations, would not be a viable solution. One cannot simply ignore the century long philosophical and theological tradition represented by the greatest figures of humanity, who expressed their views on God as the transcendent and creative principle of reality.

GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD OPEN TO THE FUTURE

The Christian faith is full of paradoxes. The vision of the kenotic God does not exclude the possibility of an ultimate transformation of the world and of God's hidden participation in this process. Let us turn then to the witness of some outstanding thinkers of the 20th century and to their dynamic vision of God.

With the background outlined above and taking inspiration from the Letters to the Colossians and Ephesians, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote about *Christus universalis* who is the Omega Point, i.e. the ultimate goal of

all evolution of the world²³. However, God acts in such a kenotic way that different possibilities of the evolution may take place by themselves. The fulfillment of the created world consists in its reconciliation and lasting union with **God who already now discretely permeates everything that exists** in full transparency.

In this theory of evolution, developed by Teilhard in *The Future of Man* (1950), the universe is constantly developing towards higher levels of material complexity and consciousness. For him, the universe can only move in this direction if it is being drawn by a supreme point of complexity and consciousness. Thus he postulates the Omega Point as the actual cause for the universe to grow in complexity and consciousness. The Omega Point exists as supremely complex and conscious, transcendent and independent of the evolving universe. Teilhard argued that the Omega Point resembles the Christian *Logos*, namely Christ, who draws all things into himself, and who in the words of the Nicene Creed, is “God from God”, “Light from Light”, “true God from true God”, and “through him all things were made”. The Omega Point must exist even before the universe's evolution, because He is responsible for the rise of the universe towards more complexity, consciousness and personality. It is by the attraction of the transcendent Omega Point that the universe evolves towards Him.

The increasing complexity of matter has not only led to higher forms of consciousness, but accordingly to more personalization, of which human beings are the highest attained form in the known universe. It is in this way that human beings become more and more in the image of God, who is the highest form of personality. Teilhard emphasized very strongly that in the Omega Point – when the universe becomes One – human persons will not be suppressed, but super-personalized. Personality will be infinitely enriched. This is because the Omega Point unites creation, and the more it unites, the increasing complexity of the universe aids in higher levels of consciousness. Thus, as God creates, the universe evolves towards higher forms of complexity, consciousness, and finally personality (in the case of humans), because God, who is drawing the universe towards Him, is a person in the fullest sense of the word.²⁴

The Christian concept of creation implies the beginning of the world with the beginning of time. For this reason it has an open and dynamic character. This dynamism was well emphasized in the process philosophy developed by an American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead

²³ Teilhard conceived the idea of the Omega Point, i.e. a maximum level of complexity and consciousness towards which he believed the universe was evolving, and developed Vladimir Vernadsky's concept of Noosphere.

²⁴ See. P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène Humain*, Paris 1955 (written already 1938-40); English translation: *The Phenomenon of Man*, New York: Harper & Brothers 1959; Harper Perennial 1976; reprint 2008; *L'Avenir de l'Homme* (1959), English translation: *The Future of Man* (1964), Image 2004.

(1861-1947).²⁵ In his view nature is characterized by openness and indefiniteness. God is responsible for the order of the world, but **not by direct interventions**. He has offered different possibilities which can be freely realized by the universe itself (here Whitehead comes close to the views of Teilhard de Chardin).

The static image of God as the almighty Creator who determines everything in the world is replaced by a vision of his active participation in the process of evolution. He is not a self-sufficient and immutable Being but while exerting influence on the developing reality, is at the same time himself influenced by this reality. In this way time and eternity are mutually interwoven. The universe develops in a process open to the future, characterized by accidental and necessary events. God is the binding and universal force in this process. Whereas our human consciousness and love are only partial and one-sided, in God they are all-embracing and truly universal. Without him there could be no world at all. Only thanks to God can the universe find its ultimate and everlasting fulfillment.

According to Whitehead, this universe shows us now a double face: on the one hand it disintegrates in its physical structure (entropy), but on the other it continues to develop spiritually in the process of personalization (a similar idea was at the center of Teilhard de Chardin's vision). God keeps everything in his eternal memory so that nothing is doomed to destruction but has the promise of immortality. In this way the whole dynamic process of God's reality itself becomes more and more enriched.

Even the material world is in its own way permeated by spiritual reality. Matter and spirit cannot be opposed, so that one should exclude any sort of pan-psychical reality, any spiritual monism. Such was the view of Karl Rahner (1904-1984), one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century, who figuratively described the matter as a "frozen spirit".²⁶

Here again we see **a kenotic side of the spiritual reality** hidden before our eyes. The spirit – a mysterious reality – is truly a hidden cry of the visible world. Every such cry is a sign of expectation and hope.

²⁵ See A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, New York: Free Press 1929; 1979 and 1985 corrected edition, edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. See also Nicholas Rescher, *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues*, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press 2001; Michel Weber and Will Desmond (eds.), *Handbook of Whiteheadian Process Thought*, Frankfurt-Lancaster, Ontos Verlag, 2008.

²⁶ See K. Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, revised edition by J.B. Metz, translated by William V. Dych, New York: Herder and Herder 1968 (Translation of *Geist in Welt: Zur Metaphysik der endlichen Erkenntnis bei Thomas von Aquin*. Innsbruck: Verlag Felizian Rauch, 1939; 2nd ed. revised by J.B. Metz. München: Kösel-Verlag, 1957).

DIVINE *KENOSIS* AND HUMAN FREEDOM

The truth of the resurrection sheds light on the dramatic event of Jesus' death. He, who on Good Friday died on the cross is risen. God has allowed the history of this world to follow its own course. He did not stop the sequence of events nor oppose the will of people. He did not shake the world by a sudden miraculous intervention which could prevent the death of his beloved Son. Jesus has shared our human lot to its very end. He outlived his death in solitude, abandoned by the disciples. This solitude was even more dramatic because of the silence of God in the face of the terrifying event. God let himself be excluded from the world. In the eyes of people he appeared weak and deprived of the power to act.

In reality, the event of Jesus' death has proved that we have to do with **God who can retire and diminish himself**. It is not an intrusive and troublesome God who disturbs and annoys people, who is in constant rivalry with humans in the history of the world, depriving them of their freedom and dignity. Instead of commanding he invites us to a relationship of reciprocity. In order to leave to us the space to be free he confines his omnipotence. Not ceasing to be almighty, he is able to become, in a certain sense, also "all-weak".

This is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith. According to the outstanding Russian religious philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev, God is in some respects weaker than a policeman on the street. It is not God who overpowers people. Calling the world into existence, he exposed himself to the risk of freedom of choice on the part of his rational beings.

In this way we come back to the already mentioned biblical idea of kenosis, applied above all to Christ's self-emptying and self-diminishing: *eaútón ekénōsen* (Ph 2:7). This is an unusual intuition! It speaks about God not in the language of perfection and fullness, but recurring to the category of emptiness, resignation, privation and self-belittlement. The divine fullness does not exclude the ability to become diminished and reduced for salvific purposes.

God does not compel. He invites us to a relationship of reciprocity. To leave space for freedom, he limits his own omnipotence. In a sense, not ceasing to be all-powerful, he becomes all-powerless.²⁷ Here the words of St. Clement of Alexandria come true: "The Savior is polyphonic (*polýphonós*) and acting in many ways (*polýtropos*) for the salvation of people".²⁸

In the majority of religions believers usually connect the concept of God with the idea of absolute fullness and perfection. The fullness excludes any lack, imperfection and weakness. On the contrary, the idea of a kenotic

²⁷ Cf. Olivier Clément, *La Révolte de l'Esprit. Repères pour la situation spirituelle d'aujourd'hui*, en collaboration avec Stanislas Rougier, Paris: Editions Stock 1979, pp. 26, 60, 114, 130, 132, 140, 163-164, 167, 397, 428.

²⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepitkos*, I, 8,3 (SChr 2, p. 62).

abasement and belittlement expresses a certain state or condition freely chosen. Christ has humiliated himself and deprived himself of the due divine glory, in order to be close to people and to share a dramatic feeling of abandonment and nothingness.

Such an interpretation of Christ's kenosis discloses **an unusual depth of the divine intention** and plan of salvation. Indeed, the fullness implies richness, abundance and might. Instead the freely chosen condition of emptying oneself and diminishment expresses, in the case of Christ, his unconditional love and will to meet humans in their real life, the desire to be as people are. The work of redemption was carried out by Jesus in humility, weakness, love. The liberating love of God is a self-emptying love. The salvific *kenosis* of Jesus implies a negation of self-centeredness and self-interestedness. It means the disinterested dedication to the salvation of all.

There is a clear mystic touch in this approach. It means that God can transcend himself by the inverse movement towards humanity. This is not God in his absolute fullness and power who would overwhelm and amaze people by the greatness of his majesty. He becomes, so to speak, the humble and self-effacing God. The truly paschal God, able to expect our free answer! Remaining incomprehensible, he leaves thus a free space for human freedom. **His silence has a very profound meaning.** Being able to diminish himself, God can expect a free answer from his creatures. Being incomprehensible in his goodness, he leaves a free space for human freedom. His silence also has a deep salvific and pedagogical sense. The divine kenotic plan manifests itself in a paradoxical way.

One can discover here a certain continuity of similar thought in the Jewish idea of the divine *tzimtzum* developed in the mystical tradition of the medieval Kabala (*Kabbalah*).²⁹ According to the Jewish mystic Isaac Luria, God the Creator "contracted" his infinite light to make room for the miracle of creation. In this symbolic story he filled huge glass vessels with the brilliance of the divine light of existence. But the light was so brilliant and

²⁹ *Tzimtzum*, i.e. constriction/concentration is the primordial cosmic act whereby God "contracted" his infinite light, leaving a "void" into which the light of existence was poured. Historically, Kabbalah emerged, after earlier forms of Jewish mysticism, in 12th to 13th century Southern France and Spain, becoming reinterpreted in the Jewish mystical renaissance of 16th century Ottoman Palestine. It was popularized in the form of Hasidic Judaism from the 18th century onwards. Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), founder of Hasidism in the area of the Eastern Europe, spread teachings based on Lurianic Kabbalah (elaborated by Isaac Luria Arizal), but adapted to an aim of immediate perception of Divine Omnipresence amidst the mundane. Kabbalah is considered by its followers as a necessary part of the study of Torah being an inherent duty of observant Jews. See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988; Aryeh Kaplan, *Inner Space: Introduction to Kabbalah, Meditation and Prophecy*, Moznaim Publishing Corp. 1990.

powerful that the vessels could not hold it. They shattered into innumerable fragments across the world. The gathering again of the broken fragments comprises the work of redemption.

Such is **the paradox of divine transcendence and vulnerability**. The mystery of redemption completed through Jesus Christ in humility, weakness, dedication and in the full extent of love (cf. Jn 13:1), continues to be carried out without the destruction of human freedom. It is not God full of glory and power, but the kenotic God diminishing himself who has the greatest appeal to our human freedom. This vision is a basic dimension in Christian paschal theology.

The liberating love of God is a love able to assume a truly kenotic shape of humiliation and self-resignation. The salvific kenosis of Christ is a visible denial of self-concentration. It manifests itself in the greatest disinterestedness and dedication to the task of universal salvation. Only God who discretely participates in the history of the world and in human sufferings can be of much help to all of us. Iniquities, crimes and the sufferings of humanity reach the very depths of God. The Father of Jesus Christ is no cold and indifferent deity, but a loving Person able to be compassionate and to initiate intimate relationships.

In the drama of self-humiliation, self-abasement and belittlement of Christ one can discover a reflected light of the beauty of God's nature, free of any narcissistic concentration on itself. True beauty is inseparable from genuine love, outgoing concern and dedication to another person's good. The identity of Christ, resulting from his divine nature, was opposite to any rapacious possession of his own glory and dignity. He has retained the truly divine ability of self-limitation of his might and greatness – all this for the good and salvation of humankind. **The courage of God's self-effacing love is astonishing indeed!** The truly divine beauty of Christ's attitude had to pass in earthly time through the real drama of self-humiliation, weakness and silence. It is, however, the beauty which will in the end triumph.

Jesus passed through his passion and cross in order to become the most serious warning against inflicting suffering on others. His death has become the greatest appeal to not crucifying anybody, **the real cry addressed to all generations** in the history of humanity. The mystery of the cross reveals the merciful judgment on the world who kills the Innocent, whose destiny is a painful diagnosis of the situation of the world continuously marked by the stigma of sin and suffering. This is no encouragement to look for morbid pleasure derived from suffering. On the contrary – it is **a permanent cry to overcome suffering and misery**. A very significant fact is that the first early Christian representations of Christ show him not as crucified, but as the Good Sheppard who looks for the lost sheep and brings it back on his arms to the sheepfold (cf. Lk 15:4-6). (Many Protestants have crosses without the corpus, as if to emphasize that Christ is not dead but alive. Could it also be to minimize a too morbid dwelling on the suffering?)

There are two essential and necessary conditions of worthy and meaningful human life. According to the Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, these are **freedom and security**.³⁰ They cannot be separated from one another, but have to go together. Security without freedom becomes slavery, and freedom without security quickly degenerates into anarchy. Both of them are necessary, but it is not easy to keep them in harmony. Freedom is a paradoxical reality. It requires mutual responsibility for another human person. Humans become free in the measure of their being open to another free human being and in respecting his or her freedom. My conduct exerts good or bad influence on other people. I have to be vigilant and feel responsible also for others.

There is a striking paradox of life: one can obtain more security at the price of losing a part of our freedom, and vice versa: more freedom for the loss of security and for more uncertainty. One value can be gained at the cost of another. The suffering of many people results today from a blatant disproportion between the enormous gains in personal freedom and the lost feeling of security in the face of our daily experiences, marked by different sorts of threats (e.g. sickness, poverty, instability, terrorism).

GOD AS PAIN IN OUR KENOTIC EXISTENCE

“God is love” is affirmed twice by the apostle John (1 Jn 4:8.16). However, human experiences often make us think that he is not only love. He may also be our pain, a wound or injury in our heart and spirit, especially in a time of trial. Sometimes it is enough when God does not grant our wish as expressed in an ardent prayer to be delivered from suffering and evil. There is so much in our life that we cannot understand nor explain. Let us listen for a while to a complaint of the Psalmist:

Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favourable?
Has his steadfast love for us ceased?
Are his promises at an end for all time?
Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he in anger shut up his compassion?”
And I say, “It is my grief
that the right hand of the Most High has changed. (Ps 77:7-10).

Many questions indeed! According to these words, human existence is felt as burdensome and painful. We humans painfully experience above all **God’s silence**. Many Psalms are full of complaints of

³⁰ *Boimy się wolności, marzymy o wspólnocie. Z Zygmuntem Baumanem rozmawia Aleksandra Klich* (We Are Afraid of Freedom: With Zygmunt Bauman talks Aleksandra Klich), “Gazeta Wyborcza” 19-20, 01, 2013, pp. 20-21.

oppressed, forsaken and suffering people. They cry out by day and night begging for God's answer and help. The most eloquent example is the beginning of Psalm 22 quoted in the Gospels of Matthew (27:46) and Mark (15:34) as the words of Jesus himself during his agony on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer; and by night, but find no rest" (Ps 22:1). The echo of such cries and complaints resounds in many other Psalms.³¹

This is **a real cry of the world also today**. The pain of a wounded existence cannot be easily removed by any explanation or rational discourse. It may be felt throughout the day like an injury in one of our finger-tips, hurt time and time again.

In fact there are also major wounds in our life linked with the question of God's existence itself. The famous Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote in 1870 to one of his friends: "The existence of God is the main problem which consciously or unconsciously tormented me through all my life".³² In his personal notes one can read a very sincere admission: "I do not believe in Christ and confess him like a young boy, but **my Hosanna has passed through a big fiery furnace of despair**".³³ No wonder "God torments" all heroes of Dostoyevsky's novels. All of them struggle with the problem of his existence. The destinies of their lives depend on its solution.

In this context I would like to draw special attention to the despairing and kenotic faith of Sergio Quinzio (1927-1996), an original Italian philosopher and theologian, a visionary. In the desperate faith and hope of this thinker, the God we believe in is the God who loses and fails through his weakness. He is not truly and perfectly omnipotent, and the salvation brought by Christ in his death and resurrection remains ineffective in the history of humanity. The world has not been changed. Why is there so much evil if the Creator has revealed himself as the God of infinite goodness, mercy and forgiveness? Meanwhile injustice, evil and death prevail everywhere, but God is absent and silent.³⁴ Are his promises never to be fulfilled in our world? Can we trust in the utterly poor and crucified Messiah who failed, who was disenchanted and desperate himself, as he cried to God but was forsaken by him? The urgency of the salvation of humanity finds no effective answer on the side of God. We speak about the "history of salvation" but it has no confirmation in real life. The promise of salvation is constantly far away.

³¹ See among many others: Ps 28:2; 86:7; 141:1.

³² See F.M. Dostoyevsky, *Pis'ma [The Letters]*, vol. 1-4, ed. by A.S. Dolinin, Moskva 1928-1959, here vol. 2, p. 263.

³³ Quoted by K. Močul'sky, *Dostoyevsky, Žizn' i tvorčestvo [Life and Writings]*, Pariž 1947, 2nd ed. 1980, p. 535.

³⁴ S. Quinzio, *Silenzio di Dio*, Milano 1982.

The history of God, affirms Quinzio, is the history of defeat from the first page of the Bible. Creation itself implies at least the possibility to oppose the will of God, the possibility of fault and death. This was already a situation marked by an extreme precariousness.³⁵ That is why the author of *La speranza nell'Apocalissi* used to repeat as his own the words of this last book of the New Testament: "Holy, faithful Master, how much longer will you wait..." (Rv 6:10).³⁶ No wonder he was so much against any evolutionistic and optimistic vision of history. In his last book *Mysterium iniquitatis*, the last pope Peter II solemnly proclaims the defeat and failure of Christianity in human history, and then flings himself downwards from the dome of St. Peter's basilica and dies on the tomb of the Apostle.³⁷ This was a vision of a "tragic Christianity" concentrated on the failure of God himself, a vision based on a desperate assertion that messianic promises have failed and deceived people.

When Quinzio reflects on the mystery of time and evil, he detects in the human history a continuing divine risk and tragedy³⁸. The Bible itself seemed to him an incomprehensible book, full of contradictions.³⁹ Maybe it would be easier for him not to believe, but he simply could not stop believing. This man, heavily afflicted by the traumatic experiences of his own life, was well aware of being given the gift of faith, although it was so full of despair⁴⁰. His life and writings give witness to such a desperate faith. But despair was for him a painful and laborious road leading to faith, which cannot be based on purely rational and metaphysical ground. We have grown accustomed to experience faith as a self-possessed certainty, on which we have built our proud theological systems, but in reality they make true faith superfluous. In his conviction, faith is the miraculous work of the mercy of God who alone can bring consolation and liberate humans from despair, suffering and death. But today our disappointed faith and hope may be even more difficult than the faith of Abraham.⁴¹

³⁵ Idem, *La sconfitta di Dio*, Milano 1993, pp. 39-42. In this respect his views are close to the Hebrew concept of *tzim tzum* used originally by cabbalists in relation to the idea of self-limitation of God who contracts or retracts himself in the act of creation, i.e. becomes smaller and weaker.

³⁶ S. Quinzio, *La speranza nell'Apocalissi*, Milano 1984.

³⁷ Idem, *Mysterium iniquitatis*, Milano, 1995.

³⁸ Idem, *La sconfitta di Dio*, p. 49

³⁹ Idem, *Un Commento alla Bibbia*, Milano 1972, 2nd ed. 1995.

⁴⁰ The shadow of death was often accompanying him all along the years of his life. Those who are familiar with his life say that he was inconsolably struck and paralyzed by this experience, especially when his wife suffered and died (1970) because of cancer. See his books: *Diario profetico*, Milano 1958, 1996; *Religione e futuro*, Firenze 1962; *L'incoronazione*, Roma 1981; *La croce e il nulla*, Milano 1984.

⁴¹ S. Quinzio, *La fede sepolta*, Milano 1978, pp. 130-134.

In Quinzio's perception there was in fact no consolation for the suffering people who had been crying to God from the abyss of their hopelessness. Their only hope remains in the forthcoming Kingdom promised by Christ, expected and invoked by people during millennia of history. So this Italian philosopher, a truly tragic figure, stands by the poor Messiah who failed. In spite of visible defeat and failure, Christ is for him the only One upon whom we can rely and build our "hope against hope". Although the Day of the Lord and of the universal judgment will be full of terrible violence, tribulation, anxiety, devastation and desolation, it should be desired and invoked by humans and by God himself. Paradoxically, the invocation is necessary and at the same time impossible (*Un'invocazione necessaria e impossibile insieme*). Fear is the extreme and unique possibility of final salvation.⁴²

Within this perspective of thinking, which combines an ontology of the decline with a vision of the weak God (*Dio debole*), one can detect Quinzio's close intellectual kinship with Gianni Vattimo, the father of the so-called "weak thought" (*pensiero debole*), and with other contemporary philosophers as well.

The Jewish-German philosopher Hans Jonas (1903-1993) asked in his memorable paper about the concept of God after Auschwitz: "Which God has permitted that this has happened?"⁴³ How can one believe in a God who did not save his children from this unimaginable suffering? Even if he is believed to be good, how can he be omnipotent? In this regard Jonas has deepened the Jewish concept of *tzimtzum* by connecting it with great tragedies of humanity, allowed for by a God not perfectly omnipotent. This God voluntarily limits his power and withdraws to secure the space for human freedom. He makes himself small, voiceless and powerless, in contradistinction to our expectations. This makes some people lose their faith and become atheists. But are we really allowed to identify God's silence with his non-existence? Is such a "death of God" not necessarily followed also by the death of humans?

There is the risk of an atheistic interpretation – warns Jonas. His concept of the "powerless God" should not frighten us. Both Jewish and Christian traditions show the image of God who is on the side of the powerless and oppressed as their ultimate hope and help.

In Quinzio's view human tragedy cannot be understood in the light of traditional theological categories. It reveals an evident break between the way of understanding God of the Old Testament who intervened in the world's events and the way we experience him today as the silent, distant and incomprehensible God. Similar objections are often formulated also by atheists. They ask whether God who allows people to suffer can be truly

⁴² Idem, *La sconfitta di Dio*, pp. 73-74.

⁴³ H. Jonas, *The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice*, "Journal of Religion" 67 (1987), No. 1, 1-13. See also: *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz...*, Frankfurt a.M. 1987.

moral in his behavior. It is possible, they suggest, that this world is not the best, but the worst of all possible worlds. Some would even say ironically that the whole animated nature with its devouring and being devoured is simply a wonderfully made work of hell itself. Human freedom and its abuse are not to be blamed for all our miseries such as for example various natural catastrophes. It is not surprising that in such a situation people struggle for their survival, often at the cost of fellow human beings.

Quinzio was an inconvenient thinker for the church, a critical believer who during his lifetime asked himself torturing and disquieting questions about the relationship between humans and the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Was this only a manifestation of human despair, an accusation of the failure of the historic church and Christianity, and finally of God's weakness? This tormented man tried to find at least some signs of divine consolation and hope, in spite of the feeling of despair overcoming him so often. However, he would not accept the consolation as presented in the constitution *Gaudium et spes* of the Second Vatican Council. Yet, it was difficult to him to deprive himself of the hope for a better world of love and delicate tenderness, experienced during the years of his marriage. As far as the question of the sources of modernity is concerned, he suggests that, because of the Jewish disappointment with the absent salvation and delayed Kingdom of God, we have believed in human progress.⁴⁴ Modernity was understood by him as a secularization of the biblical eschatology, and in fact as an imitation, counterfeit, i.e. parody and demythologization of biblical hope.

I have devoted some time to Sergio Quinzio's views because his thought seems to be a very typical case of a radically kenotic and truly tragic theology. His human crying for transfiguration, salvation and the coming of the Kingdom of God is particularly eloquent and moving. Some would assimilate him, at least in some respects, to Léon Bloy, Georges Bernanos or Paul Claudel. All of them have introduced a creative unrest into our thinking about God and the world. For Quinzio, the weakness of God and the disappointed messianic hope were a great pain in his life marked by theological loneliness.

I do not share Quinzio's views on the historical defeat and total temporal failure of God. One has to take much more into account, especially the full eschatological perspective (I think it appears insufficiently in his books, especially in reference to the forthcoming Kingdom promised by Christ). The far-reaching plans of God cannot be thwarted or suffer a definitive defeat. I believe in, and hope for, the universal salvation and ultimate reconciliation of all rational creatures with the Creator and among themselves. God is the greatest Pedagogue and wisest Artist who loves a happy ending to all his ways in the history of the world. Divine Love is the most effective power to attract and convince without destroying human freedom.

⁴⁴ Idem, *Radici ebraiche del moderno*, Milano 1991.

GOD AS PAIN AND THE PAIN OF ATHEISM: HUMAN CRY FOR TRANSFIGURATION AND SALVATION

In my mind remain the strikingly vivid words of St Paul: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rm 8:18; NIV). And the apostle continues in a truly incomparable flush of compassion for the entire creation:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons [and daughters!] of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration (...), in hope that creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that *the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time*. Not only so, but *we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly* as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons [and daughters!], the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. (...) But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently (v. 20-25; NIV; italics mine, W.H.).

The words of the Apostle of the nations remind us of **the pain of the whole creation** – of the universal pain compared to the groaning in one great act of giving birth. This is the pain of both those who believe and those who do not. So, in fact, our common pain.

Atheists have a great difficulty not only with the existence of God itself. Many would also admit that there is something amazing in the very fact of the existence of anything. In this respect they would share the thoughtful question asked long ago by the famous German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716): *Why is there something rather than nothing? (Cur aliquid potius existit quam nihil?)*. That there is something and not just nothing, is the greatest wonder in itself. The existence of this world, its continuation and history are and will remain something unusual, surprising and thought-provoking. However some invincible limits have been imposed on our logical perspicacity.

The world cries for justification and explanation of its own existence. We look for the causes which brought it into being. This is our deeply human need. But atheists ask whether God is necessary to explain the existence of the universe. If believers say that God is the beginning before any beginning and the ultimate ground of being before any ground, then immediately follows a further question: How do we know that God exists as the ultimate source of any being? Is he necessary at all? And this decisive question finds in the end no adequate answer on a purely rational basis. One can only say that nothing and nothingness can create and explain nothing. Does the “nothing” (in Latin: *nihil*) exist at all? Is it only a pure

abstraction of our mind or illusion? How can nothing explain the existence of anything? And more: how can it explain the existence of the universe? Question follows after question. Every human logic comes in this way to its limits. The explanation of the existence of something through nothing seems even more absurd than through the existence of God.

I only touch this problem to show how modest we should all be in debating such difficult issues. All of us seem to be in a similar situation. One can say that this is **our common pain and common cognitive helplessness**. Many questions arise when we face evil, suffering, misfortune, catastrophes and death of innocent people, especially children. There is no ready-made answer to such painful events. In such situations silence seems to unite both believers and nonbelievers. Also those who believe feel how fragile it becomes then to speak about God in a meaningful way. A serious mistake would be to imagine that God, as a higher although comprehensible being, belongs nevertheless to our world and can act within it. In fact he remains for us an incomprehensible transcendent reality that surpasses our ability to understand. What we can do is only to try to understand both positive and negative sides of our existence in a world that is marked by such paradoxical oppositions.

This does not mean, however, that we should give up any effort to search for the meaning of existence. The absurd and nonsensical seem contrary to the structure of our mind and our human nature. Our psychological, moral and cultural development proves that the feeling of sense and intended purpose makes truly human life fruitful. That is what we call a human destiny: *ecce homo!* In the course of history, we humans have become able to think, to speak, to love, to learn what is true and good, to believe, to worship God, to wonder and admire, to create moral and cultural values. These are already eloquent signs of our transcendence which cause wonder and admiration. Can all this be only a transient surprising event of self-conscious human existence but doomed to definitive failure and futility?

Atheists seem to be convinced that God is not necessary for the explanation of the world and the existence of goodness itself. Nevertheless, they also ask themselves, why is our life so precarious and so limited, and why do we have to die, so that even the memory of our existence will disappear? They also feel the pain of time passing by so quickly, and the pain of life going to a complete destruction and dissolution into nothingness. So **atheism hides also in itself an existential pain**, but it is not able to offer any sign of possibility to change the drama of human life. Christians enjoy instead the promise of the resurrection and everlasting life, which gives permanent sense to our existence. They believe that nothing will be lost. In the eyes of an atheist this would be wonderful, and our most intimate desires would be fulfilled, but unfortunately God is only a delusive figure, like *fata morgana* on the horizon of the history of humanity.

Christians should not turn their back on such convictions of atheists. We have **to learn to understand the pain of atheism** which is in

some respect also our own pain in the life of faith and hope. The objections of serious unbelievers can help us to reflect more effectively on our religious concepts and commitment. One of the basic preoccupations of atheists is the defense of human freedom. In their view one has to choose between God and freedom: either God or freedom. No other choice. There is a well-known phrase written by the Russian thinker and revolutionary Mikhail Aleksandrovič Bakunin (1814-1876): “If God exists, the human being is a slave; but the human being must be free, so God does not exist.”⁴⁵ Dependence and autonomy become thus competitive instances. The German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) has even strengthened their opposition: “Wherever is the great ruler of the world, freedom has no place – neither has the freedom of God’s children.”⁴⁶ Christians know that many biblical texts contradict such affirmations.

The phenomenon of atheism should urge believers to revise a number of ideas about God, which significantly contributed to a denial of his existence. Let us respect the convictions of unbelievers when they speak sincerely about the impossibility of faith in the world as we know it from our personal experience. Evil and suffering make us inclined to blame the Creator for helplessness or indifference to the fate of his creatures. Blaming God is perhaps the oldest and most common way to protest against evil. In the conviction of unbelievers, however, since there is evil, God does not exist.

In the face of evil, it is not only atheists who in their solitude have the right to protest and argue about God. Are not the cries and complaints of people besieged by evil unceasingly heard in the Psalms? Maybe therein consists some solidarity between atheists and believers in our common sharing of the human condition. At certain moments we find that we are very much alike. The existence of evil and suffering is a dark and incomprehensible situation which in itself invokes God and becomes **a cry for rescue and salvation**. In the view of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, the very word “God” is synonymous with invoking and hope. Under the weight of suffering, we are all asking: why? The difference is that believers do not go so far as to deny the existence of God, though they often have a feeling of the absurdity of the world, despite their faith in the goodness of the Creator. They pray and believe in the Bible which persuades us that God is on our side and close to us in the struggle against evil.

It is worth recalling here some wise words of the Polish writer Karol Ludwik Koninski: “Do not quarrel with atheism, do not humiliate

⁴⁵ M. Bakunin, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band II, Berlin 1921, p. 15: “Wenn Gott existiert, ist der Mensch Sklave; aber der Mensch muss frei sein, also existiert Gott nicht”.

⁴⁶ E. Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Band III, Frankfurt 1959, p. 1413: “Wo der große Weltherr, hat die Freiheit keinen Raum – auch nicht die Freiheit der Kinder Gottes”.

atheism, do not exalt yourselves, do not make publicity for your market stall. Simply eat yourselves and distribute gratuitously fruits; if they are sweet and juicy, healthy and refreshing, people will come to your garden". One can only regret that very often we make out of the Good News a religion of fear. The truth about the merciful God who liberates us from everlasting perdition removes from believers the risk of falling into, as some call it, an "alternative atheism".

Our life is a time of searching for a word of hope and comfort. One has to get accustomed to the fact that, for difficult questions, we will not easily find an answer. Personally, I am still learning to live with many questions. Maybe the decisive answer will be given only in the forthcoming world. "For we know in part and we prophesy in part" – so wrote the apostle Paul in his famous hymn on love (1 Co 13:9; NIV). We all carry in ourselves, as aforementioned, a particle of atheism, at least in the form of incredulity and distrust. Our reason is a wonderful gift. One must appreciate it, although sometimes it gives us much trouble. It demands clarity, but purely rational clarity alone is not enough.

Does God really want us to be tormented and to experience so much anxiety, uncertainty and distress? I do not dare answer this in a categorical way. In my conviction, however, God wants us to trust him in spite of all and to find joy in our faith and hope. To know that we belong to him, that our life does not end in nothingness, that he gives sense to our whole existence. Of course, this consciousness does not explain or remove automatically all the miseries and paradoxes of our life.

Sometimes one needs years to find peace in one's faith. Nobody wants to spend his or her life in a greenhouse. Sometimes you also need cold, rain and wind. In this way we mature and purge ourselves of selfish expectations. To take life as an unusual gift, to accept oneself, but at the same time to search for a deeper meaning to our existence – this is a great task and great wisdom.

To speak about God as the pain of our existence does not mean at all to justify or glorify suffering. "Dolorism" is no ideal of truly Christian wisdom. After all, it is not God himself who is the real source of our greatest pain. It is for the most part what we ourselves have done with our history and with our fellow humans. It is also our inability to understand God's pedagogy and his silence which seem often too incomprehensible and inconsistent to us. To ask: "Where was God when people suffered in the Nazi concentration camps and soviet "gulags?"⁴⁷ requires another supplementary question: "Where was this rational creature called *homo sapiens*?" Where were fellow human beings? Where were fellow Christians when it was still not too late?

So many human sufferings result from what we do to one another. The book of Genesis notes God's short question addressed to Adam when

⁴⁷ The word *gulag* comes from Russian: *Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei* – Chief Administration of Penal System in the Soviet Russia (1939-1955).

he and Eve hid themselves from his presence: “Where are you?” (Gn 3:9). This mysterious question will constantly return in the history of humankind in various forms: “*Ubi es homo?*”, “What’s wrong with you?”, “Where have you hidden yourself?”, “Where is your humanity created in the image and likeness of God?”.

But let us come back to our main subject. The burden of a truly **kenotic existence of many people** cannot be solved by pure theoretical knowledge or understanding. Usually it is theodicy which tries to explain why God “permits” suffering, does not take it away and overcome evil. But this justification of God does not help much either. The wound will bleed on in spite of all philosophical and theological explanations. The pain is not alleviated when you know well even the causes of your sickness, distress or sinfulness. Life itself continuously opens our wounds. We are not able to understand God or to dismiss his presence. The Psalmist asked wistfully in his prayer: “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? (Ps 139:7).

The pain is often additionally strengthened by a feeling of our imperfection and sinfulness. In spite of our efforts at improvement the wound is never healed completely. One has to live with it. Maybe the only answer is given by the words of biblical wisdom that speaks of Jesus Christ in this way: “through his wounds you have been healed” (1 P 2:24; cf. Is 53:5). *Christós iatrós*, *Christus medicus*, Christ as Physician – this was one of the favorite themes often raised in the writings of the Church Fathers.

The pain of the wound can be alleviated when we go our way with Christ in perseverance and hope, and in the joy of knowing that he invisibly accompanies our ways. Certainly, when we share with him at the end of our pilgrimage **the gift of the resurrection**, then all our wounds will be healed. That will be also **the end of our kenotic existence**.

MORE EXODUS THAN COMFORTABLE STABILITY

There is a need felt by many to speak about God in a new way. Perhaps in our religious culture we have been speaking too much of him in a rather cold, objective and impersonal way, far from real human life and experience. God has often been reduced to a harmless and indifferent reality having little or nothing to do with our own existence. In fact, to speak about God or only about his absence, is felt today, especially in some parts of the world, as something strange, old-fashioned and outdated.

The great religious questions reappear when the media bring us alarming information about such natural cataclysms as earthquakes, tsunami, floods and other catastrophes. Then people start asking again: Where was God? Why was there no trace of his presence in places of terrifying human tragedy, death and suffering of so many innocent victims? Why does he absent himself? Why is he so silent? Is he really so weak and therefore does not want to intervene in the world and break natural laws? To say that he only allows such catastrophes to happen in order to warn sinful

people and call them to conversion may sound like cynicism. In front of this sort of answer one may only become silent, helpless and hopeless.

But silence is no solution to the problem of God. We have to speak about him as we speak about love, which is the most sublime fulfillment of human life. In both cases it is not something superfluous. Believing in God and speaking about him is the greatest challenge to, and provocation for, our human existence. In a continuous effort to improve our cognitive approach to the question of God we become more and more conscious of how insufficient is all what we say, think and feel about him. At the same time we slowly gain a deepening presentiment of his divine otherness and transcendence, and we become more aware that to seek him is an unending task. In this respect one has to appreciate all insights connected with the process of evolution in the world as earlier mentioned. Having the courage to believe in God, giving witness to our faith in him, and speaking about him is the practical way of our love and attachment.

It is, of course, not only a question of speaking about God in a new way today, but above all of experiencing his presence in our concrete lives. Such an experience is a surprising spiritual adventure. Maybe, as some theologians say, **we have “domesticated” God too much in the church teaching** and made him dependent upon our own doctrines, institutional systems and practices. What is truly unforeseeable and revolutionary in him has been belittled, rendered powerless and subordinated to human thinking⁴⁸. This is **a human-made kenosis of God**, far from his real intentions and actions. There is a risk of expropriating God in this way and canalizing his grace. One has to be critical of this sort of thinking also in our own religious life.

That is why the Austrian theologian Gottfried Bachtl demands liberation of our manner of speaking about God from “a shadow of the church”.⁴⁹ To speak of God as the great adventure of life becomes an adventurous thing in itself. In actual fact, however, it sometimes may bear something prophetic in itself, and look foolish or even scandalizing. God is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, of the greatest human adventure which may be very painful. All this is testified by the Bible itself, which foresees **more exodus in our human adventure with God than quiet and comfortable stability**. The case of Abraham gives clear evidence to this. To believe in God is to risk, because what will come cannot be

⁴⁸ A good example of this may be the role attributed to the ordained hierarchical ministry in sacramental actions. According to a wide-spread teaching, in the Eucharistic change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ it is a priest pronouncing the words of institution, who makes the risen Lord to come down from heaven.

⁴⁹ G. Bachtl, *Der bewegte Gott*, Würzburg: Echter Verlag 2012. See also some of his other books on similar topics: *Gottesbeschreibung*, Innsbruck: Tyrolia Verlag 2002 and *Der schwierige Jesus*, Innsbruck 2005.

foreseen, and to get away from the possibility of direct verification. We do not know in advance where it will lead us.

So much has been already said and written about God. After two thousand years there is no need to start our reflection from the point zero. What changes are the categories and concepts which may become today already incomprehensible. One has to look for a fresh approach. After all, we are still the people of the beginnings. Every beginning is only a beginning and not end and final fulfillment. It is a dynamic event in a continuous becoming. In the Christian Creed we do not celebrate the word of God imprisoned in the past, but experience its living truth here and now.

Christians seek inspiration in the teaching of the Gospel and listen to the prophetic witnesses of our time. Such were not lacking in the turbulent century of the second millennium that recently came to an end. Here is one of them:

Only narrow-minded people can imagine that Christianity has been fully realized and completely constituted – according to some in the 4th century, and according to others in the 13th century, or at another time. In fact, Christianity has only made its first steps, timid steps, in the history of humankind. Many of Christ's words are still incomprehensible to us. The history of Christianity has only begun. Everything that has been accomplished in the past, everything that we now call the history of Christianity is just the sum of tests – some of which were not resourceful enough, others failed to achieve their aim.⁵⁰

The Orthodox priest Alexander Men' uttered these words at a conference in the House of Technology in Moscow on Sept. 8, 1990. The next day he was brutally murdered with an ax by an "unknown perpetrator" who was never caught. This extraordinary Christian, whom I met in person during an ecumenical conference shortly before his death, radiated the spirit of understanding and openness. He showed the greatest sensitivity to people who were marked by unbelief and atheism and kept far away from Christianity. For these people, outside the walls of the temple, he tried to uncover and show the true face of the Church. We can learn and understand a lot from such people who live up to the Gospel vision of a benevolent, open and friendly Christianity, conscious of its failures and mistakes committed in the past.

For Christianity, the 20th century was a time of great surge towards reconciliation and ecumenism, an age of profound change in the consciousness of Christians. It brought not only many good experiences but also an enormity of suffering and martyrdom. It was a time of the renewal

⁵⁰ Quoted in E. Behr-Sigel. *Pour un témoignage chrétien renouvelé*. "Contacts" 52:2000 No. 189, pp. 35-45, here p. 35.

of theology in Christian churches, a time of the Second Vatican Council, a time of a conscious turn towards the early sources of faith. This period changed the face of Christianity divided and scattered over the ages, and now laboriously seeking to restore its lost unity, or at least to overcome the great divisions between the churches.

It seems that in the very beginning of the 21st century, having entered into a new millennium, we are in a more favorable position and closer to the spirit of the Gospel of Christ. In this rapidly changing world, will the Gospel find a fertile ground to be rooted in the life of future generations? In this era of increasing secularization, does Christianity have a chance to find a fuller and more conscious realization in the lives of the people? What have we learnt from the experiences of past centuries? What are the lessons of the past which deserve special attention? These are some of the questions which we face today.

GOD IN A GENTLE WHISPER

Some contemporary thinkers speak about the transformation of a “hot religion” of the beginnings into a “cold religion” of modern times. The apostle Paul expected a different, redeemed life. For him the Christian religion was a very hot question concerning the whole of human life (Quinzio thought in a similar way). Then began the process of refrigeration. The original concrete world of faith was slowly explained in abstract, psychological, symbolical and ritualistic categories. The original belief in Jesus Christ, in redemption by his death and resurrection, and consequently also in the afterlife in God’s Kingdom, was cooled down with the help of reason and to a large extent individualized. Very often God has been reduced to a harmless and indifferent reality.

This kind of diagnosis, provocative as it is, may only partly correspond to the facts. Have we spoken too much about God in a cold way, and not enough with enthusiasm and passion about the true God? In matters of religion there is some fluctuation; there are ups and downs. In our modern culture one has from time to time announced even the disappearance of religion, diluted by the secularization process. But secularization may also be a strong challenge, a chance of renewal and revival.

When new atheists attack religion as delusion or superstition, Christians should not react aggressively against their polemics. Serious philosophical atheism is a real challenge to our search for God. Many open questions put today by unbelievers are also our own questions. Some wounds inflicted on faith also cause a great deal of pain today. Our believing self-consciousness has to be accompanied by patience and modesty. We know from our own experience that doubts are often a part of our personal faith as well. We have to learn from our mistakes committed in the past, and, in our human weakness, to give wise and credible witness to the living God in words and actions.

The “hot religion” of the faith in God who had raised Jesus from the dead, as preached by the early Christians, has not disappeared in today’s churches. It has to find a new language, involve not only the human mind but also the human heart and human feelings.

To go back to an anthropomorphic, naïve and irrational faith in God would be no solution to the problem. Already in the Old Testament, as earlier mentioned, one can see a process of evolution in understanding divine presence in the world. The narrative of God’s revelation to Moses in the burning bush which has not been consumed, is some sort of critical demythologization and appeal to a more sublime vision. This found continuation in the prohibition of making any image of God as was the case with purely human idols. Faith in one God undergoes continuous purification. It cannot become irrational.

Jewish prophets tried to renew and purify an archaic and magic concept of the biblical God. They spoke about him in a different and critical way, and showed him really close to us. The prophet Elijah became convinced that “the Lord was not in the wind, (...) not in the earthquake, (...) not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper” (1 K 19:11-12; NIV), or “a still small voice” (RSVCE). **God in a gentle whisper!** What a significant correction of human imagination and human images!

This revelation of God to Elijah connects the powerful elements of nature into form of a “negative theology”, in order to say what the true God is not. He defies any reification. The God YHWH revealed to the prophet cannot any more be localized in a wind-storm, in an earthquake or in a fire. He is described, almost ironically, as manifesting himself in “a still small voice”, in calm and weakness.

A definitive change in understanding God has occurred in the teaching of Jesus. He proclaimed God not as “the Lord of hosts”, but as “Abba”, i.e. a tender, loving and merciful Father. He taught his disciples to address him as “**our Father**”. At that time it was perceived by some, especially by religious leaders, even as blasphemy and deviation from the true God of Israel. How far we are here from an archaic God of violence as represented in some historic books of the Old Testament! The fact that people eagerly followed Jesus was explained by the evangelist Matthew in his reference to the prophesy of Isaiah:

This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

‘Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
the one I love, in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him (...).
He will not quarrel or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out (...).’
(Mt 12:17-20; Is 42:1-4)

The mention of the Spirit is not accidental in this context. Jesus himself will later explain: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (J 14:9). So also the Father “will not break a bruised reed, and will not snuff out a smoldering wick”. This is an image of God who is able to limit himself and resign his power. It is also an image of God’s Holy Spirit who acts in the world in a similar way.

With this vision in our mind and heart we will never be able to say that we have finished our cognitive journey to God. He will always remain for us an incomprehensible mystery. Many words, but not much said... Our questions will never be fully answered. Every day one has to begin our journey again. This is a permanent beginning in search for a true image of God and his Holy Spirit.

THE MOMENT IS GOD’S KENOTIC GARMENT

In light of the Scripture God is neither masculine nor feminine but a supreme being who totally transcends any differentiation of gender, i.e. any division into male or female. The Bible gives witness to this transcendence. It speaks about God as Father, but at the same time it **attributes to God some maternal features**. It displays certain traits which correspond to masculinity or femininity in the human world. The God revealed in the moving words of the Scripture is God full of tenderness, care, compassion and forgiveness, similar both to a tender earthly father (cf. Ps 103:13; Is 63:15-16), and to a gentle and loving mother (cf. Is 49:14-15; 66:13; Jer 31:20). The love of God resembles the love of an earthly mother.

The female and motherly features of God were connected, in a particular way, with the person of the Holy Spirit by the Syrian tradition. In the Hebrew and Syriac languages the very word “spirit” (*ruah, ruho*) is of feminine gender, which appears as masculine only occasionally. The maternal feature in God’s image becomes most clearly known in the person of the Spirit.

According to Martin Buber, “the moment is God’s garment” (*Der Augenblick ist Gottes Gewand*). He hides his coming mostly in inconspicuous “garments”. As already mentioned, in the Hebrew Bible he hides in cloud, pillar of fire, burning bush or breath of the wind. But this can also be referred to Jesus Christ. One has only to think about his nativity in Bethlehem, hidden life in Nazareth, acting with sick people, passion and death on the cross. A similar situation continued also after the resurrection. He meets as a visitor or foreigner the disciples going to Emmaus, appears as a gardener to Mary of Magdala and as an Unknown to the disciples on the shore of Tiberias.

This means that we have **to dispose ourselves to unexpected situations** when we want to encounter God. He **“appears” in signs and events, but above all meets us in the person of our neighbors** (Lat: *proximi!*). These are certainly small, everyday things and experiences, but they are very decisive for our human lives. As Jesus said himself: “whatever

you did [or did not do] for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did [or did not do] for me” (Mt 25:40).

There is in the Gospel an unusual account about Jesus and a sick woman: “Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.’ Jesus turned and saw her. ‘Take heart, daughter’, he said, ‘your faith has healed you.’ And the woman was healed from that moment” (Mt 9:20-22; NIV).

That was indeed the privileged moment of divine intervention, the moment of grace. The instance short as the twinkling of an eye is really the kenotic garment of God. Indeed, “time is God’s messenger” (blessed Peter Faber)⁵¹.

GOD IS MORE THAN ONLY FORCE, POWER OR ENERGY

A striking fact is that even today some Christians often avoid speaking about God as a “person”, but instead use such vague expressions as a “divine or blessing force”. All that I said in the above reflections presupposes that God is more than only a force, power or energy. In fact, we have no better concept for describing God’s nature than “person”. This concept is much more complex than mere power and energy. A person remains in a dialogical relationship both with others and with oneself. As persons we humans develop, mature and have our own history of life. We can address ourselves, be in love, have compassion, forgive and correct ourselves.

Of course, in speaking about God as a person we should not fall into a naïve and anthropomorphic projection. The concept of “person” is an image, but in matters of religion we have no other way than to think and speak using images. Without images it would be impossible to discover in God such features that cannot be otherwise recognized. Saying that God is a personal reality is a necessary and wise anthropomorphism, which should not be dismissed in religious language. Christian hope in the resurrection and everlasting life is only then comprehensible when there exists the personal God. An impersonal energy has no memory and can promise nothing. In our Christian vision God is faithful to his promises of salvation in the ultimate future.

This is possible only through belief in the personal God. Only such a personal God can be in a kenotic way present in the world’s history. He addresses his rational creatures and they can address him. Belief in him changes our existence from a solitary monologue into a living dialogue. I believe also that my life is a dialogue. I believe and try to answer honestly his call. Even in his silence one can patiently find a delicate trace of his kenotic presence.

⁵¹ Quoted by Pope Francis in his exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (171).

CHAPTER III

EXISTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF A KENOTIC GOD

Let us begin our reflection with special reference to the most classic New Testament text already quoted, dealing with the vision of the self-emptying, self-belittling, kenotic God in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul refers in it to Jesus who, being the incarnate Son of God, abandoned his glory and identified himself with human nature in its most humble and humiliated form. It is generally accepted that this was an early Christian hymn and the Apostle inserted it in his letter to the Philippians, encouraging them to preserve unity in humility.

In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus:
His state was divine,
yet he did not cling
to his equality with God
but emptied himself (*heautòn ekénōsen*)
to assume the condition of a slave (*morphēn doulou*),
and became as men are;
and being as all men are,
he was humbler yet,
even to accepting death,
death on a cross (Ph 2:5-8).

The Greek word *kenōō* means to deprive of power, make of no meaning. If I say *hemautòn kenōō* it means I give up or lay aside what I possess. In human eyes there is something foolish and senseless in such resignation and belittlement. We would instinctively feel, in our too human way, that there is no purpose in such a behavior. Who wants to act empty-handed, in vain (*eis kenón*), and without effect or no result? This would be the state of utter humiliation. Our human logic would see no sense in such voluntary self-resignation and self-limitation. But Jesus did not hesitate to assume this kind of condition compared with the most humiliated sector of the slaves' life of those days.

GOD IN THE CONDITION OF A SLAVE?

What such assuming of the condition of a slave (*doúlos!*) could mean today, one might find many examples throughout the world. Perhaps the most eloquent and clear example would be the Dalits in India, the "Untouchables" or the "Outcastes", i.e. people outside the Hindu caste system, who make up nearly one quarter of the society there (this caste

system is already three thousand years old!). From a historical point of view the Dalits are considered to be the longest oppressed group of people, being victims of human prejudices, enslavement and trafficking. Deprived of fundamental freedom and human rights, they are at constant risk of dehumanization, discrimination, degradation and violence. The term “Dalit” means those who have been broken and ground down by people situated in the higher social hierarchy. One can compare the condition of Dalits with that of black South Africans under the apartheid regime. It refers in a particular way to the situation of women, rightly called “the unheard scream”.¹ In spite of constitutional and legal protection their situation has not changed much in many parts of India. According to some sources, 70% of village people belonging to the higher social hierarchy will not eat or drink with Dalits. When an Untouchable enters a tea shop and requests a cup of tea, he or she will be served in a clay cup rather than in a glass or metal cup that others are given. After drinking their tea, they are expected to crush the cup on the ground so that no other person risks being polluted by the cup touched by a Dalit.

This is what it means to be an “untouchable” human being! Those who know well the condition of the Dalits in India say that the most humiliated sector among them are the scavengers, forced by birth to perform the most degrading task of removing human waste. This humiliating job makes them permanent outcasts. I draw attention to such realities because this helps us to realize what “assuming the condition of a slave” could mean today. Such a situation implies disgrace, humiliation and degradation of human dignity.

The Dalits speak different languages and embrace various religions (the majority became Buddhists). They try to regain their human dignity. Many Dalits have found it in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings them in a concrete and perceptible way the truth of their value and dignity. These degraded “untouchable” people are deeply “touched” by the faith in Christ, despite all social conventions, caste rules and laws. It is he who came to the world in poverty and humiliation, and took the side of those who were poor, nameless, suffering and deprived of their human dignity.

Faith in Jesus Christ and his Gospel brings inner liberation. An untouchable human being is “touched” in a particular way in baptism, and above all in the Eucharist, at the Lord’s Supper. The despised and disregarded people can experience how deeply God, in his unconditional love, enters into their hearts and bodies, and into their whole human destiny. The privileged manner of communication becomes thus the language of the body – precisely that of “touching”, in spite of caste prohibitions. This is for these people a liberating and joyful Good News which permits them to find again their own identity in the situation of everyday violence, dehumanization and social injustice.

¹ See Mary Gray, *The Unheard Scream – the Struggles of Dalit Women in India*, New Delhi: Centre for Dalit Studies 2004.

Some Indian theologians have found their own way of expressing this liberating and hopeful experience. It is a new attempt at interpreting the truth of the incarnation of God. The point of departure is an existential experience of the "Untouchables" itself. The incarnation of the divine Logos appears in this perspective as God's astoundingly original initiative to transcend his own intangibility, i.e. untouchableness. The God of the Christian faith could not and did not want to experience isolation and the painful lack of relationship that resulted from his transcendence and untouchability. There was, however, at his disposal a new way to break the distance: he became human being in Jesus Christ. Thanks to this we discover with amazement that God is the being who exists in communion and relationship with us. In this divine way he inspires and makes possible our human exodus from the existential situation of untouchableness, enslavement and degradation.

What Asian Christians think of the incarnation is for all of us an issue worth pondering. There is something strikingly simple and profound in this interpretation. In my perception it is a special kind of narrative theology, close to life, not presupposing accepted philosophical categories of thought. What matters here is an experience of wrong, injustice and inequality, away from the ancient conflicts and controversies over the divinity of Christ which continued throughout centuries of church history. We can keep then a greater distance from these controversies. It is a serious challenge to traditional theology. We face therefore a different pattern of interpreting the fundamental truth of the Christian faith, which in turn requires another way of proclaiming this truth and living up to it. The Gospel truly hides in itself a liberating power!

BELIEF IN THE KENOTIC GOD IS AN IMPERATIVE OF LIFE

Since the very beginning of humankind people have believed in some form of supernatural reality. Faith seems to be rooted in our sub-consciousness as some sort of primitive information-bearing pattern, concealed in the depth of human nature. It is not a static possession but a part of our constantly changing life. Can it be only a delusion? Faith does not exclude doubting and questioning. Doubts do not allow us to stop seeking God and thinking about our ultimate future. They challenge our mind and heart to deal with it every day anew. God is for all, but at the same time individual for every human person. "God is light" (1Jn 1:5) and can reflect himself differently in the living mirror of everyone's consciousness.

The kenotic principle reveals something of the perennial wisdom coming from above. It is the divine wisdom hidden also in biblical texts. We have to pass through a period of the "second naivety" and come closer to the more modest vision of God as self-effacing and truly kenotic.

The truth contained in the kenotic vision of God has a lasting significance for the whole Christian existence. The drama of Christ's kenosis which took place in his total self-offering and dedication will

remain till the end of time an imperative for the church, a spiritual challenge for every believer, and an urgent appeal for forgiveness and reconciliation. The kenotic attitude, understood as the disinterested ability of self-resignation and self-limitation, judges our churches, all symptoms of ecclesiastical egoism and self-complacency, all our divisions and narcissistic self-sufficiency.

Anyone who selfishly and greedily loves his or her life will eventually lose it. The words of Jesus give witness to the wisdom of this existential truth: "Anyone who tries to preserve his life will lose it; and anyone who loses it will keep it safe" (Lk 17:33). Speaking metaphorically, he warned against the negative outcome of an egoistic manner of life: "unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest" (Jn 12:24).

Christ's kenosis reveals an important existential truth about our own life. An empty existence centered about one's own interests is self-destructive. That is why the Second Vatican Council emphasized "a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the union of God's sons [and daughters!, W.H.] in truth and charity". And it explained: "This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself".² This sort of anthropology is implied in the kenotic vision of God.

Trinitarian Christian theology shows that as Jesus emptied himself, assuming the condition of a slave, so God too is able to belittle himself in divine acts of self-limitation and self-resignation. The Three Persons of God, being united within the Holy Trinity (*ad intra*) in eternal loving relationship, are also equally united without (*ad extra*) in their salvific action in the world. As the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed says, our Lord, Jesus Christ, "for us men [=men and women!] and for our salvation came down from heaven". His kenotic movement of identification with human nature and all humanity was accomplished in mutual unceasing connection with the Holy Spirit and the Father himself. Not only did Jesus resign from his glory, being as all humans are, but also it was the entire Trinity which took part in the self-emptying process of self-belittlement or voluntary self-abasement.

As we shall see later, this mysterious kenotic dimension of the divine life was particularly emphasized in modern Russian thought and found both moral and doctrinal application.³ Among philosophers and theologians the doctrine of kenosis was developed by V. Soloviev, M. M. Tareev and especially by Fr. Sergius Bulgakov (d. 1944).⁴ In Bulgakov's writings it found a thorough dogmatic exposition. In subsequent chapters I will often refer to his inspiring, but largely forgotten views.

² Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, par. 24.

³ Cf. Nadejda Gorodetzky, *The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought*, London, New York 1938, reprint 1973.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 127-174.

THE SILENCE OF GOD AND THE LOUDEST CRY IN HUMAN HISTORY

I want to reflect on an issue which has been pervading my mind for a long time. As a Christian I have placed my trust in God. I believe that he exists, is good, merciful, patient and humble. I also believe that he loves people and the world which he has called to being out of love. I believe that he loves everyone and calls him and her by name. I believe and trust that he can reconcile with himself even the most stubborn will of his rational creatures, and bring all safely to himself. I believe that he is able to open human eyes and hearts, so that they could recognize his healing and saving presence in the world, continuously marked by suffering, expectation and hope.

But at the same time I am well aware that so often can also be heard the **unspoken cry and torturing question of many people: “Do you hear me, you silent God, you unknown and distant God?”** This cry arises above all in the situation when God’s silence and lack of direct intervention in front of evil and affliction so easily become – for a distressed and suffering person – a cause of hopelessness and doubt about his existence and his love towards humans. The history of humankind often seems a long train of God’s silence, felt as a sign of his absence among people, in spite of all the promises and consolations offered by religion.

This experience is also known to people who believe. During our earthly life “we know in part”, and “we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror” (1 Co 13:9.12; NIV). Notice: “a poor reflection as in a mirror”, i.e. in a mirror made in those times out of polished metal. Because of this lack of clarity our faith often borders on incredulity, and therefore is threatened by unbelief and despair. This situation manifests a real, but rarely perceived solidarity of destinies which exists, despite all appearances, among believers and unbelievers. This feeling of solidarity will accompany my further reflections devoted to the silence of God.

Many people believe that God’s silence makes us deaf. We then become unable to listen to his voice and to hear it. Are we ourselves only to be blamed for this deafness? Is the deafness of humankind a result of our unwillingness to listen more carefully and attentively? We got used to speak about God’s silence. Maybe he speaks in our deafness, but we are unable to hear his voice.

In the well known story of two Rabbis complaining after their death to God about their fruitless ministry among people who were unwilling to listen to them, his simple answer was: “I have sunk my hearing in the deafness of humankind”. In other words: you complain that people do not listen to you, but they do not listen to me either. My silence does not mean that I am unable to hear your cry. It is you yourselves who have become deaf. In your deafness you simply cannot hear when I speak to you and therefore you painfully experience my silence. You do not even listen to one another. You do not hear those who want to tell you something very

important for your life. How can you hear what I want to tell you? So do not complain, you inhabitants of the earth, that you do not hear my voice either. I hear you, and that is important.

Why does God keep silence? It is one of the loudest cries of all inhabitants of our planet. This is also one of the most difficult questions we ask during our life. It reminds us above all of the dramatic cry of the crucified and dying Jesus himself: **“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”** (or: deserted me?”; Mt 27:46). This is **the loudest cry addressed to God in human history**. It seems that these words express in the deepest way the mystery of the hiding God. The Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapide, who knows well the secrets of Jewish mysticism, has proposed a different translation of the cry of Jesus: **“My God, my God, to what [purpose] have you forsaken me?”** This translation differs significantly from all that are well known. In its light the cry of Jesus ceases to be a sign of despair and resignation. It becomes a prayer. It becomes the dramatic question of all people.

Whatever interpretation is given, the fact remains that the evangelists did not hide the fact that Jesus experienced on the cross the silence of God in a measure inaccessible to us humans. This was, however, according to the account of Luke, an experience in the end full of hope and confidence: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk 23:46). The evangelist has changed the perspective. The startling cry of dereliction was replaced by an expression of filial confidence and trust in the Father’s love and wisdom.

One should not forget that the experience of Jesus’ forsakenness occurred when human free will had come to a negative and tragic decision about Jesus’ destiny. *Fiat voluntas tua, homo!* Let your will be done, people! Jesus’ cry in the solitude and darkness of the Golgotha will be heard by all generations of humanity. Cry, questions and confidence are inseparable.

Perhaps it is **in questions that we express our deepest and most fervent prayers**. There are indeed such good and pertinent questions that it is useless to spoil and invalidate them by hasty answers. Perhaps the deepest questions may become a prayer. In our theology we got used to offering too many overhasty answers, whereas it was rather time and place for questions and thoughtful meditation. Many of our answers seem to wait for becoming questions again. Are we ready to go on asking patiently such questions about God’s silence and his hiding presence?

A real danger in religion is that we very easily get accustomed to what we confess, and to what we see in our religious symbols and representations. We cease to perceive their mysterious contents, and consequently we do not ask questions any more.

In the globalized world of today, our situation is paradoxically marked by cultural fragmentation. Faith symbols are no longer commonly shared by our fellow citizens, as was the case in mediaeval Christendom which erected admirable cathedrals, perceived as universal cultural icons of

that epoch. Today they have become, for most people, only monuments of the past not prompting the asking of serious questions.

Does it surprise us? We live in an age characterized by pluralism of different world-views and religious allegiances. Can the silence of the hiding and self-emptying God become for us an illuminating truth? Can it tell us something important, independently of our cultural and religious differences? These are some of my questions.

Etymologically the term “religion” may come, if not from the Latin word *religare*, to bind anew – then perhaps from *relegere*, i.e. to read anew, to re-read, to try to understand once again, more deeply and wisely. This kind of *re-lecture* certainly leads to new questions and becomes a real school of reading afresh the message about God and the world. By its nature religion recurs to a symbolic and figurative language which requires unceasing interpretation for people of succeeding generations. This, of course, demands much patience in asking questions and searching for an explanation which will never be exhaustive, fully satisfying and absolutely adequate.

God will always surprise us. *Deus semper maior*, **God always greater** – says an old Latin axiom. The depth of the mystery of God, and thus of the mystery of faith, has no bottom. Our questions will have no end. True questions are not left without answers. Only the time of the answer is not known. One has to learn to live with questions, but the answer to some of them may come only in the Great Beyond, in eschatological verification. One can hope that all of us will then see and experience that God is indeed unconditional love which has been revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. It was he who in the darkness of suffering and death on the cross did not cease to ask questions addressed to the Father of the universe. These are in fact our own questions too. I believe that God was then with the Crucified whose destiny had become the greatest open question extended to the entire history of humankind. The real answer came in the resurrection.

A lesson for us? Indeed, God is present in what is still hidden before our eyes, in our questions thrown into the infinite spaces of the Ultimate Reality. We often ask what is the meaning of our existence and where does it lead us. It is better not to expect an immediate answer. When Pilate asked Jesus ironically about truth, he did not even listen, probably not expecting an answer at all. No wonder he did not receive any. It was not the proper time for such a discussion (if it really took place, as some scholars doubt). Because there was no willingness to know the truth, Jesus was silent. The answer seemed to be his silent presence itself. “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6), he said about himself during the Last Supper, answering willingly the question put to him by the apostle Thomas. What a contrast!

TO HEAR GOD’S SILENCE

Except for mystics and deeply religious persons, God does not

become an evident reality for the rest of humanity. There is no argument nor proof which can assure the feeling of absolute obviousness of his existence.⁵ The cognitive optimism of those who believe in the convincing strength of arguments that God exists has in itself a great deal of naivety. We do not come to know God through rational proofs. The mystery of God's silence is an inseparable feature of his divine pedagogy in relation to humankind. Any proof bearing evidence would violate human freedom and take away the right to, and possibility of, a free decision. In front of once given freedom God confines his omnipotence. On the one hand, the incarnation of the Divine Logos reveals the face of God; on the other hand, however, it covers it even more.

This is a striking paradox. The unveiling of the mystery of divine life can somehow conceal it again from our inner sight. God keeps silence because in a certain sense he has said everything that we need for our faith and hope. Maybe one has to hear afresh his voice which already was heard in human history. The Scripture says: "At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son..." (Heb 1:1-2). It is very significant that God did it at many times and in various ways. These words do not refer only to the past. The most decisive word of God has been pronounced once and for all "through his Son". There will be no greater revelation in the history of our earth till the end of times. Since then the divine pedagogy leaves to humans free space for faith and hope. Perhaps, if we do not hear God's voice, it is because we do not sufficiently open up our **inner hearing**.

God does not give orders. He calls above all, invites to listen and take decision: "Hear, O Israel", *Sh'ma, Israel* (Dt 6:3-4; Mk 12:29). This is also the Gospel's lesson – God does not compel but invite: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine...", "If you wish to be perfect..." (Mt 16:24; 19:21). How significant is this "if" in the mouth of Jesus! It is an invitation, a proposal, not a command. In the faith of a person a miracle of reciprocity takes place: the created freedom of a rational being meets the inviting freedom of God, the Creator and Savior. From him comes a call to listen, but one has to be able to hear it.

⁵ There are, of course, many witnesses of near death experiences (NDE), but they seem to give only some subjective certainty about God and the invisible world. Such is even the well-known case of Dr. Eben Alexander and his book: *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*, published first in the United States by Simon & Schuster, Inc 2012 and in Sydney by Pan Macmillan Australia 2012. Personally I do not think that we can have a real commonly valid proof of afterlife. Not denying a personal subjective value of such experiences, one can doubt whether science will ever be able to bring a decisive verification. Thanks to research done in this field, however, human life after death seems to be more probable. But probability is not yet proof. What is needed is still an act of faith and hope that the afterlife exists.

In one of the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch appear some thought-provoking words: “there is only one God, manifested through Jesus Christ his Son who is his Word which has come out of silence”, *logos apò sigēs proelthōn*.⁶ Even more striking still is another statement: “**The one who truly possesses the word of Jesus, can hear even his silence**”, *dýnatai kai tēs ēsykhías autoû akouéin*.⁷ The voice of God “comes out of silence”. In human reception the divine sphere is covered by impenetrable silence. No human being has direct access to it. The Early-Christian martyr Ignatius (in the beginning of the second century) encouraged believers to interiorize and assimilate the words of Jesus. He was convinced that a stupendous ability would then be born in the human inner self, permitting one to hear even God’s silence.

So it is possible that God speaks to us not only through his word, but also through his silence; not only through his closeness but through his distance and hiddenness as well.

WHEN GOD SEEMS TO ABSENT HIMSELF

Modern critics of religion have involuntarily contributed to the purification of Christian faith. Today we perhaps realize better the necessity of a deeper interpretation of Christianity and of its universalism. Friedrich Nietzsche reproached Christians that on their faces one could not see the joy and the new quality of being redeemed by Jesus Christ: “Much more redeemed should his disciples look to me!” (“*Erlöster müsten mir seine Jünger aussehen!*”).⁸ 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 allows us 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 can be applied not only to an individual human life, but also to the history of humankind and of the divided Christian 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

⁶ *Ad Magnesios* 8,2. SCh 10, p. 86.

⁷ *Ad Ephesios* 15,2. SCh 10, p. 70.

⁸ F. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, II: *Von den Priestern*, in idem, *Werke*. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, hrsg. von Giorgio Colli / Marino Montinari. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967ff.

kind of interpretation. The 20th century has brought an unusual amount of destruction and suffering. This was a real “dark night” in humanity’s history, a fire of existential fear in the face of blatant absurdity. 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 in the heart. Many of those who were plunged into the darkness of the night and the struggle 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. What a different human destiny!

But there are in fact two successive days of 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 – God's answer to the cry of the Forsaken Son of Man. The silence of Holy Saturday on the surface of the earth covers the event of Christ's encounter with a fallen humanity – His presence in the anthropological depth of human hearts. This is, if one may say so, **the lowest point of the divine *kenosis***: God in the hell created by human sins, trying to attract and to transform sick human freedom. The divine *kenosis* is no annihilation, but transformation, the beginning of Christ's resurrection, of His *anástasis*.

The silence of Holy Saturday may serve as a paradigmatic symbol for every situation of human hopelessness. However, the lessons 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 the 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. These may become the crucial moments of our spiritual maturation. One has to leave behind the world of infantile religious representations and external marks of religiosity. The process of transformation and maturation is painful. One must cope with pain and grief as one patiently works through them (*Trauerarbeit* in S. Freud’s terminology).

SILENCE AND EXPECTATION – THE LESSON OF HOLY SATURDAY

In the words of the Bible one feels something incomparably greater than only an answer to human request of proofs for the existence of God. These words breathe a certainty that he exists and unceasingly acts in the history of the world. Of course, it would not be enough for an unbeliever.

An entry into the sphere of inner silence is not an easy task. Silence is expectation, openness, receptivity, a kind of “collecting the voices”, as Cyprian Kamil Norwid, one of greatest Polish poets, put it. It has in it something of the mystery of Advent time. Proofs and arguments will always remain insufficient. God himself is the ultimate criterion of his own reality. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus compares human seeking of God, above all through prayer, with “going to a private room”, “shutting the door”, and speaking to him “who is in that secret place, and (...) sees all that is done in secret” (Mt 6:6).

The ultimate Truth which is God himself does not reveal itself to us otherwise than through the force of the Truth itself. The acceptance of this Truth requires an openness of the human mind and heart. The Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov (d. 1970) wrote years ago that “in each thought about God, it is God himself who causes thinking in the human mind”.⁹ Faith is no human invention originating through our own initiative. It is a gift of God offered to all people without exception. Through human faith **God comes out of his silence which paradoxically becomes then his word.** We answer this living word with our confidence in God.

The most comprehensible **sign of God’s existence and speaking** will always be **another human being who loves, prays and does good.** His or her face radiates with goodness and becomes a living icon, a place for the presence and discrete revelation of God. According to eastern tradition, it is this “epiphany” visible in the human face which constitutes the best witness and argument in favor of God who is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8.16).¹⁰

The evangelist John assures us that “the true light...enlightens all men [and women]” (Jn 1:9). It is this light, identified in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel with the incarnate Word of God, which allows us to have a presentiment and an intuition of the Invisible: “No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (Jn 1:18).

Contemporary theology favors more and more **the vision of a compassionate God who can co-suffer with his suffering creatures.**¹¹ It is the God able to belittle and humble himself, and to resign from his omnipotence. But he never resigns from transfiguring human freedom through love, because only love has in itself the power to persuade and

⁹ P. Evdokimov, *L’amour fou de Dieu*, Paris 1973, p. 32.

¹⁰ According to some theologians this is an “iconosophical” and “agapic” argument. Neologism “iconosophical” comes from “icon” + *sophía*. It means an iconic wisdom, i.e. wisdom expressed in icons. Greek word *agápē* means love, concern, interest.

¹¹ See W. Hryniewicz, *Pascha Chrystusa w dziejach człowieka i wszechświata. Zarys chrześcijańskiej teologii paschalnej*, vol. 3 (*The Passover of Christ in the History of Man and Cosmos: An Outline of Christian Paschal Theology*, vol.3), Lublin 1991, pp. 262-284.

attract rational creatures to their Creator. We are reminded of this (I stress again!) by a largely forgotten article of faith about **Christ's "descent into hell"**. One has to understand this in an existential sense as **a descent into the infernal dimensions of human life**. A human person plunged into the infernal depth of unbelief and loneliness can also in such a state of mind discover the presence of the humiliated and crucified Christ, who by his whole being has become an appeal to a lost or revolted freedom. One has only to invoke him by asking for rescue and crying with confidence from the depth of the infernal abyss. This is enough, even if this cry is expressed only by a sincere sigh or desire to be rescued.

Perhaps it is the message about **Christ descending into the loneliness of human inferno** which is today the most trustworthy way of proclaiming the forgotten truth of the God who reaches the darkest secrets of human freedom. This message requires a deep meditation on Christ's astounding solidarity with sinful people, which continues also in the afterlife. It is a mystery of solidarity with those who have closed themselves into the hell of negation, into posthumous atheism, condemning themselves to doom and alienation from God.

The mystery of Holy Saturday reveals **the face of Christ who silently accompanies a revolted sinner** to frightful loneliness in a state of self-isolation and alienation. Can the negation of a free creature be so radical as to defeat entirely and forever the love of God? Can the liberating love of the crucified God become reconciled with the bad decision of a lost human being?

A Christian can entertain the hope that Christ who humbled himself and shared to the very end solidarity with human destiny is able to overcome the loneliness of a person's infernal condition and help to find again the way to God without violating his or her freedom. Only love "to the end" (Jn 13:1) can cause such a miracle. Only love can lead someone out of the prison into which he or she has been thrown by bad decisions freely made. The article of faith in Christ's descent into hell gives witness to a God who attracts all lost people through the Crucified and his love "to the end".

It is that *descensus ad inferos* which reveals the permanent way of God's conduct towards human freedom. It is **not only the truth of silence of Holy Saturday**. The God descending into the human inferno – this is **the truth enlightening the entire history of the drama of freedom** until the ultimate choice between good and evil. God does not constrain our freedom which is his own gift. He does everything to draw it to himself. There he stands before a resistant rational creature through the crucified Christ, powerless and lonely in his death. The Crucified, being the greatest sign and the decisive proof of God's love and faithfulness, can always unexpectedly appear, even in the infernal state caused by human freedom. Who has closed himself in his unbelief, in the hell of his own solitude and revolt, can still find the grace of opening, thanks to this presence of Christ, accompanying

him with inexhaustible goodness and patience in the infernal state of his spirit.

The encounter with the Crucified is the most effective way of attracting sinners to God and transforming the most negative choice of their sick freedom. Christ, who shows the full extent of his love, will accompany a sinful person in order to heal his or her freedom without destroying it. He has at his disposition such attractive beauty, goodness and love with which nothing else can be compared. The force of the human “no” is not comparable with the power of God’s persuasion that rescues and saves through the greatest dedication of his humbled Son.

The mystery of the silence of the Holy Saturday proves in this way **a sign of the most extraordinary hope** – the hope for the liberation of sinful human beings from the final temptation to exist without God. It is the hope that generates a deep sense of solidarity among all people. This is an indispensable element of Christian reflection about atheism and the mystery of God’s silence.

I keep in my memory a striking passage in the reflections of Paul Evdokimov on the icon of Pentecost: “There is an evolution even in the atheism. It seems that the death of Nietzsche’s God, this Good Friday without tomorrow (*ce Vendredi Saint sans lendemain*), leaves place today to the great silence of Sabbath, to the great silence of the old king (*au grand silence du vieux roi*). This is not a silence of negation but of expectation...”¹² (To understand the meaning of this passage, see below chapter VII and the subtitle: *The Cosmos as Prisoner-King on the Icon of Pentecost*.)

In human life “Holy Saturday” can symbolize the time of the greatest existential hiddenness of God. It is the time on which falls the deep shadow of the cross, and the resurrection appears to be only a sphere of illusionary expectations. Atheists may take specific part in the silence of Holy Saturday, when nothing significant seems to happen on the surface of human history, but in the depth of reality there occur some decisive transformations. Instead of condemning a serious atheism, let us try to understand the deeper sense of such human experience of the absence of God and his silence in the most tragic events of the history. I will come back to this insight.

THE TERRIFYING GOD AND MODERN ATHEISM

The human mind alone is helpless in the face of this mystery. What is needed is an integral openness of the human spirit, in which an irreplaceable role belongs to the heart and religious intuition, so much emphasized by the eastern tradition of Christianity. Those who elevate human reason to the rank of the only source of knowledge open themselves

¹² P. Evdokimov, *L’art de l’icône. Théologie de la beauté*, Paris 1970, p. 290.

the door to the negation of God in their own thoughts, concepts and imaginations. Although they cannot prove that he does not exist, they maintain their negative judgment and, at the same time, cease to feel any need for God in their life. Their lack of religiosity becomes in this way a vicarious form of religion, which makes their own myth about the nonexistence of God, considered as a delusion or fictitious entity, hostile to human dignity and freedom. As a reverse of faith, atheism seems to have something tragic and inconsequential in its nature. It betrays an inability to trust in the ultimate mystery of the universe.

Widespread atheism is an unquestionable fact of the past century. During the decades it shaped an official, obligatory ideology of a considerable part of the world, proclaiming its own vision of human history. After the fall of the communist system it has by no means lost its influence on the way of thinking of many people, as can be seen in the recent phenomenon of the “new atheism”. This is to a large extent favored by a contemporary, one-dimensional mentality which disregards and denies any reference to the invisible world. There is in it no place for the need of God. It is better to live on the surface of existence, to enjoy one’s life, not to think about the necessity of death – simply to live as if it were the only possible existence, deprived of any responsibility before God for good and evil.

From this perspective God appears as someone who does not allow us to be happy. Atheism becomes for many a way to manage somehow without God. They abandon belief in him without regret, nor do they feel that something important is lost. If God existed – they argue – he would not keep **silence in the presence of terrible things which happen on earth...** To become an atheist today is to allow in oneself the growth of a mentality which does not need to ask “those damned questions” about the meaning of existence and the order of this world.

Those who do not believe carry in themselves a suspicion that the rational creature called a wise human being (*homo sapiens*) has itself invented a transcendent being called God. A critical attitude towards faith prompts them to see in religious aspirations only a projection of human longings, unfulfilled expectations and hopes. Humans badly tolerate their existential loneliness. They are frightened by a lack of evidence concerning the ultimate destiny of the humankind and the world. For a convinced atheist this is something very decisive. In his view those who believe have launched a hypothesis of God’s existence in order to fill the disquieting gap in their own ignorance and uncertainty. In the face of absurdity and all negative sides of existence, believers are supposed to seek comfort and consolation in the hope for a future life of happiness and immortality. An atheist is convinced that this is nothing more than an escape from hard reality into an illusory and fictitious future called eternal life. In the eyes of an atheist God appears as a useful option which has to bring an answer to all terminal situations of human existence, above all to such tragedies as evil, suffering, misfortune and death.

Have not Christians themselves given enough reasons for such

convictions? Let us think here at least about the serious consequences of the widespread ominous vision of “a menacing God”.

Unbelievers often say that the existence of God constitutes a real threat to the freedom of the human person, whereas the many hundred years old wisdom of Christianity proclaims that, by bestowing on us the gift of freedom, God voluntarily limits his own might. Humans can oppose him and consider him to be their antagonist. God has never counted anybody as his enemy, even the most sinful, wicked and ungodly human. Our human freedom prompted “the Son of Man” to come and “to seek out and save what was lost” (Lk 19:10). Without reference to freedom one cannot understand the meaning of the freely accepted death of Christ: “We were still helpless when at his appointed moment Christ died for sinful men” (Rm 5:6). This death speaks not only about an astounding respect of God for human freedom, but also about a divine way to save this freedom and to transform it from the inside, and about the grace of forgiveness offered to all sinners: “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

The mystery of the cross becomes in this way perhaps the only answer worthy of God in the face of the freedom and unbelief of the human person. He does not force anyone to love him, but only shows at what price he is ready to attract and win human freedom and friendship. There is no other more convincing answer to the suspicion that God is an entity menacing human freedom and self-determination.

One of the urgent tasks of Christian thought is to **correct some false images of God**, dictated by a theology of fault, threats, fear, rejection and damnation. In modern times these representations largely contributed to an intensified denial of his existence. Humans are afraid of an almighty God overpowering the freedom of his creatures, severely punishing and intransigent in his justice. A frightened human individual asks then in fear and anxiety whether this God should exist in order to condemn and punish forever and to be only a God of a small number of the chosen and saved. According to the French historian Jean Delumeau, no other civilization attached such importance and value to the feeling of culpability and shame as it was done in the West between the 14th and 18th centuries.¹³ His monumental work shows a frightening vision of the sinful world, of criminal humans and of an angry and threatening God. It manifests a heavy “over-feeling” of guilt in the history of the West, representing in enormous proportions the dimension of sin in relation to forgiveness and mercy. In consequence a vision of the sinful masses of people condemned to everlasting hell was a witness to “the bankruptcy of redemption”. This kind of religious mentality can only discourage, paralyze and prompt us to reject the very idea of God. In actual fact, the God whose existence is denied by atheists is often a God of false representations and images which discredit a

¹³ J. Delumeau, *La peur en Occident (XIV^e–XVIII^e siècles). Une cité assiégée*, Paris 1978.

belief in his existence.

In another book the same French historian proves that the doctrine of an eternal hell, which dominated Christian preaching in Europe for many centuries, is one of the main causes of the de-christianization of the West. Since the 16th century there emerged and intensified in the post-Enlightenment period a powerful movement rejecting Christianity and its theology of the punishing God. Such people as Jean Meslier (1664-1729), Denis Diderot (1713-1784), Paul-Henri Thiry, baron Paul d'Holbach (1723-1789), Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715-1771) and many others after them denied finally all reference to transcendence.¹⁴ This was certainly the price Christianity has paid for St. Augustine's influential misinterpretation of the symbolic images of the New Testament texts and for his vision of the *massa damnata*.¹⁵

The erroneous ideas of Christians about God caused to a large extent reaction and revolt of people keeping their distance from the church. The image of a severe God was in the middle ages often put before the eyes of mass numbers of converted barbarians. Christianization occurred on the order of rulers under the threat of losing one's life. The belief in God imposed together with compulsory religion (see a false interpretation of Lk 14:24: "force people to come in", *compelle intrare*), led step by step to the phenomenon of unbelief and atheism in the subsequent centuries. The history of Christianity had long periods of being a history of fear and anxiety. A terrifying God who paralyzes human faith and hope does not hold human life in high esteem.

Every coerced good cannot be a true and lasting good. Christians themselves saw often in God a distant Absolute, to whom one should submit not so much out of love, but above all out of fear of hell and eternal damnation. Christianity was in consequence becoming a religion of laws, prescriptions, prohibitions and retributive justice. There slowly disappeared the idea of human freedom which God respects, but never leaves alone until he manages through his goodness and beauty to draw it to himself, to cure and transform it. Not without reason the modern masters of suspicion (Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud) were stigmatizing the vision of God as a "sadistic Father" and a frightful Judge punishing pitilessly the sins of the world. No wonder the aforementioned Orthodox theologian, Paul Evdokimov, rightly saw in "penitentiary theology" and "terrorist religion" one of the main causes of contemporary atheism.¹⁶

¹⁴ J. Delumeau, *Rassurer et protéger. Le sentiment de sécurité dans l'Occident d'autrefois*, Paris 1989. See pp. 504, 571.

¹⁵ One has to read for example the awesome chapters 17-27 of Book XXI of his work *On the City of God (De civitate Dei)*. Augustine was convinced that the major part of humankind (*massa damnata*) would be condemned for everlasting hell.

¹⁶ P. Evdokimov, *L'amour fou de Dieu*, p. 20.

The acceptance of such a doctrine is incompatible with the sense of human solidarity and in effect generates hatred or at least total indifference for fellow humans. One should never forget that our ideas about God are very closely related to human attitudes towards other people. Religion has important implications also for all other areas of social life.

KENOTIC WISDOM OF DIVINE PEDAGOGY

The image of an angry and punishing God has been to a large extent abandoned in Christian teaching. This can be felt as a liberation from fear and as a rediscovery of hope. This does not liberate, however, from other painful questions asked by people about suffering and the innocent victims of history. Human life is not free from ambiguities and miseries. Already the prophets were conscious that an experience of human sins, injustice, suffering and of the missing presence of God could effectively shake their trust in him. “No one calls on your name (...) for *you have hidden your face from us* and made us waste away because of our sins” (Is 64:7; NIV; italics are mine, W.H.). Besides every one knows that human life always runs under the verdict of death. That is why there are so many questions left unanswered till today.

In the face of this world and so many suffering Jobs, can God be really loved as a Friend truly loving his people? Is everything only an outcome of a blind doom? Why has a vision of God as the greatest *Philánthropos* – the best Friend who unchangingly loves his people – lost its convincing strength? Many want to believe that it is so, but are not able to.

True religion cannot be only a decoration and ornament of human life. It should help to develop in believers an attitude of open eyes and an open heart. Only then will it be able to help understand the cry of the victims in the face of suffering and evil.

The tradition of the Christian East, so close to me personally, often takes up the motif of God’s silence and discretion. It sees in them truly the divine way of his dealing with human freedom. Through his silence God utters his word of love and benevolence towards human beings. In the eyes of the Byzantine theologian and mystic, Nicholas Cabasilas (14th century), it is simply **an insane love** (*eros manikós*), ready for everything, in order to gain freedom for his rational creatures and to attract them to himself without destroying their free will. Humans can say “NO” to God. Bestowing on them the gift of freedom God took the risk of being rejected, refused and forgotten. Here precisely is **the ultimate source of the kenotic wisdom** of his divine pedagogy – an ability of self-limitation, self-denial and self-emptying, so clearly manifested in the attitude of Jesus Christ.

The history of humankind uncovers an inconceivable respect of God for human freedom, who attracts and calls us only by his love. This is the most divine way of his conduct towards free rational beings. He does not constrain our free will. His dedication is patient and humble. He is able

to wait infinitely long for the free answer of his own creature. The aforementioned Byzantine mystic has expressed this with an incomparable simplicity and suggestiveness:

Just as human affection, when it abounds, overpowers those who love and causes them to be beside themselves, so God's love for men emptied God (Phil.2:7). He does not stay in His own place and call the slave, He seeks him in person by coming down to him. He who is rich reaches the pauper's hovel, and He displays his love by approaching in person. He seeks love in return and does not withdraw when He is treated with disdain. He is not angry over ill treatment, but even when He has been repulsed He sits by the door (cf. Rev 3:20) and does everything to show us that He loves, even enduring suffering and death to prove it.¹⁷

So one can hear in this text an echo of the words of Christ himself from the Book of Revelation: "Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share his meal, side by side with him" (Rv 3:20). In the simple, figurative words of Scripture is expressed the whole discrete concern of God for attracting to him the freedom of human persons. In a certain sense God is standing as a beggar at the door of our freedom which opens only from the inside.

The culminating sentence of St. John's writings says that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8), thus describing his nature and relation to the world. But this love is demanding, and to believe in it is for us humans no cheap faith. God requires a radical transformation of our thinking, a real *metánoia* of our mind. He wants us to be merciful and compassionate to each other, and to accept our existence, in spite of all adversities, as an undeserved gift. He himself has become human in Jesus Christ, so that also suffering is nothing unknown and alien to him. Only at the end of this world can we hope to understand why it all was so enigmatic and mysterious.

I strike this eschatological note because I believe that only then will it become clear what now seems so incomprehensible. I believe that at the very beginning of creation God decided to enter into his world (with all its ambiguities) and to encounter humans in their free decisions. It was his divine hope that we would answer his invitation. He wanted to be particularly close to those who suffer injustice and violence and therefore he even took of becoming himself a victim of injustice. I believe that at the end of times it will become evident that God himself, as an incarnate human being, was present in the life of Jesus and wanted to bear forever the marks of his crucifixion as a sign of his love in its fullest glory. Such were the

¹⁷ Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*. Translated from the Greek by Carmino J. deCatanzano. With an Introduction by Boris Bobrinskoy, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1974, pp. 162-163.

consequences of the risk of God's love. All he did is a humble plea for understanding, on our human side, of the wisdom of his kenotic pedagogy. His unconditional love is patient and can wait infinitely long. On Easter we celebrate the joy of God who will do everything possible in order to win human freedom and to wipe away every tear from human eyes.

THE KENOTIC GOD AS A CHALLENGE TO OUR THEOLOGICAL THINKING

Continuing our reflection, let us ask then, what is, more concretely, the significance of a kenotic vision of God for a traditional way of theological thinking. Many of our concepts and ideas about God are simply human constructions. Some of them have been elevated to the level of dogmas, but even they fulfill only a subsidiary role. For this reason already some great medieval theologians defined an article of faith as "a perception of truth which tends to the truth itself" (*perceptio veritatis tendens in ipsam*). What we embrace with human concepts is only a partial perception of reality which is greater and richer than all our definitions. The fullness of truth will be revealed only in the world to come. For now "we know in part" and "see but a poor reflection as in a mirror" (1 Co 13:9.12; NIV). It is worth keeping these wise words constantly in mind.

One has also to take into account the witness of the mystics who speak in negative terms about what God is not. A similar message is transmitted, as I mentioned earlier, by the centuries of negative and apophatic theology, privileged in the eastern Christian tradition.

The vision of the kenotic, self-emptying God prompts us to question the power of domination exercised so often in the name of the patriarchal Father God. An **urgent task is to refashion the very notions of fatherhood and masculinity** in such a way that they reflect also some motherly features of tenderness, love and care, as portrayed by the prophets. Then the biblical image of God the Father will appear in a different light. As examples, here are two characteristic prophetic witnesses:

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands (Is 49:15-16; NIV).

When Israel was a child, I loved him. (...) It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them (Ho 11, 1.3-4; NIV).

Such a vision of the kenotic God, who loves and cares for us like a tender mother, questions some of our traditional concepts based on a reduced understanding of a hard masculinity and fatherhood. It also excludes any use of power to the detriment of those who are weaker and underprivileged. That is why Jesus in his parable of the Last Judgment identifies himself with “the least” of his brothers and sisters. Who are they? The detailed explanation comes from Jesus himself: “For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me” (Mt 25:35-36). One can, of course, list some more situations of similar and equally real human need.

What we do, or not do, to one of “the least of these brothers” (and sisters) of Jesus, we do, or not do, to him. This is the decisive criterion of the judgment and of the verdict on human life. How humane is this Last Judgment! In this way Jesus stands up in defense of “the least” and their dignity against our indifference, lack of compassion and readiness to help. In this context one can think especially about the present situation of women and children being misused and painfully wounded. Let us think also about migrant workers who move from country to country in search of well-paid work or about refugees, victims of war and asylum seekers in our turbulent world.

This leads us in our reflection on the kenotic God to **the cry for a new understanding of human personality**. What do we mean by human personality? How can a human being become a self-giving person, ready to open his heart to the needs of other people? If God awakens every one of us to become such a person, free from egoistic concentration on oneself, how can we transform oppressive models of behavior when they are institutionalized by the very structures of our societies? In the modern mentality a human being is considered a self-sufficient individual, fully autonomous, striving for self-realization, personal success and happiness with little or no concern for others.

This concept contradicts the very nature of a human person who is open and relational. There is an interesting **etymological intuition** linked with the Greek word *prósōpon*. It means face, mask (esp. put on by actors) and person. But it comes from the preposition *prós* = to, towards, and *ōpa* = faces (sing.: *ōps* = face). So a human person is by his or her nature oriented towards the faces of other people, i.e. it is a relational entity and not a monad closed in upon itself. Human persons are interrelated among themselves. It is worth noting that already in the Old Testament appears a characteristic word *pānīm* for face. It means literally what is turned to someone else and applies both to God and human beings (Cf. Gn 32:31; 33:10). The human face is the most legible reflection of a person: “A man’s heart changes his countenance, either for good or for evil. The mark of a happy heart is a cheerful face...” (Si 13:25-26).

In this respect the kenosis of God is a continuous appeal to transform and re-constitute the shallow and obliterated notion of our

humanity, and to restore its deep original meaning. As the Bible says, our human personality was created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1:26), whose being is also relational. The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber was right when he said: “In the beginning is the relation”. Therefore my “I” is always confronted face to face with the divine “Thou”.

Christians have an additional motif to follow the divine model of relational existence within the Holy Trinity of Persons. Each Person – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – exists in a relationship of mutual giving and receiving of love. This is the highest level of relational existence. Trinitarian personhood becomes thus a supreme model also for our humanity, for our existence in relation to human persons. This is expressed by an essential intuition contained in *imago Dei*, in the fact of being created in the image of God. In this way we are invited to become extroverted, self-giving persons who give and receive love in full respect for the individuality of others.

One can say that this constitutes an imperative of a truly human and fruitful life – an imperative which concerns both men and women. All of us have to learn an outgoing concern for other persons. This is the mutual duty of both genders. The permanent model of the kenotic God was manifested in the incarnation of the divine Logos who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14). This is **the greatest call and cry for all of us to become self-giving persons, free from self-absorption.**

THE KENOTIC GOD AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE

I have already mentioned that the kenotic God is a co-suffering God. This affirmation seems to go against the teaching of traditional theism. Thinking of God in light of Aristotle’s philosophy led to a long-standing conviction that to suffer implies imperfection proper only to created beings. God is free from all such imperfection and therefore cannot suffer. This way of theological thinking is seriously questioned today.¹⁸

In antiquity it was Origen who first expressed his doubts about the impassibility of God. “In his mercy – he wrote – God co-suffers (*sympaschei*), [and] is not insensible.”¹⁹ Reflecting on the sufferings of the Son of God Origen adds: “The Father himself is not deprived of the ability

¹⁸ See W. Hryniewicz, *Le Dieu souffrant? Réflexions sur la notion chrétienne de Dieu*, « Église et Théologie » 12 (1981) 333-356; J. Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott. Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik christlicher Theologie*, München 1980⁴; Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM Cap., *Does God Suffer?* University of Notre Dame Press 2000; idem, *Does God Change?* (Studies in Historical Theology), New York, Fordham University Press; 2002; Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford Early Christian Studies), Oxford 2004, Oxford University Press, USA 2006.

¹⁹ *Selecta in Ezech.* 16. PG 13, 812.

to suffer (*Ipse Pater non est impassibilis*). When invoked, he takes pity and feels pain (*condolet*). He suffers out of love (*patitur aliquid caritatis*) and becomes such as through the greatness of his nature he cannot be; on our behalf he endures human sufferings (*humanas sustinet passiones*).²⁰ In this way Origen opposed the idea of *apatheia* taught by those philosophers who affirmed that God was entirely impassible (*Deum penitus impassibilem*).²¹

Of course, the suffering of God is not identical with the suffering of human beings. One has to understand it in terms of compassion and empathy, and these do not contradict the idea of perfection. God's perfection cannot be conceived of as a Stoical *apátheia*. On the contrary, the ability to have compassion is a sign of divine perfection. The very idea of personhood with its etymological intuition of *prós ópa*, i.e. ontological orientation towards the faces of others, implies an outgoing concern, self-giving and compassion. God's perfect power consists in his faithful and compassionate love. Christ's kenosis revealed this unconditional, steadfast and compassionate love of God towards people. This does not mean, however, that God will at any moment remove the suffering of people who cry to him for help and rescue. Why he does not do it is his own divine secret. There are questions which cannot be adequately answered during our earthly life.

The existential implications of the kenosis of God are far-reaching indeed. Being compassionate in his love, he takes a discreet part in the drama and tragedy of human existence. Classical theology is helpless with such risky issues. It prefers to keep silence, whereas so many suffering people across the world look for a different vision of God. They believe that he suffers with them and gives them hope and strength to survive. The kenotic God is able to go beyond his own transcendence. His glory and power are manifested above all in relationships of love and justice among people, wherever they experience forgiveness and strive for reconciliation. The kenotic God awakens in us the sense of human solidarity. Seeing the suffering face of the other, I am myself touched and awakened to have more understanding, openness and benevolence.

Speaking about the kenotic God, we use **the language of human vulnerability**. This means that he is present in a particular way with those who suffer and desperately need assistance. In such situations God does not appear in his glory and power, but somehow shares human vulnerability and pain himself, as it were in the condition of a servant or slave. It is not easy to understand this humble presence of the vulnerable God in the categories of classical theology. This kind of language is intuitively understood by those who experience themselves the vulnerability of their condition and struggle to preserve faith in their suffering. This becomes a dominant element of their spirituality in the midst of injustice and hatred. Seeing all

²⁰ *In Ezech. Hom.* 6,6. GCS 8, 384-385 (PG 13, 714-715).

²¹ Cf. *Peri archon/De principiis* II,4,4; *Comm. in Matth.* 17,17; *Comm. in Rom.* 7,9.

around the destructive presence of overwhelming evil done with human hands, suffering people try, paradoxically, to help God himself to keep his presence in their innermost self. They do this, despite their weakness, by offering to God their best inner feelings as long as there is strength in them to do so. One cannot disregard such a moving witness to God's presence in human vulnerability. How can we find otherwise in human hearts a glimmer of hope for the possibility of reconciliation?

What a mystery of a kenotic God is present in kenotic silence! Is it not a shattering response to the glorification of power in our human world?

PATIENCE WITH GOD

To a certain degree every believer can admit that God's distance, concealment and silence often cause him or her some pain. In this sense I also can share with honest atheists their feeling of God's absence in the world, especially in the face of immense suffering and evil. But they come to the conclusion that there is no God: if there is such evil, God does not exist. And precisely this I consider premature as a sign of impatience and inability to endure under the pressure of uncertainty. Our human condition requires more patience. That is why the very Greek word for patience means just endurance under the pressure of a painful reality (*hypo-monē*).

Christians know no better way of being patient with God's concealment or absence than those three fundamental virtues aptly called "theological" or "divine": faith, hope and love. The apostle Paul wrote centuries ago: "Love is patient (...). And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Co 13:4.13). Not only is love patient, but also faith and hope share the same quality.

There are currently many books responding to Richard Dawkins and the new atheists. Some of them really are of great value, e.g. the studies by Terry Eagleton²² and David Bentley Hart²³. One should clearly acknowledge that modernity's criticism of Christianity is an indispensable context within which contemporary faith has to be articulated.

²² Cf. T. Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*, Yale University Press 2010. The author demolishes what he calls the "superstitious" view of God held by most atheists (Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens in particular) and agnostics, and offers a deep account of the Christian Gospel. He also sharply criticizes the betrayal of this truly revolutionary account by institutional Christianity and conventional believers.

²³ D.B. Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, Yale University Press 2010. The author provides a bold correction of the New Atheists's misrepresentations of the Christian past. He reminds us that Christianity transformed the ancient world bringing liberation from fatalism, conferring great dignity on human beings, subverting the cruelest aspects of pagan society and elevating charity above all virtues.

In this regard the Czech philosopher, theologian and psychotherapist Tomáš Halík seems to be right when he sees the main difference between faith and atheism in the impatience. His book *Patience with God* is one of the best Christian responses to the new atheism.²⁴ However, there is in it no underhanded apologetic move. His approach is genuinely existential, marked by a refusal to engage in outright polemics. He detects a certain similarity between atheism, religious fundamentalism and naïve enthusiasm for a too easy belief. In their attitude not only atheists but also fundamentalists and enthusiasts try to cope quickly and impatiently with the mystery called God.

In fact one cannot do it so easily. God wants us to persevere with our doubts, carry them in our hearts and allow them to lead us to maturity. The mystery requires, by its nature, a patient abiding by it and bearing it in ourselves. Only in this way can the perception of mystery silently mature in our inner self. Faith, hope, and love are three aspects of patience in the face of God's silence, which is interpreted as "the death of God" by atheists and is not taken seriously enough by different sorts of fundamentalists with their "vulgar evidence." Faith teaches us to live out patiently the mystery of God. It is inseparably connected, like love, with confidence and fidelity, and constantly verified by patience.

In the debate following the publication of Halík's book it was often confirmed that atheists are not wrong, only impatient. They want to resolve doubts instead of enduring them. Their insistence that the natural world doesn't point to God or to any necessary meaning is correct. Their experience of God's absence is a truthful one, shared also by believers. Faith is not a denial of all this: it is a patient endurance of the ambiguity of the world and an experience of God's absence. Faith is indeed patience with God. This was already expressed in a motto in Halík's above-mentioned book: "Patience with others is love, patience with self is hope, patience with God is faith" (Adel Bestavros).

Some will surely deny that atheists and Christians share the same experience. They would insist that, while Christians experience the absence of God, atheists experience evidently his non-existence; those two experiences are simply incomparable. However, one has to take into account that, in contrast to the reasoning of many Christian apologists, Halík's approach is a realistic articulation of the difficulties in believing. What a Christian can say to an atheist comes from an understanding of the goodness of God – from an awareness that there is room in God's kingdom

²⁴ T. Halík, *Vzdáleným nablízku: Vášeň a trpělivost v setkání víry s nevírou*, Praha 2007. English translation: *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us*, translated by Gerald Turner, New York: Doubleday 2009. See Prologue. Halík is a Roman Catholic priest, secretly ordained during a communist regime. He has personally experienced what it means to live on the edge of an atheist and post-atheist society.

for those who doubt and do not believe in him, being unable to detect his existence in the dark realities of the world.

Let us not try to convince atheists that they are wrong. If somebody is too impatient in search, his or her truth is left unsaid and undiscovered. One should be honest: our truth, the truth of the Christian faith, is here on earth also left unsaid until the end. It remains open to a greater future and tends towards its eschatological fulfillment. Therefore we have to constantly overcome the temptation of self-confidence and arrogant triumphalism, to listen to each other and to learn also from atheists. Atheistic criticism can help us to purify our faith from religious illusions and false certainties.

If you ask atheists themselves about their alleged "impatience", some of them would question the validity and meaningfulness of such categories as "patience" or "impatience". They will assure you that they do not experience at all their search for understanding as marked by impatience. Are atheists then not wrong, but only impatient? The suggestion of being impatient is, in their own view, wrong or at least inappropriate and ambivalent in this respect. It is not helpful, as it first appears to be, in characterizing human relationships with the reality called God. Some would say that the very idea of "patience" when applied to atheists smacks of condescension. They get irritated at the suggestion that their atheistic convictions are merely the result of impatience. It is possible that for some atheists the experience of God's absence is even more painful than it is for many Christians. It means that they are in practice also more patient.

I think there was no intention in Halík's reflections to present believers as the only patient and mature people who can hold on in spite of suffering and all difficulties, and atheists as impatient and immature people unable to live with doubt and have patience with God. Some of atheists may indeed have been patient and have endured through doubt, but have not come to faith.

Let us not forget that adopting an answer based on faith betrays also some impatience. This may be even more impatient than seeking answers through science. Those who look for a quick answer do not make enough effort to understand what contemporary science offers. Believers have to take uncertainty and doubt seriously. Thomas Merton once wrote some sobering words of warning: "Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish or from doubt. On the contrary, the deep, inexpressible certitude of the contemplative experience awakens a tragic anguish and opens many questions in the depths of the heart like wounds that cannot stop bleeding. For every gain in deep certitude there is a corresponding growth of superficial 'doubt.' This doubt is by no means opposed to genuine faith, but it mercilessly examines and questions the spurious 'faith' of everyday life, the human faith which is nothing but the passive acceptance of conventional opinion."

We all have to patiently endure doubts, whether we believe in God or not. In this we are alike. The same is true also of scientific inquiry, which seriously seeks to uncover truth. Very often, however, believers affirm that

faith is certitude and therefore want all doubts to be quickly resolved. They do this believing that God is the answer to an otherwise unexplainable reality, whereas atheists, waiting patiently, would rather admit that the answers are not available. Halík is right when he emphasizes that genuine and mature faith implies a patient endurance of the ambiguity of the world and the experience of God's absence. Is then such faith only hope or wishful thinking? It is rather enduring a lack of satisfactory answers until they become apparent at the **eschatological verification** after death, when faith is no longer needed. Perhaps Karl Barth's ethics with the striking English title *The Hastening That Waits* (1993) may be of some help in dealing with these kinds of questions. Waiting for God is not only a preparation for faith, but also an essential part of it.

It would be false and unjust to present atheism as a disease that needs to be eradicated as the worst enemy of faith. It can happen that sincerely suffering atheists can better understand precisely **the cry** of the crucified Jesus forsaken by God in the solitude of his agony. In this sense they may remain **in solidarity with the kenotic Christ**.²⁵ That is why we too should stand in solidarity with them and in this way take part together in the kenotic act of Christ.

LET US NOT BE AFRAID OF ATHEISM!

The blessing of maturity in our faith cannot be achieved as long as we do not seriously treat the ambiguities of our human condition. Mature faith is indeed verified through patience in enduring the darkness of the mystery, because it is constantly **the faith wounded by the pain and cry of the world**. Nothing seems to point so much to God and to cry so urgently for God as the experience of his hiddenness and absence.

That is why faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*) can recognize in earnest, painful and protesting atheism the voice of our brothers and sisters. We all sometimes endure the pain of asking without finding an answer in the face of evil. The fanaticism of antireligious hatred can be a subconscious, defensive reaction of those

²⁵ Halík refers in this regard (see his book *Patience with God*, chapter III) to the genuine, uncensored thoughts of a French nun, St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Near the end of her life she experienced deep spiritual anguish and a real "night of nothingness". She felt being left alone in a desolate place where no sun shined any longer, but resolved "to accept even the strangest thoughts" out of love for God. Quite unexpectedly we learn that she wants to treat unbelievers as her brothers, with whom she sits at the common table and eats the same bread. At the threshold of death she had confessed of losing faith and being able only to love. God's absence became thus a means to mark her solidarity with both Christ's forsakenness by God on the cross and to stress her solidarity with unbelievers. Theresa's spiritual solidarity with those who do not believe can be also for us an appeal to enlarge our hearts through the experience of darkness.

atheists who hide in themselves their doubts concerning unbelief and try to stifle them.

Much should be done to put into practice a new type of dialogue between belief and unbelief. The well-known Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski (1927-2009) was very convincing when he commented on Czeslaw Milosz's (1911-2004) views: "There exists a stupidity of belief and the stupidity of unbelief. There exists also the wisdom of belief and the wisdom of unbelief. (...) And when Milosz says: 'Me too, I one day believe, and another day do not believe', it is not so, that one day he was wise, and another day stupid; no, he lives in the wisdom of faith and in the wisdom of unbelief alternately."²⁶

We all have to learn that the truth can be more effectively discovered in dialogue. It is dialogue which offers this possibility in the interaction of essential questions and honest answers. Questions express our readiness to seek. Atheists put to believers very serious questions and oblige us to give equally serious answers which often turn us back to questions and further seeking. To be a Christian means to become a person who sincerely seeks with the seeking and asks with the asking. A genuine seeking never ends in our life here on earth. Unfortunately, as can be easily observed, there are too many believers offering ready-made answers and pretending to know the ultimate truth. In this way one builds only a fortress of religious certitudes and walls of division.

Emphasizing the significance of "a new commandment" (Jn 13:34) given by Jesus to love one another, Christianity has brought into force a new vision of human existence. It shows us the way to create an atmosphere of proximity among people and to make ourselves close to others. What we need also today is an authentic **culture of nearness** which cannot be given by any technological advance alone. **People cry for the warmth of benevolent closeness, friendship and love.** We all need it for an integral growth of our personality. Also, those who adopt no religion appreciate such human values as honesty, reliability, respect for other people and friendship. They expect more tolerance and acceptance on the part of believers. They are, in their own way, **witnesses of God's hiddenness and silence.** Who among us really knows the inner cries of nonbelievers?

On December 21, 2009 Pope Benedict XVI launched an idea based on biblical texts about the Jerusalem Temple (Is 56:7; Mk 11:17), suggesting that the church should open a "court of the Gentiles". It was intended to create a space for dialogue with unbelievers and agnostics, with those to whom religion has become something indifferent, alien and outdated, and with those who search for a deeper meaning of life. The idea was then put into practice when such meetings and debates were organized in different cities. However, one can ask today, whether the metaphor of "a

²⁶ L. Kolakowski, *Mala glossa do epopei ducha* (A Small Gloss to the Epos of Spirit), in *Poznanwanie Milosza 3, 1999-2010* (To Know Milosz, Part 3, 1999-2010), ed. by Aleksander Fiut, Krakow 2011, 683-686, here p. 685.

court of the Gentiles”, useful as it may be, does not in fact hide a triumphalistic vision of the church. Can we really compare the church with the Jerusalem Temple? Through Jesus Christ God has come out of this Temple infinitely further than only to the court of the Gentiles.

As a result the church, rather than opening today the court of the Gentiles, should herself go to different courts of this kind, following the example of the apostle Paul on the Areopagus (cf. Ac 17:16-34). **Do we really better understand today the meaning of Christ’s kenosis?** Have we discovered the existential significance of his paschal mystery? Where today is the Areopagus on which the disciples of Christ can exchange views in a sincere and honest dialogue also with unbelievers? It is certainly not enough to build new churches when in many countries the old ones have ceased to be “a house of prayer”.

Pope Francis said in his interview in the Jesuit periodical “La civiltà Cattolica” in 2013: “Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be **a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself** and go to those (...) who have quit or are indifferent. (...) We need to proclaim the Gospel on every street corner, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing, even with our preaching, every kind of disease and wound.”²⁷

In my own country, Poland, the idea of the court of the Gentiles was also put into practice in Warsaw in September and October 2013. However, to avoid negative connotations of the original name “Cortile dei Gentili”, which literally means “the Court of the Pagans” in the Polish language, one changed it into “The Court of Dialogue”. Pagans or partners? – that was a decisive question.²⁸ Atheists and agnostics are our partners in dialogue.

The time has come for Christianity to seek its identity not in a negative way by delineating the borders against modern paganism, but positively, on the road of dialogue. We people of faith need to be close to all unknown companions on the human pilgrimage into the future. This requires us to remain open to their questions and to listen carefully to them. Our example should be that of Jesus’ disciples going to Emmaus. In the encounter with “outsiders” we can detect in their otherness a deeper truth of the human condition. Deepening my knowledge of their otherness, I can at the same time grow in my own knowledge of God which is always only partial and imperfect. This may remind me of my own fragility, limitedness and finiteness. Also, my faith and religious knowledge are full of unanswered questions and unsolved problems.

There are many sorts of atheism as similarly there are many sorts of faith. So there is, for example not only an ideological, militant, self-

²⁷ English translation: *A Big Heart Open to God*, in “America Magazine”, September 30, 2013. Boldface is mine, W.H.

²⁸ Cf. Ewa Kiedio, *Konfrontacja wiary (Confrontation of the faith)*, “Tygodnik Powszechny”. Cracow No. 43, October 27, 2013, p. 20.

confident and thoughtless atheism, but also a serious, painful and liberating one. There is an atheism of fervor in protesting against evil and injustice in the world, an atheism seeking the sense of life, a primitive atheism of mere indifference or ignorance, and a kind of widespread atheism called by Halík “*Etwasismus*” (in German) when someone does not believe in God but only in “something” above us.²⁹ Some atheists demand simply too much, claiming naively that God should not exist because he or she cannot bear the fact not to be god. This is a typical case of a divinizing human ego, falling into narcissism, egoism and idolatry.

Atheism can be inspiring in its critical function. However, it can also become naively self-contented, sterile and destructive, when it turns into a dogmatically stiff ideology. Suffering, evil in the world’s history and the feeling of the absurd can easily become what is often called “the rock of atheism”. Our Christian theology is still unable to offer adequate answers to this challenge. Can we cope with this perennial problem when we suppose that God does not exist as atheists assume? Already by this common helplessness in the face of suffering a certain solidarity with unbelievers manifests itself. “Our God” is also the God of all others, of those who suffer, of those who seek the meaning of life and of those who do not know him at all. I often say that we have to deal with a truly ecumenical God – the God of all and for all.

For this reason one should, as Halík has appealed, **de-demonize unbelievers**. I share his readiness to bless those fervent atheists who seek sense, truth and justice, and protest against all injustice, violence and evil in the world.³⁰ They are fellow travelers on the road of life and deserve our friendship and closeness. Many of those who struggle with God can be closer to him than those who are lukewarm and indifferent.

Let us offer these feelings to nonbelievers in all sincerity! Their existential experience should become part of our own experience as well. **One can only pray to God’s Spirit-Creator: Bring nearer to those who are remote! Create closeness between people of faith and those who are unable to believe!** Openness to others is an openness to the mystery of God himself. In the depth of human hopes and experiences there is something holy and transcendent, which can be described as original beauty, inborn confidence and the feeling of gratitude for the very gift of existence.

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS ONLY PARTIAL

The division between believers and nonbelievers is in large measure deceptive. The unbelief of atheists and the faith of believers are often not so distant from each other. Both the truth perceived and professed

²⁹ “*Mit den Suchenden auf die Suche gehen*”. *Ein Gespräch mit dem tschechischen Theologen Tomáš Halík über Glauben heute*, “Herder Korrespondenz” 67 (2013) Heft 2, 69-73, here 70.

³⁰ See in his book *Patience with God*, the end of chapter VI.

by those who believe, and the truth of atheists remain always partial and uncovered to the very end. We usually do not know even the real causes and motifs of someone's unbelief. Let us seek with the seeking and ask with the asking!

To many people today, including believers themselves, the most serious problem is the question: **where in fact was God when the suffering humans desperately cried for any sign of his presence?** Many of us experience much more strongly his real absence than his real presence. "No one has ever seen God" (Jn 1:18), says the wisdom of the Scriptures. People ask so often: Is God only a projection and construct of the human mind or a psychological need of consolation? Where does he intervene into processes of the universe and in the course of history, when all indications are that everything is governed by the laws of nature, accident, necessity and human will? Why are there so many anti-witnesses of his alleged presence?

Asking questions is a sign of uncertainty and doubt. Faith and doubt go inseparably together and should correct and complement each other. We know from our daily experience that faith without doubt can easily lead to fanaticism, but doubt blind to facts usually generates bitterness and cynicism. Our reason, a precious gift of God, can play an important role in faith, but it has to know its own limits. I share the opinion of those who warn that faith without reason can be dangerous for our human coexistence. On the other hand, a self-confident rationalism deprived of the spiritual impulses of faith can also be unilateral, one-dimensional and equally dangerous.

Pope Francis' first encyclical *Lumen fidei* (29.06.2013), in which one finds included the earlier prepared reflections by Pope Benedict XVI, shows faith as a way of dialogue in the experiences of all human life. The document does not touch upon the problem of modern atheism. It explains that faith, a real exodus like that of Abraham, urges us to seek the truth and to do good. It does not overcome all darkness and does not give answers to all questions. It is the faith which prompts us to listen to others and also to learn from them. That is why believers should be modest and humble and never arrogant in their conviction of possessing the whole truth.

Our knowledge of God is only partial and imperfect. In the face of his incomprehensible mystery we are not allowed to wound those who do not believe by our self-confident and steeled certainty. A humble faith hopes that we shall all know someday the fullness of the truth accessible to all creatures. How should we appreciate now this partial perception of the truth and be grateful for it since it is a promise of a greater and unimagined fulfillment!

In the prophecy of Isaiah there are the thought-provoking words: "Truly you are **a God who hides himself**" (Is 45:15; NIV). This God, whose face has been manifested in Jesus' actions, looks out for those who are remote as people on the fringes of their community, like the tax collector Zacchaeus is in the Gospel of Luke. Such people are often

despised, rejected or ignored today, also in our churches. In fact they are much in need of the love and friendship of Christ who “came to seek and to save what is lost” (Lk 19:10). How can we make ourselves near to such people on the outer edges, who cannot find their place, who doubt but seek? The answer seems to be the following: let them not be aliens and outsiders to you, make yourself close to them as a real neighbor, and remember that God is present in human seeking, that he can speak also to the church through unbelief. He is not a God according to our wishes and expectations.

The story of Zacchaeus is indeed continuing in us. This biblical figure, hiding between the leaves on a branch of a sycamore-fig tree, is a symbol for any person on the margins, not easily seen, curious but noncommittal. Jesus liked to seek out the marginalized and the poor. They had a special place in his heart. Christians should follow his example and understand such people. Today it is also the way of the kenotic presence of Christ, acting through the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit. Let us like and understand the Zacchaeuses of our time who doubt and seek, because everyone of us can be like them and have something in common with them.

POPE FRANCIS IN DIALOGUE WITH A NON-BELIEVER

The remarkable dialogue between Pope Francis and *La Repubblica's* founder, Eugenio Scalfari, was published in that Italian newspaper on October 1, 2013.³¹ The conversation took place in Santa Marta in the Vatican, in a small bare room. Neither of the two had any wish to convert the other. The Pope said at the very beginning: “Proselytism is solemn nonsense, it makes no sense. We need to get to know each other, listen to each other and improve our knowledge of the world around us. (...) Everyone has his own idea of good and evil and must choose to follow the good and fight evil as he conceives them. That would be enough to make the world a better place.”

The interlocutors agree that, in Jesus’ teaching, love for others is the only way to love God. It is that leavening that serves the common good. The Pope explained: “the love of each one of us for the other (...) is in fact the only way that Jesus has given us to find the way of salvation and of the Beatitudes.” But one has to distinguish the commandment: “Love your neighbor *as yourself*” from sheer narcissism as a valid rule of conduct. Pope Francis does not like the word narcissism, understood as an excessive love for oneself which can produce serious damage not only to those affected but also in relationship with others. Those most affected by this are people who have a lot of power. “Often bosses are narcissists – he admits. Scalfari adds: “Many church leaders have been”. The Pope goes even further: “You

³¹ For some time it could also be read on the official internet site of the Vatican (www.vatican.va), but then it disappeared, giving rise to different interpretations and speculations.

know what I think about this? Heads of the Church have often been narcissists, flattered and thrilled by their courtiers. The court is the leprosy of the papacy." He promises to do everything to change it.

Scalfari, a non-believer, wants the Pope to know that he was in his youth a practicing Catholic and a true believer. All that changed when he entered high school and read among others the philosophical texts of Descartes. The Pope remarks then: "Descartes, however, never denied faith in a transcendent God." In his reply Scalfari agrees, but remarks that for him it was Descartes who laid the foundation for free thought and a very different vision.

Later in a very friendly conversation about saints and mystics the Pope admitted: "A religion without mystics is a philosophy. (...) I love the mystics". Mystical brief moments can fill an entire life. "Has that ever happened to you?" – asks Scalfari. "Rarely – answers Francis and explains: "For example, when the conclave elected me Pope. Before I accepted I asked if I could spend a few minutes in the room next to the one with the balcony overlooking the square. My head was completely empty and I was seized by a great anxiety. To make it go away and relax I closed my eyes and made every thought disappear, even the thought of refusing to accept the position, as the liturgical procedure allows. I closed my eyes and I no longer had any anxiety or emotion. At a certain point I was filled with a great light. It lasted a moment, but to me it seemed very long. Then the light faded, I got up suddenly and walked into the room where the cardinals were waiting and the table on which was the act of acceptance. I signed it, the Cardinal Camerlengo countersigned it and then on the balcony there was the 'Habemus Papam'".

In the course of conversation Scalfari asked the Pope: "Do you feel touched by grace?" The answer was: "No one can know that. Grace is not part of consciousness, it is the amount of light in our souls, not knowledge nor reason. Even you, without knowing it, could be touched by grace." – "Without faith? A non-believer? – asks surprised Scalfari. Francis replies: "Grace regards the soul." Scalfari: "I do not believe in the soul". Francis: "You do not believe in it but you have one." And repeated, that he had no intention to convert a non-believer.

The dialogue turns then to the present situation. Scalfari draws attention to the fact that modern society throughout the world is going through a period of deep crisis, social as well as spiritual. Even non-believers share this feeling and that is why they want dialogue with believers and those who best represent them. The Pope is also convinced that "selfishness has increased and love towards others declined." Scalfari: "So this is the goal that we have in common. (...) Is your Church ready and equipped to carry out this task?" Francis turns the question to his interlocutor: "What do you think"? His answer was: "I think love for temporal power is still very strong within the Vatican walls and in the institutional structure of the whole Church. I think that the institution dominates the poor, the missionary Church that you would like." Pope

Francis again: "In fact, (...) in this area you cannot perform miracles." Scalfari wants to know whether the Pope is determined to follow the path of St Francis. The Pope's answer: "I'm not Francis of Assisi and I do not have his strength and his holiness." At the same time he has reassured us that he wants to go in that direction: "Gently, but firmly and tenaciously."

Towards the end of the conversation Pope Francis asks Scalfari: "you, a secular non-believer in God, what do you believe in? You are a writer and a man of thought. You believe in something, you must have a dominant value. Don't answer me with words like honesty, seeking, the vision of the common good, all important principles and values but that is not what I am asking. I am asking what you think is the essence of the world, indeed the universe. You must ask yourself, of course, like everyone else, who we are, where we come from, where we are going. Even children ask themselves these questions. And you?" Scalfari is grateful for this question. His answer is: "I believe in Being, that is in the tissue from which forms, bodies arise." Pope Francis instead: "And I believe in God, not in a Catholic God, there is no Catholic God, there is God and I believe in Jesus Christ, his incarnation. Jesus is my teacher and my pastor, but God, the Father, Abba, is the light and the Creator. This is my Being. Do you think we are very far apart?" Scalfari: "We are distant in our thinking, but similar as human beings, unconsciously animated by our instincts that turn into impulses, feelings and will, thought and reason. In this we are alike." The Pope: "But can you define what you call Being?"

Here we come to the very core of the dialogue. Scalfari's answer is: "Being is a fabric of energy. Chaotic but indestructible energy and eternal chaos. Forms emerge from that energy when it reaches the point of exploding. The forms have their own laws, their magnetic fields, their chemical elements, which combine randomly, evolve, and are eventually extinguished but their energy is not destroyed. Man is probably the only animal endowed with thought, at least in our planet and solar system. I said that he is driven by instincts and desires but I would add that he also contains within himself a resonance, an echo, a vocation of chaos". Pope Francis' reply: "All right. I did not want you to give me a summary of your philosophy and what you have told me is enough for me. From my point of view, God is the light that illuminates the darkness, even if it does not dissolve it, and a spark of divine light is within each of us. In the letter I wrote to you, you will remember I said that our species will end but the light of God will not end and at that point it will invade all souls and it will all be in everyone." Scalfari: "You said, 'All the light will be in all souls' which – if I may say so – gives more an image of immanence than of transcendence". Francis: "Transcendence remains because that light, all in everything, transcends the universe and the species it inhabits at that stage. But back to the present. We have made a step forward in our dialogue. We have observed that in society and the world in which we live selfishness has increased more than love for others, and that men of good will must work,

each with his own strengths and expertise, to ensure that love for others increases until it is equal and possibly exceeds love for oneself.”

At the end of the conversation Scalfari sincerely appreciates Pope Francis’ attitude and efforts to make the world better. He says: “Your Holiness, you are certainly a person of great faith, touched by grace, animated by the desire to revive a pastoral, missionary church that is renewed and not temporal. But from the way you talk and from what I understand, you are and will be a revolutionary pope. Half Jesuit, half a man of Francis, a combination that perhaps has never been seen before.”

They embrace each other. The Pope adds that next time they may also discuss the role of women in the Church (in Italian *la chiesa* is feminine!) and talk about Pascal. “Give all your family my blessings and ask them to pray for me. Think of me, think of me often.”

Scalfari sums up the meeting: “We shake hands and he stands with his two fingers raised in a blessing. I wave to him from the window. This is Pope Francis. If the Church becomes like him and becomes what he wants it to be, it will be an epochal change”.

A great lesson for us all about a new form of dialogue! There is no need to say more. Gestures speak louder than words alone.

EVERYONE HAS HIS OWN NARRATIVE

Christ’s parable about the judgment of nations gives witness that God welcomes the intermediate, implicit, and in this sense anonymous faith hidden in the works of mercy towards all suffering people: hungry, thirsty, deprived of basic human needs and rights. This is a faith contained in such disinterested deeds, performed even without any religious motivation, but simply out of compassion for human misery. Not only people insensitive to others, but also those merciful with open minds and hearts will be greatly astonished that their attitude had something to do with the hidden presence of Christ in all those who suffer need in their life. “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison...?” (Mt 25: 44). One can have the name of Jesus all the time on our lips, but remain in fact egoistic and insensitive. That is why the astonishment will be great for all, when the verdict of the Judge is pronounced.

Perhaps there are ways of an implicit faith, unknown to us during this earthly life. Christ may be present in the hidden faith of those who sincerely seek some sense in human life, long for belonging, do good, and who ask many difficult questions without finding convincing answers. In such faith there is, actually, more hesitation than certainty and self-confidence, more questions than answers, more doubts and darkness than clarity. Such anonymous faith may often be tired of being constantly on the way to the unknown. But doing good is the most effective way to find the deeper meaning of life. Those who do good are, without even knowing it,

real friends of God. May they be blessed! Everyone has his or her own narrative before God.

True faith is opposite to an attitude of religious fundamentalism which likes ready-made answers for any possible question. Fundamentalists do not admit any variety of interpretation. In the eyes of super-zealous apostles of fundamentalist faith, everything seems to be clearly defined and obligatory, and does not admit any other explanations. They react aggressively against ecumenism and religious freedom, and claim faultlessness for their views in contrast to all critics, skeptics and those in doubt. No wonder many intellectuals today lose their faith and leave the church. For this reason one has to emphasize the need of showing a **profound rationality of faith**. But let us remember: this is a **rationality which often transcends our human ability of understanding**.

We are constantly reminded of this by the so-called apophatic theology³², whose wisdom is so much appreciated in the eastern Christian tradition. Atheism can be a certain ally of this tradition, because it distinguishes itself by a living consciousness of the inadequacy of our concepts concerning reality exceeding the cognitive abilities of human mind and heart. However, apophatic theology cannot be fully identified with the so-called negative theology which confines itself to negation and tries to say what God is not. Instead, negation is only an element of apophatic theology, in which the human mind tries to rise above negations and transcend them. The main feature of the apophatic tradition is resignation from any attempt to define God. But negation is only a way. It should lead to an experiential knowledge of God through love. Therefrom results an important role for the wise heart, for the “enlightened eyes of the heart” (cf. Ep 1:18). The real goal of apophatic theology is to lead to a personal encounter between a human person and God.

When apophatic theology denies some religious concepts, affirmations and images, it comes closer to certain insights of atheism, which is in fact a radicalization of negative theology. Atheistic criticism can accompany negative theology quite a long way before they part ways in front of the ultimate mystery of reality. The choice then becomes inevitable. Atheists choose unbelief in God, agnosticism remains in the sphere of doubt, and only faith takes a courageous step into the mystery of God as the final explanation of the world. Mature faith is able to do it in spite of doubts, uncertainties and open critical questions.

By its very nature the phenomenon of faith contains an existential element of confidence and, at the same time, of **intellectual risk**. This is a specific feature of each act of true faith which requires rational justification. Without this rationality it can easily become only a blind trust or a mere obedience, which contradicts the requirements of reason, and in consequence leads to intransigence and intolerance. A person consciously

³² The Greek adjective *apophatikós* means that we say something through negation.

taking the risk of faith is able to better understand also those people who are not ready to make a similar decision. They deserve the respect of those who believe.

Freedom is a gift for all rational beings. We do not live in a world in which everything is a priori determined. Humans can do good or evil. But still the world in which there is freedom is better than the one in which would reign only necessity and determinism. In this respect, as earlier mentioned, Leibniz declared long ago: our world is the best of all other possible worlds, although it is subject to suffering and evil, that affects concrete human lives. Creating the world, God has chosen a possibility which guarantees in the end the greatest good for the whole of creation – the good of free decisions, and not a good coerced by the Creator. In the best world possible, the greatest collective good is in the end achieved not at the cost of individual creatures and their freedom. Ultimately it is the good of the whole creation, corresponding to its good beginnings: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gn 1:31; NIV). So finally it will also be possible to say: God sees everything that he has made, and behold, it is very good forever.

The drama of history continues in the time of every human life. What would our history look like without this drama? It is difficult to imagine the world as a purely static reality, without a dynamic process of becoming and maturing. It would be an innumerable multitude of human beings called into existence in time, but none of them would have his own real story. The static world would be the one without development and progress, without searching for truth, without possibility to discover the miracles of God’s creation, without mistakes and struggles for good and beauty, without divine intervention to free humans from sin and fault, and to transfigure the whole of creation. It would be a world totally different from the one we know. It does not seem that such a world would really be better.

From this point of view the statement of Leibniz is not groundless, although it often encounters resistance and raises many objections. It seems to me that it would be a mistake to consider our human life only as a history of misery, suffering and non-fulfillment. Maybe some people who see only the negative side of our existence are inclined to deny the sense of creation as such: let the triune God exist alone in his happy eternity without the miracle of creation! Then his creative power would never call anything into existence. His grace and goodness would never be shared with anyone outside himself. He would have no one other than himself in the Trinity of divine Persons in order to show his love and care, to support, forgive and transform. Everything indicates, however, that God did not want such a possibility.

This kind of vision would contradict the very nature of the good that desires to be communicated to others (*bonum est diffusivum sui*). In the present world everyone has his or her own history, his or her own narrative about human unrepeatable existence. Nobody is excluded from nor deprived of participation in eternal happiness.

CHAPTER IV

THE KENOTIC SPIRIT OF GOD IN HUMAN HISTORY

Before his death Jesus promised to ask the Father to give the disciples “another Paraclete” (*állos Paráklētos*), “another Advocate” or Counselor, “the Spirit of truth” who would remain with them forever (Jn 14:16-17). The word *Paráklētos* literally means someone called to stand close by as our adviser, defender and supporter. Calling the Spirit “another Advocate” he implied that he himself also did not cease to be the Advocate and Adviser. Both of them are then our Guides in the journey to the Father’s house. Nevertheless, after the departure of the earthly Jesus, a special role belongs now in this respect to the Holy Spirit. It is he who guides us in our kenotic journey, being himself the kenotic Spirit of God as well, in a certain sense even more kenotic and unknown than the incarnate Logos. How can he be our Guide on our kenotic journey into the unknown divine mystery?

The kenosis of Christ is inwardly connected with the kenosis of the Holy Spirit. The kenotic work of Christ finds continuation in the kenotic work of the Spirit. That is why the very descent of the Holy Spirit is shown in the Gospel as the work of the Father with the participation of the Son: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever” (Jn 14:16), “the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name” (Jn 14: 26), the Counselor “whom I will send to you from the Father” (Jn 15:26); “but if I go, I will send him to you” (Jn 16:7; NIV).

This mission of the Spirit has its kenotic plan, aiming at the salvation and transformation of the whole world. Such a mission, similar to the mission of the Son, presupposes the necessity of kenosis, because it is by its very nature a kenotic act, although realized in a different way in the case of the Son and the Spirit. The kenosis of the Holy Spirit has not been revealed to us with the same clarity as the kenosis of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless it results from the very fact of the Spirit’s saving mission in the world, who reveals Christ, but himself remains always in the shadow.

In the following reflections I often refer to the inspiring insights of the Russian Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov, put forward many years ago in his book *The Paraclete/Utešitel’* (1936).

THE KENOSIS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CREATED WORLD

The concept of kenosis applied to divinity implies the “descent” into the created world and participation of a divine Person in the life of created beings. This very descent into the world cannot be accomplished by the divinity without self-limitation and voluntary diminishment. The kenosis is precisely this diminishment of God in his absoluteness. He becomes God

for his creatures and lovingly enters into relationship with them. In this sense kenosis may be understood as some kind of self-relating or even of “self-relativizing” of the Absolute, inspired by his love for the whole of creation.

The world cannot bear the entrance of the divine reality in all its fullness, power and glory without ontological destruction. It should first be brought to such an eschatological state, in which the coming of Christ in glory can take place, when God will be all in all. Until then the descent of the Holy Spirit can be accomplished only in part as a kenotic preparation for the ways of salvation of the world through the mission of the Son and the Spirit. In his divine existence the Spirit is the eternal fullness of life and, as the apostle Paul says, he “reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God” (1 Co 2:10). Instead, in the created world, although being “the Giver of life”, he has to diminish his fullness.

The very concept of created beings implies that their life in time is only a gradual striving for fullness, but not fullness itself. That is why the power of the Holy Spirit in the world of creatures can act in only a limited way, in accordance with its created state and with its process of becoming and growing towards an eschatological reality. One can say that God’s initial creative words: “*Let there be...*” constantly resound in the world. The whole creation has a future in the fullness of his everlasting life. It is striking that the Latin word *natura* – the nature means a reality which is yet to be born and grow (i.e. *nascitura* in contradistinction to the adjective *nata*, i.e. born already).

The kenosis of the Spirit – acceptance of non-fullness by Fullness, and adoption of becoming by eternity – is a reality hardly comprehensible for created beings who experience only non-fullness and see merely the process of becoming and growing. But it is the kenosis which characterizes the participation of the Spirit in the existence of creatures. So the boundlessness of the Spirit’s Fullness has to be communicated in measure and kenotic limitedness proper to non-fullness, unavoidable on the part of a creature receiving the divine gift within its own process of growing. The kenotic way of the Spirit’s communication with the world leads from his initial “hovering over the waters” (Gn 1:2) to “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rv 21:1) when God will say: “Now I am making the whole of creation new” (v. 5).

This is the Spirit’s grace for all nature – the grace which enters, so to speak, into the body of the world and constitutes the ground and the power of being in every creature. Even the material elements of the world are open to the kenotic action of the Spirit (Bulgakov speaks about such an ability: “*dukhopriemlemost’ veščestva*”¹). After their creation all the created beings have in themselves something of the transfiguring power of God’s Spirit, and are in a certain measure the Spirit-bearers (*tvar’ dukhonósna*). In

¹ S. Bulgakov, *Utešitel’: O Bogočelovečestve, část’ II (The Paraclete: On the Humanity of God, Part II)*, Paříž 1936, p. 255.

such an invisible way creation anticipates already the transfiguration of the coming age when God will be “all in all” (1 Co 15:28). Not losing its ontological identity, creation becomes transparent for the Spirit and open to his action. One can speak here about some sort of permeability of the created world by the divine uncreated reality.

What an admirable unity of the created life and the divine existence! Only in rational creatures does this unity appear in its unusual manifestation. Spiritual reality can be known only by a self-conscious spirit in the act of divine inspiration and mutual penetrability of the human created spirit and the uncreated God’s Spirit. One has to emphasize, however, that the Holy Spirit has no personal incarnation in human nature but only fills human beings with his light and power. The very person of the Spirit is not revealed in such an act of inspiration and illumination, but he nevertheless acts in a kenotic way on the human person according to his or her openness.

The human spirit is not closed in upon itself like a lonely monad but remains always in communication with others, exerts influence on them, inspires them, receives inspiration from them and is subject to their influence. The human spirit is open also to the influence of the spiritual world and to God’s Spirit acting in the history of humankind. The Spirit does not despise even his fallen creatures, who always preserve the ability to receive his divine light and inspiration.

In consequence of the fact of creation the very being of a human person is able to receive gifts from the Spirit. If his creative power gives existence and life to all creatures, then his power remains to a certain extent independent of the self-determination of rational beings, i.e. independent also of their fall. This is **one of the most striking sides of the Spirit’s kenosis in the created world**, of his voluntary self-limitation adapted to the measure of openness on the part of rational creatures. The power of the Spirit finds no obstacle even in their sinful self-determination. They exist thanks to the Spirit-Creator and this gift will not be taken away from them. “The power of the Spirit dwells also in the adversaries of the Spirit” – wrote Fr. Bulgakov.² In his view it applies to the devil and his angels as well. They will not be deprived of the grace of existence by the power of God’s Spirit. This grace acts also in hell, even in the state of hellish Satanism, because hell is a special way of life and being, and not of non-being and absolute death. Here we touch already the eschatological dimension of the Spirit’s kenosis, an issue to which I will return at the end of this chapter.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The whole Old Testament is an unending dialogue of God with humans, who on their part answered him. “God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Heb 1:1). It was

² Ibidem, p. 262.

also he “who put in the midst of them his holy Spirit, who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses” (Is 63:11-12).

The main feature of the Old Testament understanding of the Spirit is his revelation as a divine gift or power in general, or simply as God’s spirit (with a small “s”) but not as a person. He comes to be known by people as various gifts, although inseparable from the Giver. In other words, the Spirit is revealed only through his energies, whereas his person remains entirely hidden. This descent of the Spirit can be called, according to Fr. Bulgakov, some sort of “**Old Testament Pentecost**”, which begins already in the creation of the world, when “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Gn 1:2).³ The gifts of the Spirit were given to humans created in the image of God. Precisely this fact enabled them to receive his many gifts, which had to prepare humankind for the event of Christ’s Incarnation and the Pentecost of the Spirit. One can say axiomatically: *humanum capax divini*, what is human is capable to receive what is divine but in a kenotic and accommodated way through pedagogical revelation. God related to people above all as Word, close to them and comprehensible, in the long process of the maturing of humankind into the incarnation of the divine Logos. The whole process of the Old Testament revelation is an anticipated “incarnation” of the Word in human life. It is accomplished through God’s Spirit. One can therefore speak rightly about the revelation of the Spirit and about some kind of “Old Testament Pentecost”.⁴ The question arises then: was this partial Pentecost preceding the incarnation of the divine Logos really possible? If so, what was its relationship to the New Testament Pentecost?

The incarnation of the divine Logos is inseparable from the participation in it of the Holy Spirit. The action of these two divine persons in human history may be distinct but directed to the same goal which is the salvation of all humanity. The activity of the Spirit extended in time to the entire Old Testament history of the chosen people of God and together with it to the history of all people. This acting presence of the Spirit has an anticipatory and proto-typical character as “only a shadow of the good things that [were] coming – not the realities themselves” (Heb 10:1; NIV).

It is the Spirit of God who prepares not only for the incarnation of the Logos, but also for Pentecost itself as his own descent into the world. The apostle Paul enumerates the various gifts of the Holy Spirit:

There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose [for the common good, *pros tò*

³ Ibidem, p. 282

⁴ See ibidem, p. 264.

symphéron]. (...) All these [gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, who distributes different gifts to different people just as he chooses (1 Co 12:4-7.11).

There is no reason to limit the meaning of these words only to the New Testament divine economy. Various gifts of the Spirit were given to different people before, above all to the Old Testament prophets. That is why in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter referred explicitly to this fact quoting the prophesy of Joel (Jl 2:28-32; Ac 2:17-21). “God’s help, the gift of the Holy Spirit, comes in response to a creative tension of the human person” – wrote Fr. Bulgakov.⁵ Natural gifts of some prominent people (e.g. kings, judges, artists) were often enriched in this way by divine gifts. Human inspiration thus encountered divine inspiration, witnessing to the openness of the human spirit to the divine Spirit, who descended on people through his gifts.

A special place belongs in this respect to the gift of prophesy. Prediction of the future, although not being the only prophetic action, is at the same time an effect of human perspicacity and divine revelation. The divine light gives the prophet the ability to foresee, which in its content, depth and fidelity surpasses mere human intuition. This enlightenment is God’s answer, in a comprehensible language, for human inquiry (cf. Dn 10). Great prophets are great people, great thinkers and saints, worthy of divine distinction among other people. Because of the great openness of their individual spirit, they are able to receive the inspiration of God’s Spirit and become themselves bearers of the Spirit. That is their uneasy and very responsible vocation.

The New Testament Pentecost takes place in connection with the incarnation, with the direct participation of the incarnate Logos. Instead many texts of the Old Testament speak about the descent of the Spirit as sent simply by God or filling some people (Ex 31:3; 35:31; Nb 11:17.25; 24:2; Jg 14:19; 15:14; 1 Sm 11:6; Mi 3:8; Jl 2:28-29; Is 63:11; Ezk 39:29). So Israel knew the gifts of the Spirit of God before the incarnation, as the chosen nation and “the vineyard of the Lord Almighty” (Is 5:7).

But the destinies of Israel did not exhaust God’s ways in the economy of salvation. They providentially included also the destinies of all other nations. With the history of Israel were connected the ways of the universal history of humankind in preparation for the coming of the Savior. What a consoling fact it is, that our human destinies are mutually intertwined! The history of the chosen nation is included in the universal history of humanity. The New Testament Pentecost gives the most evident witness to this.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 266.

GOD'S SPIRIT AND THE WORLD OF GENTILES

From a theological point of view it is comprehensible that the Gentiles cannot be put on the same footing as the chosen nation endowed with divine revelation. Such revelation is not accorded to any other nation. The Gentiles had to follow their own ways, using their natural abilities in seeking the truth. Their godliness should be regarded as a positive religious value, not deprived of the acting presence of God's Spirit. In this respect some striking facts should be recalled and taken into consideration. I will draw attention to the most significant of them.

The book of Deuteronomy allows **a certain legitimacy to astral religion** while commanding the Israelites not to share in that religion.⁶ Forbidden in Israel, astral cults were nevertheless granted to various nations as divinely approved. Moses warned people against image worship and idolatry, defending thus the imageless worship of the invisible God. The reason for this is God's self revelation at Sinai and the covenant made with him: "Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant (...). You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire" (Dt 4:12-13.15; NIV). The most significant text related to astral cults then states unambiguously:

And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars – all the heavenly array – do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping *things the Lord God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven*. But as for you, the Lord took you... (Dt 4:19; italics are mine, W.H.).

This means that God himself, as the supreme Lord of human history, assigned to every nation its object of adoration. For this reason the veneration of heavenly bodies by different nations other than Israel can be considered providential. In this light an astral religion is a gift of God's Spirit and a clear sign of God's concern for all peoples and nations of the world. In his universal benevolence he is present and active in their religious pilgrimage. Their religious situation is not merely the result of human search for God, nor marked only by superstition and unbelief, but is part of the universal divine plan of salvation. The prohibition explicitly directed to Israel against adopting astral cults assigned to the other peoples is therefore not based on a negative evaluation of the other religions and their forms of worship but on the covenant made with God at Sinai. Fidelity to the covenant should make Israelites witnesses to God for the Gentiles,

⁶ See G. O'Collins, SJ, *Salvation for All: God's Other Peoples*, Oxford 2008, pp. 20-23.

who will acknowledge in the former “a wise and understanding nation” (Dt 4:6).

The prophets often spoke against foreign nations as invaders and enemies. They also criticized Israel’s apostasy from God and pointed to **the fidelity of other peoples towards their gods** (cf. Jr 2:11-12; Ml 1:11.14; Zp 3:10). So there is something positive and admirable in this faithfulness. God is benevolent also towards Egypt and Assyria, traditional enemies of Israel. They are his people as well: “The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, ‘Blessed be *Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork*, and Israel my inheritance” (Is 19:23-25; italics mine, W.H.). God’s saving actions reach everyone, including the enemies of Israel. Also other distant peoples such as the Ethiopians (the Nubians, in Hebrew: the Cushites), or close peoples such as the Philistines and the Arameans (Syrians) are God’s beneficiaries: “‘Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?’ declares the Lord. ‘Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caaptor [Crete] and the Arameans from Kir?’” (Am 9:7). So in the history of humankind there were **some other liberating events of exodus** and not only that of Israelites from Egypt. All peoples are blessed by God. He takes part in their history. His care for the ultimate destiny of all nations is confirmed by the prophet’s vision of the eschatological feast for all (Is 25:6-8; 66:18-19).

In God’s eyes there are no “outsiders” and foreigners. He reveals his benevolence, mercy and forgiveness to all and offers salvation to all the nations of the world. These are truly astonishing biblical statements. God always appears greater than all his gifts! In various religions one can detect the manifestation of his wisdom (cf. Si 24:6).

Special attention should be paid to some prominent gentile figures. **Noah** is already shown in the Book of Genesis as “a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time” (Gn 6:9) who long predated the call of Abraham and the Sinai covenant. Being rescued from the flood, he spontaneously “built an altar to the Lord” and “sacrificed burnt offering on it” (Gn 8:20) in thanksgiving. In this way he anticipated the priestly actions prescribed much later through Moses. How could this happen without the action of God’s Spirit? There is then in human nature some spontaneous ability to show thankfulness to God. Such a thing did not happen even to Adam in paradise. Through Noah God gave human history a new beginning, made a covenant with all peoples and with the earth itself (Gn 9:8-17).

The Old Testament presents other figures like Melchizedek and Job who did not belong to the chosen people and yet were blessed and honored by God. There is only a short mention about **Melchizedek**, a mysterious Canaanite priest, an ancient “king of Salem” who in the name of God went with bread and wine to meet and bless Abraham.

He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of

heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hands' (Gn 14: 18-20).

There is something astonishing in this concise account of the encounter of the two representatives of the Old Testament: one represents the chosen nation, another one the Gentiles. A priest of a Canaanite cult conveys a blessing to Abraham in the name of the deity whom he worships, and who is identified as "the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth" (v. 22). Could this be possible without the inspiration of God's Spirit? The benevolence of Melchizedek seems to reflect the benevolence of God himself towards all peoples. No wonder he will later become a model for the priestly privileges of the Israelite king (Ps 110:4) and a symbolic prefiguration of the priesthood of Christ himself (Heb 5:10; 6:20; 7:3.17). The unknown figure of this Canaanite shows another model of worshipping God: not by blood and burnt offerings but through bread and wine.

Also, the people from "the outside" have their own mission in God's saving plans. An eloquent example also is **Balaam**, a foreign priest-diviner from Mesopotamia, whom I already referred to in the first chapter of this book.⁷

The lesson is clear: let us allow God to act according to his will and eternal wisdom! These mysterious figures make us more sensitive to the variety of ways in which God's Spirit is present and acts in the world, responding thus to the cry of many people for light and assistance. They teach us a greater hope than the one we now experience in our daily life. A certain darkness in the world of the Gentiles was no obstacle to being enlightened by the rays of priesthood and prophesy, i.e. by the direct gifts of God's Spirit.

But let us turn now to the New Testament. A striking witness is given by Paul, the Apostle of the Nations, at **the meeting on the Areopagus** in Athens. He finds the inhabitants of that city very religious, because they also worship something unknown, as it is inscribed on an altar devoted "To An Unknown God" (Ac 17:23). That is why Paul speaks to the Athenians about a universal quest for God by all humankind. It is God's will, he said, "that all nations might seek the deity and, by feeling their way towards him, succeeded in finding him. Yet in fact he is not far from any of us, since it is in him that we live, and move, and exist, as indeed some of your own writers have said: 'We are all his children'" (Ac 17:27-28).

In this way the Apostle puts before us all today the fact of the election by God not only of Israel but also of all people who are his children. As far as the Gentiles are concerned, "what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen" (Rm 1:19-20; NIV). However,

⁷ The chapter "We believe in the Holy Spirit", subtitle: *God's Spirit speaking also through an "alien" diviner*.

because of human sin, “although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened” (v. 21). In such a situation access to truth then becomes adumbrated both for the Gentiles and for the Jews. In this respect Paul’s witness is clear:

There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. (...) Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do, by nature things required by the law, they are the law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that *the requirements of the law are written on their hearts...* (Rm 2:9-11.14-15; italics are mine, W.H.).

In this regard, not diminishing the election of the Jews, Paul puts them on the same footing with the Gentiles, equally in need of salvation and similarly all called to it. This natural equality before God is described in the lively account of the conversion of the **Roman centurion Cornelius** during his encounter with the apostle Peter (Ac 10:1-48:11:1-18).⁸ In his person, together with his household, the Gentiles accept the word of God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out on them even before they are all baptized (Ac 10:44-46). That is a clear witness that “God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Ac 10:34-35). One can only praise God’s goodness and benevolence for his astonishing gifts bestowed on all people. No wonder the apostle Peter, himself equally astonished, reports later this event at the council of Jerusalem: “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Sprit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith” (Ac 15:8).

Such events as the intervention of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles, openness of their hearts to Christ, and their call to salvation have great importance. Those people proved to be willing to receive the Gospel and to assimilate it with greater openness than all the compatriots of Jesus. It is difficult to deny that in the world of Gentiles there was much erring, religious misunderstanding, one-sidedness and illusion. They had only a limited knowledge of the deity on the ground of natural revelation. The apostles had to convince people that venerating idols made no sense: “an idol is nothing at all in the world” (1 Co 8:4; cf. also 10:19). However, this was no categorical and negative judgment over different religions of the Gentiles. One has to appreciate their godliness and piety which found

⁸ See O’Collins, *Salvation for All*, pp. 149-152.

expression in their seeking God, prayers, offerings and good works. For that reason the Eastern liturgy speaks even about “a sterile heathen church.”⁹

The world of the Gentiles, both in its religion and its culture, is not deprived of the active presence of God’s Spirit, who blows like the wind wherever he wills. Thanks to him natural religions also have access to a certain knowledge of God. In this respect one can even speak about natural revelation and **natural Pentecost**. One should therefore rejoice over the gifts of God’s Spirit bestowed on Gentile “prophets” like Balaam or on the Magi, i.e. wise men who came from the east to pay homage to the new born Jesus in Bethlehem. It was the world of the Gentiles that gave to Christianity its philosophy, knowledge and religious art. All this is marked by the divine spirit. No wonder early Church Fathers used to see “Christians before Christ” in Plato and Socrates. Maybe some other great names like Aristotle, Plotinus or Phidias (a Greek sculptor, painter and architect), and the ancient masters of Egypt could be added to the list of inspired creators.

In view of an outstanding passage by the largely forgotten Russian Orthodox theologian, Alexandr Matveevič Bukharev (1822-1871), Christianity cannot be opposed to the true values of humanity: “all treasures of Egypt and Babylon (except only of what is vitiated in them) can be transferred by faith to the promised land as the heritage of the Only-Begotten and Beloved Son of God...”¹⁰ In other words, Christ’s kingdom is open to everything that is good and true in human culture. Divine light enlightens every human being. No wonder Elisabeth Behr-Sigel saw Bukharev as representative of an Orthodox prophetism. He did not proclaim “a crusade against the modern world, nor flight from it, nor genuflection before it...”¹¹

The rays of divine inspiration are always refracted through the prism of human experience not only of what is good, but also of what is evil. As sinful people we are not able to live up to the high requirements of divine gifts. This applies in great measure to all religions. It is not easy to separate in them light from darkness, bright sides from dark sides and to distinguish the action of God’s Spirit from human customs, ambitions and decisions. Israelite prophets tried to protect the chosen nation from close relations with the Gentiles, but sometimes they saw in them only dark sides, idolatry and depravity, without perceiving their genuine and deep values.

One can apply to the world of the Gentiles the words from the Prologue of the Gospel according to John: “a light shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower” (Jn 1:5). God’s Spirit is present also in

⁹ See Bulgakov, *Utešitel’*, pp. 273, 279.

¹⁰ Arkhimandrit Feodor (A.M. Bukharev), *O pravoslavii v otnošenii k sovremennosti (On Orthodoxy in Relation to the Modern World)*, S. Peterburg 1906, pp. 39-40.

¹¹ E. Behr-Sigel, *Alexandre Boukharev: Un théologien de l’Eglise orthodoxe russe en dialogue avec le monde moderne. Introduction et Lettres à Valérien et Alexandra Lavrski*, préface Olivier Clément, Paris 1977, pp. 96-97.

darkness and does not despise the human limited ability to accept his gifts. This is again his **kenosis** in communication with created beings. Let us not measure God's immense love shown in his condescension with purely human judgments! The deep **kenosis of the Spirit does not exclude his acting presence also among the Gentiles**. So again, let us repeat the words of wisdom: "God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Ac 10:34-35; NIV).¹²

So far our attention has concentrated on the issue of the ancient Gentiles. But what about modern atheism or the different phenomena of the so-called "humanistic neo-paganism"? The question has lately become much discussed in the Roman-Catholic Church because of an initiative entitled "**The Courtyard of Nations**".¹³ Those who believe sincerely want to discuss important existential questions with unbelievers. Such a dialogue requires much honesty on both sides. It is worth remembering that the gifts of God's Spirit may be accessible also to those who do not believe but are full of compassion and really do what is good and right. After all, every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, and this iconic divine gift is indestructible. **The kenotic presence of the Spirit has no boundaries**. Those who want to deny this measure divine gifts with the measure of mere human reason. The Spirit blows wherever he likes. One cannot tell where he comes from or where he is going.

All human creativity is accomplished by natural inspiration, accompanied by the gift of the Spirit. He, the Spirit-Creator, is the ultimate source of all creative inspiration. His luminous rays enlighten human minds and hearts. No human has been given the power to confine the unknown ways of the Spirit. Modern Gentiles, when they are worthy of it, may also become Spirit-bearers. Every human being preserves in his or her innermost self the Spirit-carrying capacity. Everything that is great and creative in human life has in itself the mysterious mark of the Spirit. If nature is an unwritten Bible, then in some sense this is also true of the human spirit and human history.¹⁴

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE ANNUNCIATION AND IN JESUS' KENOTIC MINISTRY

In the light of traditional Christian theology, the action of the Holy Spirit precedes the descent of the Son of God in the event of incarnation. The Father sent the Son into the world through the Holy Spirit. This happened in the Annunciation to Mary of Nazareth. For this reason one can speak about her personal anticipated Pentecost – the **Pentecost of the**

¹² Cf. J. Dupuis S.J., *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: Orbis Books 1998, pp. 23, 312, 316, 385.

¹³ This program was launched by Pope Benedict XVI in connection with the Year of Faith (2012-2013).

¹⁴ Bulgakov, *Utešitel'*, p. 281.

Annunciation. “The Word/Logos was made flesh” (Jn 1:14) through the descent of the Holy Spirit in person, who reposes on the Son in eternity and in time. That is why the Spirit was even called (e.g. in the apocryphal Gospel of Egyptians) Christ’s Mother. This can be said, of course, only in the sense that the Spirit somehow identified himself with the motherhood of the Virgin Mary. Being filled with the Holy Spirit she has been called in the eastern tradition the Spirit-Bearer (*Pneumatophōra*, *Dukhonósitsa*) as a person entirely transparent to the personal revelation of the Spirit.

The event of the incarnation of Christ was a truly dyadic act of his man-becoming. Only through the descent of the Spirit did the descent of the Son also take place. The Son did not descend alone, but together and inseparably with the Spirit. The Annunciation to Mary and the descent of the Spirit are mutually connected. However, the Pentecost of the Annunciation was limited only to her person and lasting motherhood. Like Jesus himself she also had to pass along the road of kenotic humiliation and diminishment. But in her was eventually accomplished that transfiguration, which will once embrace the whole of humanity.

Let us go back to the theme of reposing or resting of the Spirit on the Son in eternity, and in time on his human nature. In Jesus’ baptism the Spirit personally descended on him “like a dove” and rested or remained on him (cf. Jn 1:32), permeating his humanity with his divine power. This event Bulgakov rightly calls “**Christ’s Pentecost**”.¹⁵ Jesus was constituted and proclaimed Christ, i.e. the Anointed One by the Spirit, the Spirit-Bearer. In his appearance the world has not only the incarnation of the divine Logos, but also the Spirit reposing and remaining on him. Referring to Isaiah’s prophesy, Jesus himself spoke about the Spirit resting on him: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me...” (Lk 4:18; cf. Is 61:1; NIV). And later he testified: “But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt 28:12).

This means that in all his ministry Jesus is Christ, the Anointed One by the Spirit, the Bearer of the Spirit, filled with his saving power and inspired for all time by him. When seventy two of his disciples returned from their mission, telling him that even the demons submitted to them, “at that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit (*tō pneúmati tō hagíō*), said: ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth’...” (Lk 10:21). It was the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be confronted with the spirit of evil. The drama is accomplished on the cross, where Jesus “through the eternal Spirit (*dià pneúmatos aiōníou*) offered himself unblemished to God” (Heb 9:14).

All this witnesses to the **personal Pentecost of Jesus Christ** during his earthly life and death. Thanks to the Anointed One by the Spirit, Pentecost was in principle already open to the world, although only in a partial and limited manifestation. The next act of this Pentecost of Christ was his **transfiguration** on Mount Tabor. The Holy Spirit rested on him

¹⁵ Bulgakov, *Utešitel’*, p. 286.

continually, but in this event the disciples could feel that the kingdom of God, by the power of this Spirit, was really near. The transfiguration reveals the Holy Spirit as Glory through the image of “a bright cloud” (Mt 17:5) which enveloped Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah. The sonship of Jesus was confirmed by the Father’s voice: “This is my Son, whom I love”. These words clearly refer to the descent of the Spirit during Jesus’ baptism. The revelation of the messianic dignity of Jesus in the glory of the transfiguration is therefore both christophany and pneumatophany, i.e. a dyadic event showing Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in their mutual relationship.

In his farewell discourse, before the approaching passion, Jesus himself asked his Father for glorification: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you”, “glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (Jn 17:1.5). But on Golgotha he will be forsaken by God in his human nature: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46). Bulgakov explains that the invariable resting on him of the Holy Spirit became then not perceptible, in contradistinction to its perceptibility during the transfiguration.¹⁶ This manifests **the kenosis of the Holy Spirit** which began already in the incarnation, **on a parallel with the kenosis of Christ**. The remaining of the Spirit upon Jesus, after his personal descent during his baptism, was not manifested in all its fullness, but only through his gifts. The witness to this partial manifestation can be found in the words of the prophet Isaiah quoted by Jesus at Nazareth. Here is the whole passage:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor
(Lk 4:18-19 NIV; cf. Is 61:1.2).

Various gifts of the Spirit are listed in these words, including the gift of driving out demons and of healing. All this was not yet the fullness of the Spirit reposing on the Son in eternity. The earthly life of Jesus is marked by a certain kenotic measure, suspended or withheld during his transfiguration, when his disciples were able to see the fullness of the Holy Spirit’s glory reposing on him. But this was only a short temporary event. **The kenosis of the Spirit continued to attain progressively the deepest degree during Jesus’ passion and death**. Before the agony in Gethsemane he still assured his disciples: “But the time is coming, and has come (...).

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 288.

You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me” (Jn 16:32; NIV).

Maybe, as Bulgakov suggests, these and similar words in the farewell discourses are a certain cryptogram, i.e. a hidden word about the Holy Spirit. The Father is all the time with the incarnate Son, but starting with Gethsemane the kenosis intensifies on a parallel with the kenosis of the Spirit, who diminishes the power of his perceptible presence. Jesus confesses the feeling of being seized with sorrow at his approaching death: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Mt 26:38; Mk 14:34). He still addresses his request to the Father: “Abba, Father”. But in the agony on the cross he does not speak any more to the Father, but simply to God: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, quoting a verse from Psalm 22,2.

This feeling of forsakenness, so different from the earlier words “my Father is with me”, is **the deepest kenosis of the Holy Spirit**, who “abandons” Jesus. One has to understand “abandonment” in the sense that the perceptible presence of the Holy Spirit was reduced in some way to a pure potentiality but not suppressed. The One who eternally reposes on the Son in his divine nature constantly rests also on his humanity.¹⁷ The abandonment is only a transient experience of Jesus who, according to the Gospel of Luke, cried out before dying: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk 23:46). Even death does not suppress his union with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The death of Jesus is not only the last boundary of the earthly kenosis of the Son but also of the kenosis of the Spirit resting on him.

The resurrection of Christ in his “spiritual body” (1 Co 15:44) was accomplished by the Father’s will through the Holy Spirit, united with the divine power of the Son himself. That was a new manifestation of the Spirit’s presence and saving action which would increase while his kenosis would diminish. In resuscitating Jesus, the Holy Spirit manifests himself as Glory. Thus Jesus’ resurrection is already his glorification. As a consequence of this the kenosis of the Spirit’s action on Jesus approaches the end, together with the parallel kenosis of the Son himself. The glorified Jesus Christ himself will send the Holy Spirit from the Father (Jn 15:26; 16:7) as an anticipation of Pentecost (cf. Jn 7:37-39; 20:21-23). Already in his farewell discourse he announced: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor...” (Jn 14:16; cf. also verse 26). This announcement was made still in the time of Jesus’ deep kenosis. Because of the reciprocity of the two divine persons acting inseparably, one can say that the Holy Spirit himself also asked the Father, together with the Son, to be sent into the world.

This mysterious prayer for the final glorification of Jesus could not remain unanswered. It was addressed to the Father already beyond the

¹⁷ In Bulgakov’s view it is the Holy Spirit who unites the Father with the Son. See *ibidem*, p. 289.

boundaries of this world, after the accomplishment of the kenotic ministry of Jesus Christ. As a result of the incarnation fully accomplished in the resurrection and ascension, he had already united himself with the world through his humanity in such a way that he could receive the new power to send the Holy Spirit: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18). The Spirit will reveal not himself but Christ (cf. Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14) because he is "the Spirit of Christ" (Rm 8:9), "the Spirit of the Son" (Ga 4:6) in the sense of his mission in the world. In other words, if earlier the Spirit was sent into the world by Father on the Son for the incarnation to be accomplished, now he is sent by the Son by the force of the already fully accomplished incarnation and glorification.

The ascension of Jesus is his heavenly glorification, i.e. his entrance into the fullness of divine life from the state of kenosis. The *personal* kenosis of the Son is therefore exhausted and overcome, and together with it also the kenosis of the *activity* of the Holy Spirit. During the time of his earthly ministry until the resurrection the incarnate Son did not send the Holy Spirit on the apostles or any other people, although he himself accomplished works of healing and deliverance by the power of the Spirit. Thereafter the ascension opens a new epoch of the Holy Spirit's mission in the world.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE POST-PASCHAL PENTECOST?

A partial anticipation and preparation for Pentecost took place already in the Cenacle when the risen Christ said to his disciples: "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained" (Jn 20:22). The Spirit was given only to apostles, and not to the whole world. His gift was clearly determined: to forgive sins and to retain them.¹⁸ Thus the apostles, having already received this gift from Holy Spirit, are advised that the universal event of Pentecost still awaits them: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about" (Ac 1:4), "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Ac 1:8).

What happened then in Pentecost? One has to ask this question to know the boundary separating the life of the world before Pentecost and after it. There is no doubt that God's Spirit acted in the world since its beginning, in the Old Testament and also in Christ's incarnation. However, **something new** occurred in Pentecost. It was not the descent of God's Spirit only in his gifts, but the descent of the Holy Spirit in person. This time the descent was not limited to the concrete individuals of Christ and his Mother, as it was in the event of incarnation. The Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and those who were with them. This event spread further upon all people and upon the whole world what was in iconography symbolically

¹⁸ According to Matthew, this promise was first given to Peter (16:19), and then to all the apostles (18:18) before Jesus' passion.

represented by the figure of the Cosmos.¹⁹ So Pentecost is the hypostatic (personal) descent of the Holy Spirit into the world, fully analogous with the descent of the divine Logos in the incarnation.

However, there is no direct and explicit affirmation in the New Testament that Pentecost was a truly hypostatic descent of the Holy Spirit. One would be even inclined to understand this event in analogy with Old Testament witnesses of the action of the Spirit directed to kings and prophets. The Acts of the Apostles says: “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (*Pneúmatos Hagíou*, without definite article *tou!*), and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit (*tò Pneûma*, with definite article!) enabled them” (Ac 2:4; NIV).²⁰ Further witnesses in the Book of Acts refer both to “the Holy Spirit” and to “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (cf. 5:32; 15:28). He communicates with people, speaks to them and sends them on missions. These are his actions in the primitive church. But none of these and other witnesses give unquestionable evidence that it was the activity of the Holy Spirit in his own person and not God’s spirit in general. That is why one has to admit that there is no explicit witness of the hypostatic Spirit of God himself and of his hypostatic revelation. The texts speak only about his various gifts.

In the prophesy of Joel quoted by the apostle Peter in his Pentecostal sermon it is said: “I will pour out *from* my Spirit (*apò toũ Pneúmatos mou*) on all people” (Ac 2:17). But it was *not* said directly: “I will pour out my Spirit” (*tò Pneûma moũ*). In the Old Testament the gifts of the Holy Spirit were sent down, but he did not descend himself in person. Similarly, in Luke’s account of the Pentecost, the abundance of gifts and the appearance of what seemed *like* (*ōsei*) tongues of fire that separated do not by themselves give witness to the hypostatic manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Those fiery tongues were only a human vision and not a hypostatic dwelling of the Holy Spirit in fire.

One can find in the direct promise of Jesus in his farewell discourses real textual support for the conviction that in the account of the Pentecost we have the witness of the descent into the world of **the hypostatic Holy Spirit himself**. These were a prophesy, the fulfillment of which was Pentecost. It means that Luke’s account of the Pentecost should be read in the light of Jesus’ words about “**another Counselor**”, *állos Paráklētos* (Jn 14:16; NIV), i.e. the One **equally hypostatic with the hypostatic Logos himself**. In relation to this “another Counselor” is used a **personal pronoun of the third person**: “the Counselor, the Holy Spirit (...) will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (14:26). Jesus has promised: “if I go, I will send *him* to you” (16:7). He will be with us “forever” (14:16), and “*he* will testify about me” (15:26).

¹⁹ I will come back later to the significance of this mysterious figure.

²⁰ The definite article, which usually indicates a person, is seen also in Ac 4:31: the believers “were all filled with the Holy Spirit”, *eplēsthēsan ápantes toũ Hagíou Pneúmatos*.

And more: “But when *he*, the Spirit of truth, comes, *he* will guide you into all truth. *He* will not speak on his own; *he* will speak only what *he* hears, and *he* will tell you what is yet to come. *He* will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (16:13; italics my own W.H.).

All this can be understood as affirmed only about the Person fully similar to the Person of Jesus Christ, who is also the Paraclete. In the light of such fulfilled prophesy the event of Pentecost appears as the descent into the world of the Holy Spirit in person. We are faced here not only with gifts, but with the real source of them, the Paraclete himself.

The personal character of the descent of the Holy Spirit finds confirmation also in other texts of the New Testament. Let me quote some of them. The apostle Paul wrote: “These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God. After all, (...) the depths of God can only be known by the Spirit of God” (1 Co 2:10-11). And about the variety of gifts he said: “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, who distributes different gifts to different people just as he chooses” (1 Co 12:11). Existentially important is another text: “The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words” (Rm 8:26). The author of the Letter to Ephesians urges believers: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ep 4:30).

All these functions testify to the essential attributes of the Spirit’s personality. Here one can see the basic difference between the Old Testament events of pouring out of the Spirit in his separate gifts and the event of Pentecost, in which the gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit in person. In other words, in Pentecost not only are gifts offered to the world, but also the Person of the Holy Spirit invisibly descends. As “another Counselor”, Teacher and Protector, he will continue Jesus’ personal, salvific functions towards people. The very Person of the Spirit remains invisible and hidden behind what “seemed like tongues of fire”. His descent and presence manifest themselves only in his abundant gifts, known also before Pentecost. He cannot be seen and worshipped in a way similar to that experienced by the shepherds and the Magi after the birth of Jesus.

THE DYADIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SON AND THE SPIRIT

Let us ask then about the fuller meaning of the descent of the very Person of the Holy Spirit. This question leads us, as emphasized by Fr. Bulgakov, to the summits of theological reflections.²¹ Was the event of Pentecost necessary to the ways of salvation? Was it not enough to bestow

²¹ Bulgakov, *Utešitel’*, p. 307 ff.

gifts of the Spirit in a transcendent way, as happened in the Old Testament? One has to take into account an inner connection between the accomplished incarnation of the divine Logos and the descent of the Spirit. Christ himself established this connection in his farewell discourses with undeniable force and evidence. We must face the fact that God the Father sends into the world not just one, but two Persons, not only the Son but also the Holy Spirit. The first mission occurs in the incarnation of Christ. The second has no similar equivalent.

Thus we stand before the mystery of the divine economy in the world, expressed by the **dyadic relationship between the Son and the Spirit** in the self-revelation of the Holy Trinity. The triune God is revealed in his Word (Logos) by the Holy Spirit. This is a bi-unique revelation of the two Persons sent by the Father into the world. In consequence, the world itself, in the depth of its being, appears also dyadic: word-like and spirit-bearing (*slovesno-doukhonosn*). The first principle of being (word-like) gives content, the second (spirit-bearing) gives reality. The two are inseparable. In creation itself there is then an ontological place for the Holy Spirit and for his descent into the world, as was already the case with the descent of the incarnate Logos.

The ascension of Christ to heaven does not mean the end of his incarnate condition and a broken link between him and humanity. This link should be extended to all humankind as its life in Christ and in the living relationship of people with him. In this way the mystery of the incarnation finds its permanent continuation. The realization of this task is accomplished thanks to the descent of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in the name of Jesus. The glorified humanity of Christ preserves its saving power in the world because it remains forever united with the Spirit. In this sense one should understand a certain identification made by Jesus himself between his own mission and the descent of the Holy Spirit as “another Counselor to be with us forever”. His words should be taken seriously in all their significance: “I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you. (...) I live and you will live” (Jn 14:18-19), “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

This is a real revelation about the continuing dwelling of Christ in the world by the power of the Holy Spirit and thus about their dyadic union and co-existence. Christ never becomes separated from the Spirit. The descent of the Holy Spirit can therefore be regarded as the new act in the process of incarnation – as the return of Christ in the Holy Spirit, who is really “another Counselor”, like Christ himself “on whom he reposes in time and in eternity (Jn 1:32).”²² The idea of the Spirit who “reposes” on the

²² This is a formulation of the Joint International Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church in its first official statement (Munich 1982) on “The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity” (I,6). See *The Quest for Unity: Orthodox and Catholics in Dialogue. Documents of the Joint International Commission*

Son both in time and eternity was particularly evident in the Antiochene-Syriac tradition.

For this reason one can speak about a **dyadic axiom** which permanently characterizes the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit. Christ is the One anointed inseparably by the Holy Spirit who reposes on him. The Holy Spirit on his part is the One who inseparably reposes on Christ, manifests him and continues his saving mission.

From the above reflections some important dogmatic conclusions follow. Pentecost proves that the descent of the Holy Spirit in person was necessary for the accomplishment of the work of salvation in the world. His gifts manifested in the Old Testament were not sufficient for this purpose. It is not by his gifts that the Spirit eternally reposes on the divine Logos, but personally (hypostatically); and also he reposes personally on the incarnate Son of God. Only the hypostatic descent of the Spirit could bring the active presence and life-giving power of Christ into the world: not gifts themselves, but the very Giver of them. The Holy Spirit in person has the power to continue and complete the saving work of Christ. This affirmation does not deny the fact that the personal descent of the Spirit also brings his gifts, which people living in the times of the Old Testament could not experience. Nevertheless, this is not yet the eschatological fullness of these gifts because of the kenosis of the Holy Spirit, which permeates the whole history of humanity.

Although the incarnation of Christ and Pentecost are two separate events in the history of salvation, they remain closely connected as a bi-unique revelation. The Holy Spirit reveals Christ, and Christ acts and is revealed by the Spirit. This is truly divine reciprocity in revelation! Each Person reveals the other one in a specific way: Christ, as the incarnate Logos, is the Truth and content of this revelation; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth who guides us into all truth. According to Bulgakov's formulation, "the Holy Spirit is like a transparent environment in which and through which is seen the Logos".²³

As a personified and hypostatic love the Spirit exists in a kenotic way not for himself, but for self-identification with Christ and his mission. Paradoxically it is in this self-identification with Christ's work that the whole power of his pro-existence is manifested. In this way the Holy Spirit reveals Christ, his life and saving power. This is the mutual dyadic identification of Christ's revelation in the Spirit and the Spirit's revelation in Christ (cf. Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). That is why the apostle Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost is devoted above all to Christ, who "exalted to the right hand of God (...) has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (Ac

and Official Dialogues in the United States 1965-1995. Edited by John Borelli and John H. Erickson, Crestwood, NY & Washington, DC 1996, p. 56.

²³ Bulgakov, *Utešitel'*, p. 311: "Dukh Sv. est' kak by prozračnaia sreda, v kotoroi i črez kotoruiu zritsia Logos".

2:33; NIV). Those to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” are promised to “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38). The apostles regard themselves as witnesses of Christ by the power of the Spirit (cf. Ac 5:32). In many witnesses of the New Testament one can see the repeated identification of the revelation of Christ with the Holy Spirit (cf. Rm 8:9; Ga 4:6; Ep 1:17; Ph 1:19; 1 P 1:10-12).

THE SPIRIT WITH NO CONCRETE HUMAN FACE

In Pentecost the descent of the Holy Spirit occurred in person, accompanied by his gifts but without visible manifestation of the Giver. His Person remains invisible and unknown to the world. There is then, for our perception, a certain limit to Pentecost. It was not yet time for the hypostatic manifestation of the Spirit. Our reason sees in this fact a certain inconsistency between the personal descent of the Spirit and his non-hypostatic manifestation. His descent in person is separated in temporary revelation from his personal manifestation.

Pentecost is an event with long-lasting consequences for the destiny of the world, but it is an event not yet fully accomplished. The Paraclete-Counselor was sent to be with us “forever” (J 14:16). His sustained sojourn is a continuing and inexhaustible Pentecost. Here we can see in all evidence the difference between the descent of the divine Logos in his hypostatic incarnation and the descent of the Holy Spirit. The incarnation took place in the concrete historical person of Jesus, in a particular place and for a well-defined length of time. There is no such concreteness in the descent of the Spirit, whose presence remains empirically invisible and mysterious. It is true that, in the origins of the Church, people strongly felt his activity but only through his gifts. The Person was hidden and incomprehensible, and will remain so until the end of times.

The Holy Spirit has no concrete human face or other visible image. His inspiration simply changes human life and continually directs it towards the Gospel of Christ. A human face touched by his grace manifests then in the best way his acting presence. The activity of the Spirit knows no boundaries. For this reason Jesus compared it to the wind: “The wind (*τὸ πνεῦμα!*) blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:8; NIV). The wind is the natural likeness of the Spirit. The words of Jesus allude at the same time both to the image and to the Prototype. The Spirit’s action is not bound up within a defined time or place. In his divine sovereignty he is, so to speak, timeless and spaceless although he acts in time and space. He acts in an intimate, tender and delicate way. Do you not believe that it is so? Just listen to the fervent appeal of Fr. Bulgakov:

Try to deny this superior, supernatural reality, because you do not see it with your eyes and do not feel it with your

senses. Attempt to convince yourself that there is no Spirit, but only a psychological emotion, and in the cold, lifeless, satanic light you will see yourself and your life, taste spiritual agony before your death, because “each soul is nurtured by the Holy Spirit”. But there comes He, and you become another within yourself, feeling in what is partial fullness, in poverty richness, in sorrow of half-being everlasting joy, in tragedy catharsis, in dying victory of eternal life, in death resurrection.²⁴

SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE KENOSIS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Although the kenosis of the Holy Spirit is connected with the kenosis of Christ, it appears different in its accomplishment. Through his incarnation “the Word (*ho Logos*) became flesh” (Jn 1:14), including in his divine life created human existence. Similar to the descent of the Son of God in the event of the incarnation which was his kenosis, the descent of the Holy Spirit was also a kenotic event in the history of salvation. Nevertheless, we should understand kenosis of the Spirit in a different way from kenosis of the Son of God, which consists in his resignation from divine glory and power, in diminishing the fullness of divine life throughout his earthly existence. Instead, the Holy Spirit in the kenosis of his descent does not diminish himself in his divine life, and does not resign from his glory because he himself is that Glory.²⁵ His kenosis is expressed through his new bonds with the world, different from those that existed since the beginning of creation when he as the Spirit of God “was hovering over the waters” (Gn 1:2).

During the time of the Old Covenant this Spirit of God “was hovering” *over* the creation, not having yet a privileged and personal place of his lasting rest. After the incarnation this place has become the humanity of the Son of God: “John [the Baptist] also declared, ‘I saw the Spirit coming down on him from heaven like a dove and *resting on him*’” (Jn 1:32; italics mine, W.H.). It is the humanity of Christ which, as a consequence of his incarnation, finds continuation in his saving work in the world by the power of the Spirit. For the Holy Spirit permanently “rests” on the whole work of Christ in the history of humankind. He is present *in* the world.

However, the power of this dwelling and the presence of the Holy Spirit is limited and does not correspond to that fullness of gifts which is proper to his person. This limitation and reduction result from the measure of reception of the Spirit’s gifts on the part of the world and humanity. The measure of reception of the Spirit is determined by human freedom. He does not violate it, but convinces, attracts and finally overcomes its opposition.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 314.

²⁵ See Bulgakov, *Utešitel’*, p. 318.

Orthodox theologians willingly speak in this regard about a kind of duel between the freedom of human beings and the grace of the Spirit.

There can be no doubt about the final outcome of this struggle because the Holy Spirit has at his disposal an irresistible **power of beauty**. But this is no instant victory. The action of the Spirit is extended in time and space. What happens may be compared to the slow growth of a tree from a little seed. The kenosis of the Spirit in his gifts embraces all the stages of human spiritual growth and transformation. The fullness of reception of the Spirit's gifts does not occur all at once.

The kenosis of the Spirit consists in his self-limitation in front of a created freedom and its inertia. "If love is also patience united with humility – writes Bulgakov – then the Person of Love, **the Holy Spirit manifests himself here as Patience and Humility, *kak Terpenie i Smirenje***".²⁶ Using figurative biblical language we can say that his grace, although irresistible by its nature, stops and waits at the door of every human heart: "I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share his meal, side by side with him" (Rv 3:20). This inspired image applies not only to Christ but also to the Holy Spirit who by the inspiration of his grace knocks at the heart of all human persons and calls them to discover the presence of Christ living in them. The two divine persons, Christ and his Spirit, are inseparable. They form a divine dyad²⁷. That is why the apostle Paul warns: "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Rm 8:9; NIV). The saving work of Christ is accomplished and completed by the Spirit, who does not perform in the world anything that would not already be part of that work.

Let us look more closely at the **difference between the events of Incarnation and Pentecost**. The incarnation took place at a designated time in human history without any obstacle from created freedom, through one single act of the "fiat" on the part of the Virgin Mary. It was realized in a limited, relatively short time during the earthly life of Jesus. Human freedom could not oppose this divine act of man-becoming itself. Instead, as far as acceptance of the saving work of the incarnation in the world is concerned, created freedom can make negative decisions and become an obstacle.

By the very fact of the incarnation, humanity has been, in its ontological nature, already united with Christ. But as singular human persons are concerned, they have to accept him freely in their concrete life. This is accomplished with the inspiration and help of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said: "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). It is the Spirit, he emphasized, who "will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you" (Jn 14:26).

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 319; cf. also p. 388.

²⁷ From the ancient Greek: *dýas* (genitive: *dyados*) means duality, couple.

The incarnation of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit, although separate, are so to speak the two sides of one and the same event in the transformation of the world. The salvific power of Christ's work is secretly present in the world through his Spirit. Like the incarnation, the descent of the Holy Spirit also takes place in a determined moment of time. However, unlike the incarnation which occurs concretely in the person of Jesus Christ, its mission has been directed to free human beings throughout the entire world. It has extensively an unlimited object of action, without determined time and space. The kenosis of the incarnate Logos in the state of diminishment and humiliation extends only to the glorification of his humanity. Although the kenosis of the Holy Spirit finds its preliminary accomplishment in Pentecost, it continues to be accomplished throughout the whole eon of the "last times". So his kenosis is not self-belittlement and resignation from the fullness of his divine glory and existence. It happens through condescension and accommodation to human inertia, weakness and even opposition to his presence in the world. Entering the world the Spirit encounters here obstacles to his transforming action, which in consequence is limited and reduced in its effectiveness. He wants to penetrate the whole of humanity with his transfiguring energies and unite himself to every human being.

Because the kenosis of the Holy Spirit extends to the whole history of humanity, it is also followed by a certain inactiveness or relative ineffectiveness of Christ's incarnation in the world. After the resurrection "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18) has been given to the Savior. In reality, however, this power cannot manifest its fullness as long as the Holy Spirit has not transformed Christ's extended body, i.e. humankind, and more precisely human hearts and mutual relationships among people. This transformation is to be accomplished by the transfiguring power of the Spirit in his continuing Pentecost. He descends into the world but still does not find a dwelling place in many people. This explains why, in the Orthodox prayer "O King of Heaven" addressed directly to the Spirit, there is this fervent invocation: "Come and abide in us".²⁸ He has not yet succeeded in abiding in all humanity.

That is also why the risen and glorified Christ, although proclaimed as Lord and King, in his humanity still remains, paradoxically, in "the condition of a servant" (Ph 2:7) who intercedes for us, full of compassion for human erring and suffering. This is his prolonged kenosis. St Paul says that he first has to destroy every hostile sovereignty, authority and power: "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Co 15:25). We can add that this will happen by the action of the Holy Spirit and the power of Pentecost secretly present in the world. Christ and the Spirit act inseparably together.

²⁸ See W. Hryniewicz, *God's Spirit in the World. Ecumenical and Cultural Essays*, Washington: CRVP 2012, p. 153.

In this way, **different modes of the kenosis of Christ and the Spirit are intertwined** and connected with each other in bringing the reign of God nearer. Both John the Baptist and Jesus himself proclaimed that the time had come and the Kingdom of God was close at hand (cf. Mk 1:15). The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of his Spirit. A clear sign of it was not only the event of the incarnation, but also the descent of the Holy Spirit already during Jesus' baptism, and later in the Pentecost. John persistently witnessed that among people had appeared the One who would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Mt 3:11; cf. Mk 1:8). Christ reigns in the world by the power of the Spirit. That is why **the kenosis of the Spirit is also an earthly kenosis of the glorified Christ**. This antinomy seems to be a contradiction to our rational static thinking, but the reality of divine life in the world manifests itself in such dynamic paradoxes.

Therefore the kenosis of Christ is at the same time connected with the kenosis of the Holy Spirit who communicates himself according to the reception of his gifts by human freedom.

ARE THERE ANY LIMITS TO THE TRANSFORMING ENERGY OF PENTECOST?

This question is answered by Sergius Bulgakov clearly and decisively: "there are no such limits and cannot be".²⁹ The Holy Spirit has descended to the world not to temporarily dwell in it, but to reside in it and to unite heaven with earth in himself. Everything existing in the world has received the Spirit and his energy in Pentecost, thus completing the earlier received energy of the incarnation. This affirmation may sound paradoxical, because **the influence of Pentecost remains invisible and inaccessible to our experience**. This is precisely the way the kenosis of the Holy Spirit manifests itself. Because of this, his patient action appears dependent on the ability of creation to receive it, and especially on the readiness and receptivity of human freedom. In the continuing Pentecost the mystery of the existence of the world, its ontology, history and eschatology finds its expression.

As distinct from the kenosis of Christ, the Spirit's mission is not another act of incarnation, but the transfiguration of humanity through participation in the divine life. His kenosis expresses itself in voluntary self-limitation and self renouncement. The Immeasurable subjects himself to a certain measure. This is ultimately **the kenosis of love, of the divine condescension**, the entrance of absolute divinity into the sphere of creaturely relativity and limitedness. This condescension continues in the whole process of salvation of the world, so much alienated from God and so often opposed to him. So it is God himself who in his love adapts himself to the human sinful situation. Through his kenosis the Holy Spirit diminishes

²⁹ S. Bulgakov, *Utešitel'*, p. 387.

and limits the power of his action, which is in consequence not immeasurable but occurs from measure to measure.

How is it possible for God to limit himself in his power? This is **the most fundamental question concerning the kenosis of the Holy Spirit**. At the same time it touches the very mystery of divine life and divine love of the world, so often emphasized in the Bible. In spite of all our attempts to understand this divine life and love, they remain mysterious and surpass our cognitive abilities. The very act of creation of the world also remains mysterious and miraculous. How to understand that the Absolute Being, not losing its absolute sovereignty, gives existence to a relative reality and enters into close relationship with it? How does the Creator act in the created world, not with all the power of his divinity, but adapts himself to the abilities of his own creatures? In this sense God seems in his love to go out of his own divinity and enter into the history of all creation. This is an extreme antinomy for human thinking, an antinomy which testifies to the incomprehensibility of all God's ways in creation. But in fact this mystery reveals itself paradoxically in the life of the world. It does not remain absolutely hidden, leaving us in total ignorance.

The kenosis of God is a part of the mystery of his innermost being. It consists, let us repeat it, in the voluntary self-limitation accomplished by the power of divine love. The kenosis of the Holy Spirit results from his generous and self-renouncing love. God's love desires to go out and communicate with his rational creatures, but encounters obstacles in the limitation of their receptivity, in their lack of openness and love. Some limits and obstacles are often set by the fallen state of the world, subject to the temptations of "the price of this world" (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

The Creator respects the freedom of his creatures because he loves them and can bear their sinful alienation and opposition. How comprehensive in this respect is the spontaneous exclamation of Jesus: "O unbelieving and perverse generation! (...) How long shall I put up with you?" (Mt 17:17; NIV). In his love God can endure a lot and simply ... wait. His patience has no limits. His restraint and self-limitation proceed from his love which wants to maintain inviolable the self-determination of the world and human beings with their degenerations and limitations, and thus to save their own nature and inner freedom. Love prefers not to intervene when this would destroy the inner rhythm and freedom of created beings. And precisely in such self-limitation and moderation of love consists the kenosis of the Holy Spirit.

For the Holy Spirit of Pentecost there is in the life of the world no other limit except his own kenotic self-limitation. In this providential way he has introduced himself into the history of the world, and continues the work of Christ as the inspiring and transforming energy of the Kingdom of God. It explains the fact that the ancient parallel version of the second invocation of the Lord's Prayer according to Luke, instead of the words "Your Kingdom come", has the following formulation: "Let your Holy

Spirit come down upon us and purify us.”³⁰ This means that the coming of the Holy Spirit is identical to the Kingdom: wherever there is the Spirit, there is also the Kingdom of God.

THE CONTINUING PENTECOST IN THE HISTORY OF HUMANKIND

It is indeed a striking fact that Pentecost as the descent of the Holy Spirit is usually not considered a new great event in the history of salvation. But in fact it was the promising beginning of a long process of transformation of the world, which will continue until the end of human history. Once begun, it continues in the world, tending towards its final fulfillment. The continuing Pentecost leads the world beyond its empirical appearances to eschatological fulfillment in the forthcoming age.

Of course, we do not see any more the fiery tongues resting on people as in the day of Pentecost, but the gifts of the Spirit are invisibly bestowed on them and transform their inner selves. The Spirit inspires in various ways human persons and their creativity, and thus enters into their life history. The fact of the continuing Pentecost is connected with, or results from, the absence of revelation of the Spirit as a person. He manifests himself only in his active presence and his gifts. His personal (hypostatic) revelation belongs to the eschatological future when his divinity will be fully manifested.

That is why in the solemnity of Pentecost the Holy Spirit is seen not as descending in person, but in his gifts – as sent by Christ from the Father – not as the Giver himself, but as the Gift to humanity. In the Orthodox Church the solemnity has a predominantly Christological character. What is celebrated is the fulfillment of Christ’s saving work in the world rather than the very descent of the Spirit and his action. Liturgically this finds expression also in silent celebration of the day devoted to the Holy Spirit.³¹ The celebration takes place, so to speak, in a deep shadow, imbued with consciousness that the Spirit belongs to the mystery of the coming world and should be honored in silence rather than in words.

Nevertheless, there are theological grounds to believe that basically **the destiny of the world has already been decided** and determined in the sense of its salvation and transfiguration. For many people this conviction is not easy to accept. They point to the fact that in the world we have not seen any significant change after Christ’s resurrection and the descent of the Spirit. We have to remember, however, that in the world and in its history there is present a supernatural divine energy able to save and to transfigure or transform. This is surely a mysterious process going on in the depth of reality, accompanied by “the secret power of lawlessness” (2 Th 2:7; NIV)

³⁰ Lk 11:2. Cf. *The Greek New Testament*, edited by Kurt Aland et al., Third Edition, United Bible Societies, 1979, 255.

³¹ That is of the second day of Pentecost.

and tragic opposition. In the world sin, evil and death still reign. No wonder the action of the power of the Holy Spirit does not appear as something perceptible to our senses. But it does exist and works invisibly through all human hearts.

This **less bright side of reality** may give the impression of a certain weakness and helplessness of the Holy Spirit in the world, marked by its inertia and impenetrability. But this is precisely the kenosis of his descent and acting presence in creation. He does not reveal the fullness of his transforming energy. Here one sees a clear analogy with the kenosis of Christ in his condescendence, humiliation and “condition of a servant” although “in his body lives the fullness of divinity” (Col 2:9), and “from his fullness we have, all of us, received” (Jn 1:16). Christ’s glory and power will be revealed only at his second coming. Now his kenosis still continues in the world and in humankind, which is unable to assimilate the blessings of his life, death and resurrection.

For this reason also the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world has a kenotic character and does not immediately transform all creation. The world is not yet ready for the second coming of Christ and could not stand his glory and power. This is a great paradox of the kenosis of divinity descending to the world, applying both to Christ and to the Holy Spirit. That is why Pentecost is the kenosis of the Spirit. However, this does not contradict his presence and action in the world.

WHEN WILL THE KENOSIS OF THE SPIRIT END?

Already before his ascension Jesus promised his disciples: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but (...) to the ends of the earth” (Ac 1:8). This power sent on earth is already an eschatological accomplishment, although not yet fully brought about and manifested. Pentecost is oriented towards eschatological fulfillment. The prophesy of Joel (2:28-32) referred to the day of the descent of the Spirit and as quoted by the apostle Peter (Ac 2:16-21) has a clearly eschatological character. “In the last days” God will pour out his Spirit on all people. Those “last days” embrace the whole epoch of the New Testament which leads to “the great and glorious day of the Lord” (Jl 2:20; NIV), i.e. to the end of the present form of the world.

In this eschatological dimension Pentecost has not yet reached its full achievement. Its fulfillment is only at its beginning. But the beginning, especially in prophetic language, pre-contains or anticipates already its final accomplishment. In the second coming of Christ he will not only appear in his glory and power but in person. Will the Holy Spirit also manifest his personal face? Or will he remain forever only a kenotic and hidden blowing of the divine inspiration?

Here we face, as Bulgakov stresses, an unrevealed mystery concerning the person of God’s Spirit. We feel that we are in a situation similar to the people of the Old Testament in their expectations of the

Redeemer. We even have no presentiment of what this final revelation of the Spirit may be like. One may have only a feeling of immense gentleness, humility, goodness, love, benevolence and the spiritual beauty of holiness. If the Spirit manifests himself in the world in this way, then any impenitence and resistance in human hearts will melt away and disappear. The fiery language of his love and the beauty of his holiness will transfigure and save the world.

Thus we come to the unforgettable intuition expressed by Fyodor Dostoyevsky in his novel "The Idiot" that "**Beauty will save the world**". But what beauty? Certainly the true one, not one that is purely sensuous, sensual, alienated from holiness or even hostile to it. Sensuousness is separated from the radiance of the light of the Holy Spirit and can become an instrument of temptation and sin. It has only an external character and easily disappears. In its outward form this kind of beauty overcomes the inner, true, invisible, spiritual beauty. And this leads often to the sinful tragedy of human life, so deeply felt in the works of such Russian writers as Nicolas Gogol and Dostoyevsky. **The Beauty which will save the world is the power of the Holy Spirit.** To understand this we have to have the sense of beauty as an all-embracing and overcoming power of the Spirit's action. Only such spiritual and wise beauty is able to overcome merely external prettiness and soulless attractiveness.

The ways of the divine beauty of the transfiguration are, however, inscrutable and unsearchable. They do not submit to the rules of human logic. Such beauty leads to the real miracle of transfiguration. But before its fulfillment this miracle of transfiguration remains for us a mystery which cannot be known by purely human efforts. We may know only that the mystery of transfiguration does exist and that it exists *for us*. As far as the personal or hypostatic revelation of the Holy Spirit is concerned, we may feel that we live not only in an empty world but somehow in the Old Testament times of expectation. Pentecost as the event completing the New Testament still preserves for us its mysterious character and awaits its full accomplishment.

In Pentecost an anticipation of the transfiguring action of the Holy Spirit already took place which will at once embrace all of creation. The world is indeed "God's field" (1 Co 3:9) on which is sown a natural body and will be raised "a spiritual body" (1 Co 15:44). One can say that the world in its innermost ontological reality is already transformed and glorified. In witness thereof are the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor, when everything became as white as the light, and later his resurrection in a glorious body.

The end of the kenosis of the Spirit will also be the end of the kenosis of Christ in human history. It will happen when the Kingdom of God will be accomplished in all creation, and God will "be all in all" (1 Co 15:28). Using various symbols, the prophetic texts of the Bible speak about the final victory of Christ and of the Spirit, about the universal transformation and renewal of the world (cf. Rv 21:1-5). The power of

Pentecost in the world of nature and in humankind transcends the limits of our temporal history and directs it towards the life of the coming age. For his part God has done everything necessary to accomplish this great cosmic Passover.

In the act of creation – say Orthodox theologians – God’s Spirit gives creatures their being (“Let there be”), reality, energy of life and beauty. At the end of times the world will not be created again but transfigured. It is true that some prophetic biblical texts speak about a “new creation” (cf. Is 65:17; 2 P 3:13; Rv 21:1; 21:5), but in fact they mean the renewal and transformation of the world, and not its destruction. This transformation is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. As at the beginning of creation the life-giving power of the Spirit acted in the nascent world, so the same creative power will bring about its rise to a new existence.

PENTECOST IN ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENTS

One can speak therefore about Pentecost not only in the course of history but also beyond its limits in eschatological events. The close connection of Pentecost with the end of the world explains why Scripture speaks of the coming of “the fulfillment of the ages” (1 Co 10:11), of “the last days” (Ac 2:17; 2 Tm 3:1; 2 P 3:3) or “the last times” (1 Tm 4:1; 1 P 1:20). If the resurrection of Christ is accomplished, according to the New Testament, by the power of the Holy Spirit, then the universal resurrection, the second coming of Christ, the end of the world and its transformation – all these new events will also take place in the same way with the participation of the Creator-Spirit. All that happened already in Pentecost still retains its power and prepares the world for the new appearance of Christ and eschatological fulfillment: “The Spirit and the Bride say: ‘Come!’” (Rv 22:17).

By his Pentecostal descent the Holy Spirit penetrates with his action beyond the borders of death and our temporal world. He will be our Paraclete, Advocate and Counselor, in all the last events that will determine our ultimate destiny – both in ‘paradise’ and in ‘hell’, says Fr. Bulgakov.³² All these events can be considered as the continuing Pentecost and its saving influence and transfiguring power.

So we can rightly ask a question also about the participation of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s descent into the world of the dead (*Sheol*), commonly called ‘hell’ (Lat.: *infernus*, *descendit ad inferos*). During his earthly life and death Jesus never became separated from the Spirit. Although dying he cried out with the words of Psalm: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Mt 27:46; Ps 22:1), this forsakenness was confidently overcome in the arms of the Father: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk 23:46). In his public ministry Jesus taught and worked miracles by the power of the Spirit, being anointed by him (*Christós* literally means

³² Bulgakov, *Utešitel’*, p. 400. See also p. 290.

the Anointed One). This inseparable connectedness with the Spirit did not cease in his descent into hell. The very appearance and presence of Christ in the world of the dead accomplished the spiritual resurrection of those who were able to welcome him and accept the gift of salvation. This happened not without the action of the Holy Spirit, “the Giver of Life” and the Resuscitator.

Some Orthodox theologians wonder if the Holy Spirit of Pentecost acts behind the “gates” of hell. How could these be impassable for him if they did not prevent the descent of Christ? The answer can be only one: Pentecost continues and **the gifts of the Spirit are bestowed also in the afterlife, especially the gift of the remission of sins** asked for in the intercession of the Church. This gift may be understood as some sort of sacrament in the future life for the deceased.³³ Acceptance of the remission of sins is no judicial amnesty followed by liberation from punishment, but a real healing which gives sinners the possibility of living a new life and of being regenerated.

This is **the eschatological side of Pentecost**, not fully disclosed to our perception. One can believe and hope that Pentecost really knows no limits. It cannot be confined to the temporary history of the world, but is as equally universal an event as the incarnation of Christ. Where Christ is, there also is the Holy Spirit. Consequently, what is performed by Christ, is also accomplished by the Spirit, “another Paraclete/Counselor” (Jn 14:16), given by the Father as promised and prayed for by Jesus before his death. And the Spirit will be with us “forever”, as it is written in the same verse of the Gospel. Precisely this word “forever” suggests an eschatological continuation of the mystery of Pentecost in the afterlife as well.

In Bulgakov’s view **the saving action of the Holy Spirit reaches even to the depths of hell**.³⁴ Also the mercy of the Mother of Christ, the Spirit-Bearer (*Duchonósica*) makes sinners in hell open themselves more and more to the action of the Holy Spirit. Their sufferings recover thus a healing power. This is an inner spiritual process of coming to know one’s guilt and gradual regeneration. Even in hell the human spirit preserves its ability to regret, sorrow, repent and be creatively transformed. The apostle Paul described this inner struggling with oneself as being saved, “but only as through fire”, *hōs dià pyrós* (1 Co 3:15).³⁵ This struggling is supported also by the intercession of people still living on earth and by those already saved who do not lose their loving compassion for suffering fellow humans.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE SALVATION OF THE DEVIL

Fallen spirits also have not ceased to be God’s creatures. As human

³³ Bulgakov (p. 401) calls it a “beyond the grave sacrament/mystery” (*zagrobnoe tainstvo*).

³⁴ See *ibidem*, pp. 514,524,530,548,552,572.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 518,530,548,566-567,572.

beings we are unable to know the depth of the ontological absurdity of their situation marked by enmity, hatred towards God and total alienation from him. Nevertheless there are reasons to hope that the devil will be saved. Had evil been invincible and everlasting, then the responsibility for the final destiny of fallen spirits and sinful people would also have been laid on God himself. Although he did not create evil, nevertheless he allowed it to be present in the world. It was he who called rational creatures to being, endowed them with freedom of choice and the possibility of sinning. Then we would have to ascribe to God the will to create a world destined to fall, in which some creatures will have no chance of being saved.

That is why Bulgakov deeply reflects on the very phenomenon of Satanism in order to show the possibility of repentance, healing, spiritual regeneration, and of the devil's return to God.³⁶ This is a very thought-provoking attempt to penetrate into the incomprehensible, irrational and arbitrary freedom of evil spirits who lack no knowledge nor understanding of their rebel willfulness. Such freedom disguises an ontological insanity, perversion, illusion and emptiness which pretend to be the fullness of being. This rebellious freedom temporarily deceives people and combats God. The devil owes to the Creator his being, but hates him and would want him not to exist at all, although he is not able to be severed from God's being and to do without him. Satan's insanity does not want to be reconciled to the consciousness of being only a creature. This tormenting consciousness brings into the depth of his being an excruciating contradiction and permanent struggle with himself. The devilish wantonness, closed and blind subjectivity, are deprived of any ontological foundation. This **a hidden cry of the enslaved inner self of a satanic being, a cry of the world of fallen spirits.**

The nature of Satanism has its source in the freedom of created beings. Anarchic freedom has no real foundation. It is an extreme self-sufficiency of devilish self, arbitral self-determination and negative autonomy. Satanism is in consequence an unending mutiny of anger and hatred towards God. Evil assumes the pose of a "the prince of this world" who pretends to a central role in the history of the world. As long as the world lasts, this illusion has a seductive power. Fallen spirits are a parasite on the body of humanity. The freedom of God's creatures is tempted, but this situation will end at the *Parousía* of the Lord: "the prince of this world will be driven out" (J 12:31).

We human beings living on the earth can know very little about the struggle of the devil with God. Unknown to us is the very essence of arbitral devilish freedom in its extreme state of fictional greatness and pure negativity. However, according to Bulgakov's intuition, in the depth of the illusionary consciousness of fallen spirits expelled at the *Parousía* from this

³⁶ Ibidem, pp. 539-543, 562-565.

world, begins a progressive process of a certain regeneration.³⁷ A deceptively absolute freedom turns out to be no more than a transcendental illusion, “the minus of being” with its immense boredom.

What could fill this existential emptiness? Is this emptiness inexhaustible? Can the devilish caprice of wantonness find in itself any positive force? To answer such questions, the Russian theologian recurs to the creative nature of the created spirit. Deprived of his seducing power in the *Parousía* Satan will have to become aware of his nothingness and false conduct. Can the nature of the spirit remain founded without end on the illusory greatness of a powerless anti-god? Can the irrational freedom of a creature experience finally an awakening in the satanic “eternity”?

The reflections of Bulgakov on the temptation of Christ in the wilderness, in Gethsemane and on Golgotha are courageous and far-reaching.³⁸ Ineffective concerning the Tempted, the temptation reached above all to the tempting devil himself. Exposing Jesus and his self-dedication to a test, the devil wanted to check whether God really loves the world to whose salvation he gave his Son and whether in his love the Son would be faithful to the Father. This tempting must have been a great shock for the Tempter himself. He had to sustain a defeat and a humiliation. Even this did not force him on the way of repentance and reconciliation with God. On the contrary, he did not renounce further temptations. As St. Luke’s Gospel says: “the devil left him, to return at the appointed time”, *áchri kairoũ* (Lk 4:13). This time came with the mortal agony in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. The devil’s temptation was then overtaken by the chief priests, teachers of the law, elders, robbers and soldiers: “‘He saved others’, they said, ‘but he can’t save himself! (...) Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him...’” (Mt 27:42-43).

Even this last temptation did not achieve its aim but turned out to be a new temptation for the Tempter himself. The death of the Son of Man has only intensified his efforts to become “the prince of this world”. It would seem that Christ’s resurrection and ascension thwarted these insane pretensions and put an end to Satan’s infatuation with power. But only at the *Parousía* will he and his angels be expelled from God’s world. And this will be the last and decisive temptation for the Tempter himself.

The attitude of sacrificial love and **the whole saving work of Christ**, the true King of creation, **the transfiguring activity of the Holy Spirit in the world** – all this has not ceased to be **for the devil a painful challenge**. It is a pain resulting also from the consciousness of his part in all the sins of humans. Judas’ betrayal of Christ to death (cf. Jn 13:27), against the will and knowledge of Satan but inspired by him, has served the salvation of the world. As Satan’s new consciousness grows, his burden of

³⁷ Ibidem, pp. 541, 568. I add here myself that the Book of Revelation speaks strikingly about “the secrets of Satan” (Rv 2:24).

³⁸ Bulgakov, pp. 564-565

guilt aggravates his pain of repentance. Being humans we do not know the real intensity of this infernal struggling and torments that fill “the ages of ages”.³⁹

In this way we come to the very core of our reflections on this issue. One cannot exclude the possibility that Satan will come back to the true freedom proper to rational creatures and give up his deceitful negation, anger and self-sufficiency. This would be the beginning of his repentance and return to God. In the very satanic nature there are premises for such a radical change. The devil is God’s creature and has never ceased to be.

There is in the depth of his created being **an ontological anamnesis**, i.e. an ontological memory of the state before his fall, which burns like fire, troubles and awakens his demonic fury. So he hates everything that Christ’s work has brought into the world, struggles with his own nature and its emptiness. It is because of this ontological anamnesis, of being “the helpful hand of the Creator” which is never withdrawn from the rebellious creature, that the Tempter becomes himself tempted.⁴⁰ Even expelled from this world he can still not yield, but the consciousness of being only a creature will return and cause new pain. The possibility of salvation is contained in the very fact of being created. The strength of resistance may be exhausted in the face of reality itself.⁴¹

Satan’s self-accusation in his own Satanism is able to make a break in the madness of his self-affirmation and empty solipsism, arouse doubt, and this could be the beginning of a new era in his existence. Once begun the process of verification of his alleged priority in the order of being cannot be stopped. The possibility may become a real fact although this cannot be only a unilateral act on the part of a rebellious creature. The whole process of the devil’s conversion is possible thanks to the goodness, patience and mercy of God, and to the power of the universal saving work of Christ. Let us not forget also about the spiritual help of good angels and the intercession of compassionate people delivered from the power of evil.⁴² The power of salvation reaches the whole world of fallen spirits.

In this sense we can speak about an active process of overcoming Satanism in Satan himself and in his angels during the incomprehensibly - long-for-us epochs called the “ages of ages”. The existence of such a process is suggested by biblical prophecies about the God who will eventually be “all in all” (1 Co 15:28), “for from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rm 11:36). God “has let us know the mystery of his purpose (...), that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth” (Ep 1:9-10; cf. also Col 1:16-20). And this admirable statement, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every

³⁹ Ibidem, pp. 568-569.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 574.

⁴¹ Ibidem, pp. 563, 568.

⁴² Ibidem, pp. 543, 569, 571.

tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Ph 2:10-11; NIV). Finally the grandiose eschatological vision: “Then the end will come, when he [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Co 15:24-25). Military language but it expresses well the final victory of God over all evil in the world.

Fr. Sergius sincerely confesses having no more courage to continue these reflections, inspired by compassionate love. His religious intuition prompts him, however, that Satan, who in his pride acknowledged himself to be on an equal footing with God, should in the end find the lost way of humility and love. The Creator knows best the secrets of his creature. It was God who bestowed on fallen Satan an existence not for eternal death and fruitless pain. Otherwise we would have to admit that an invincible power of Satanism is hidden in the devilish being. In front of this power God himself would appear to be powerless; that in the struggle between absolute good and a rebellious creature, the conqueror is the devil and is somebody stronger than the Creator.⁴³ Jesus said about him: “there is no truth in him”, “he is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8: 44).

Here on earth we do not have a clear knowledge of the way in which the decisions of the irrational and arbitrary freedom of fallen creatures could be reversed, and how Satan could become able to repent. It is his being itself, resulting from the fact of his being created by God, that is an ontological indication of future universal salvation.⁴⁴ Even the devil’s madness cannot overcome the fact of his divine origin.

Bulgakov’s vision of the eschatological fullness of salvation should not be conceived of as a universal amnesty which ignores sin and evil. Although salvation is a gift of divine grace, there is nothing in it which would deny the spiritual struggling and suffering on the part of lost creatures. Only a man of deep religious intuition can penetrate into a mystery inaccessible to human reason. In his reflection **the saving role of Christ and the transfiguring, kenotic power of the Holy Spirit, “the Giver of life”, play a decisive role.**⁴⁵ Thanks to their action fallen spirits also can be spiritually resurrected and come back as “the lost sheep”, in Jesus’ parable, to the house of the Father of all.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 585.

⁴⁴ See ibidem, pp. 545,552,561,571,579,585.

⁴⁵ About the Holy Spirit and the resuscitating power of Pentecost see also pp. 524, 530, 572.

CHAPTER V

THE SPIRIT AND THE CRY IN THE CHURCH

The whole existence of the Church depends in equal measure on Christ and the Holy Spirit. It does not matter that the event of Christ chronologically precedes the event of Pentecost. The mystery of the Church is not to be situated in a linear scheme of succession of historical events. The chronological priority of Christ loses its sharpness when we remember that, from the moment of the incarnation (*et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto*) to the resurrection, his whole life was permeated by the presence and action of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel according to St. John shows the descent of the Spirit as a christological event (cf. Jn 20:22). This discretely witnesses to the Spirit's transcendence in relation to a linear development of historical events. For this reason the pneumatological dimension is a constitutive element of the Church's mystery. The role of the Holy Spirit in the Church reaches deeper and further than we are able to show even in the most courageous theological reflection. What I am going to say in this chapter will be only a modest introduction to what should be said with reverence, wonder and thanksgiving.

THE CHURCH GATHERED TOGETHER BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe *in* God and trust him (Latin: *Credo in*) while confessing at the same time our faith in the *existence* of the Church one, holy, catholic and apostolic (*credo ecclesiam*, without “*in*”!). This faith is our confidence that the human and sinful community is **a place of the transforming action of the Holy Spirit**. When I believe *in* God the Father, *in* Jesus Christ and *in* the Holy Spirit (each time “*credo in*”!), and set my hope on them, I can, thanks to such hope, also utter the word of faith concerning the communion of believers. The aim of this communion is to give witness to Christ who is the greatest hope for the salvation of all.

It is only after the death and resurrection of Jesus that the first disciples began to speak about a new community of faith gathering together in his name. From an etymological point of view the Church (*ekklesia*) means a community of those “called out” (from the Greek word *ek-kaleō*), a communion of convened and gathered people. The Greek term *ekklesia* contains, in the Latin translation, a double nuance of meaning: on the one hand it speaks in an active sense about calling together, assembling and convening (*convocatio*), on the other hand about an assembly (*congregatio*) which is constituted as a result of the divine calling. One can therefore speak about the convening and gathering church (*ecclesia convocans et congregans*) and also about a convened and assembled church (*ecclesia convocata et congregata*) by Christ and the Holy Spirit. The two meanings

are closely connected, but the priority belongs to the active side. Important above all is the One who calls and convenes, in order to preach the Good News to all people. A very profound thought is expressed in a concise formula of the Latin liturgy: *ecclesia Spiritu Sancto congregata*, i.e. “the Church gathered together by the Holy Spirit”.¹

The Church as a separate community confessing its faith in Jesus as the Messiah is a post-paschal reality. It is generally assumed that this community manifested its existence at Pentecost (in Greek *Pentēkosté* means the 50th day) when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples gathered together in the Cenacle. The striking fact is that neither the evangelists nor St. Paul recall the separate event of Pentecost. The Gospel of John links the resurrection of Jesus and the communicating of the Spirit in one account (cf. Jn 20:22). Only The Acts of Luke reports on the existence of the special event of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Jewish feast of harvest. In this perspective Pentecost is considered as the day of birth for the Christian community of Jerusalem, a day which begins the time of the public witness of Jesus as the promised Messiah (cf. Ac 2:1-13).

There are many images and descriptions of the complex reality of the church as **community of disciples of the risen Christ**, his brothers and sisters². Between him and his church there exists a special bond whose realism and depth can be expressed only by a language of the most intimately interpersonal relations. The biblical personification of the church as the bride reveals something of her ultimate destiny. The seer from Patmos looks very far ahead: “I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, doming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rv 21:2; NIV). It is the language of love. No wonder the coming of the Lord is yearningly invoked by “the Spirit and the bride” (Rv 22:17).

In the letters of St Paul a special significance is attributed to the description of the church as the Body of Christ (cf. Rm 12:4-5; 1 Co 10:16-17; 11:23-30; 12:12-27). In theological tradition the biblical category of the pilgrim People of God has a privileged place.³ The biblical images of the Church refer both to the universal church and to the local community, which is also the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. During our earthly life we do not know the real limits of the church which run through the depth of our inner being, which is called the human heart by the Bible.

The Church has her unattainable model in the communion of the Divine Persons. According to a well known formulation of Tertulian: “where are the Three. i.e. the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, there is

¹ The prayer of the day on Wednesday of the 7th Paschal Week.

² See the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* (par. 6) of the Second Vatican Council.

³ *Ibidem*, par. 9-17, 48-51.

also the Church as the Body of the Three” (*corpus Trium*)”.⁴ This unusual expression combines the concept of the Church with the whole Trinity. Among early Christian writers Origen thought in a similar way: “the Church is full of the Trinity”.⁵ The Second Vatican Council has referred to this kind of patristic thinking when it described the Church as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”.⁶ Having these descriptions in mind we could say that the Church is the “People of the Divine Trinity”, “the People of the Three” (*populus Trium*).

The Church, as the space and place of the continuous Pentecost, is mentioned in the third article of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in connection with belief in the Holy Spirit. This direct sequence indicates a close relationship between the profound reality of the Church and the presence and activity of God’s Spirit. Incessantly invoked by the believing community with genuine faith and hope, he leads people to the truth and impels them to restore the broken unity. It is he who convinces all of Christ’s disciples of the sin of divisions, antagonisms and enmities. The Church does not dispose of the Spirit but continually invokes him because he always remains **the sovereign Spirit of God**, the great Mystagogue and Teacher of the community of believers.

There exists a close connection between the reality of the Church and the work still being done by God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Confessing with confidence faith in the Spirit, as a Christian I also believe in his presence and salvific activity in the Church of Jesus Christ. It is certainly not an easy faith. During the centuries of its existence, Christianity has failed to achieve a deep and lasting transformation of the world. This fact impairs to a large extent – not only in the eyes of Christians themselves, but also in the opinion of followers of other religions and of unbelievers – the credibility of its teaching, ideals and aspirations.

In addition Christianity is profoundly divided, unable to overcome growing divergences and oppositions. Ecumenical agreements elaborated in bilateral dialogues do not penetrate the consciousness of leading church authorities and in consequence most often remain without any real influence on the concrete life of the churches. In the evaluation of many critical observers, the hierarchical church imposes on people many duties and restrictions which delimit their inner freedom and direct relationship with God. Hence the often repeated outcry: “Jesus – yes, the church – no!”, which suggests that it is possible to live up to the Gospel outside the visible structures of particular churches. What discourages believers themselves is a not rare anonymity resulting from the lack of the spirit of true communion and brotherhood inside the Church. This is a part of **a kenotic countenance of the church** in its human dimension.

⁴ *De baptismo*, 6. PL 1,1206; CSEL 20,206.

⁵ *Selecta in Psalmos 23,1. PG 12,1264.*

⁶ The dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, par. 4.

There is on earth no ideal church consisting only of sinless and faithful people. In spite of all weaknesses, historical shortcomings and errors, the church, although divided and often unfaithful to the will of Christ, remains through the centuries the sign of the faithfulness and goodness of God. She endures as a spiritual homeland for the believers in which we grow, and from which we receive so much good for our own lives.

What is needed is a clear consciousness of the truth, to which belong ultimately in the Church such prerogatives as sovereignty, initiative and priority. This awareness should preserve believers from any form of absolutism in understanding church institutions and the tasks to be fulfilled. It also does not allow the Church to refer to, with mistrust and reluctance, all manifestations of the activity of the Holy Spirit outside her own limits. It is absolutely clear that **God's Spirit is in every respect infinitely greater than the Church**, and acts wherever he wills. We must not forget that it is not humankind which exists for the Church, but the Church for all humankind. Her hierarchical and institutional dimension should not overshadow faith in her mysterious reality and evangelical mission. The mystery of the Church can be grasped only in the light of her manifold personal relationships. Her genuine mission and fundamental goal appear only in relation to the triune God and to human persons. The Church has her roots in a reality greater than herself. Her task is to serve in humility the good of all humanity.

The Church should be, by her very nature, **a vast space of the Spirit** – a place where he is present and works through the variety of his gifts. Let us repeat: the initiative and priority always belong to him. No human being, no concrete community of persons has an exclusive right to the Holy Spirit. We are not allowed to subordinate his presence to human initiatives or institutions. It is true that in the church we cannot live without authority, but it should be an authority of service and dedication to the cause of Christ. The Christian conception of authority presupposes the free and responsible participation of all in the life of the community of believers. It is not authority and power which decide finally about the true nature of the Church but the Holy Spirit himself. Thanks to him, the work of Christ does not become merely a distant historic reminiscence but is still for everyone a living presence.

Authority in the church should be exercised on all levels of her life in order to serve people and not to dominate them. This means that the church must not become an authoritarian institution, or even more so a totalitarian one, because that would then deny the spirit of Jesus' Gospel: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules, like the one who serves. (...) I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:25-27; NIV).

The church ought to be a **communion of brothers and sisters** based on genuine brotherly feelings, good fellowship and freedom. We are all subject to the same authority of the Good News. Our Lord is Christ and the Holy Spirit, the giver of life. Regardless of our vocations, we are all called to serve and be helpful to people, especially to those in need, and we will be judged according to our good deeds or omissions and neglects (cf. Mt 25: 35-44).

Experiencing the Holy Spirit in the Church is available to all of us. Yet, the fire of the Spirit is usually covered up by believers themselves with the ashes of lukewarmness, mediocrity or indifference. Throughout our entire lives we constantly learn how to live up to the mystery of the church and experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in it. The beauty coming from the Spirit transforms and rescues our humanity. The mystery of the Church can be experienced by any human person to the extent and measure of our inner openness.

UBI SPIRITUS – IBI ECCLESIA

These perceptive words of St. Irenaeus of Lyons about the Church and her relation to the Holy Spirit have not ceased to be a challenging synthesis leading to theological reflection. He wrote: “For where the Church is, there is also God’s Spirit; and where God’s Spirit, there also the Church and every grace: for the Spirit is the truth” (*Ubi enim Ecclesia, ibi et Spiritus Dei; et ubi Spiritus Dei, illic Ecclesia et omnis gratia: Spiritus autem veritas*).⁷

In God’s plan the Church is and should be, by her very nature, the space of the Spirit – the place in which he is present and acts through the variety of his gifts. The initiative and priority belong always to him. No human being and no concrete community has an exclusive right to him. When the Apostle says: “Never try to suppress the Spirit” (1 Th 5:19), we can only add: Do not be slaves to an exceedingly well organized construct at the price of violating human conscience! The canonical borders of the Church are not to be identified with the charismatic boundary of the Spirit’s action. It has not been given to us to define where the Church is or is not. Only the Spirit can transcend all human barriers.

The Holy Spirit is **the Mystagogue of the Church**. It is he who introduces us to the community of believers: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Co 12:13; NIV). An **unusual expression: “the one Spirit to drink”!** It means: to be imbued by “the living water” of his wisdom. Jesus said: “‘Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive” (Jn 7:38-39). In the writings of the church Fathers, especially those

⁷ *Adversus haereses* III,24,1. SCh 211, p. 474.

from Syria, one often encounters this kind of mystagogical and doxological dominance of their faith in the presence of the Spirit in the Church. God constantly sends “the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Ga 4:6). He who “searches all things, even the deep things of God” (1 Co 2:10) penetrates also the intimate depths of our personhood without any violence and thus shapes our own humanity.

Having this in mind, some outstanding Christian thinkers of the past expected the coming of a new epoch of the Holy Spirit in the history of humankind. In fact, however, there is no new and independent epoch of the Holy Spirit which would not be at the same time an epoch of Christ as well. Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202), theologian and mystic, announced the coming of such an epoch of the Spirit and of the “spiritual Church” (*Ecclesia spiritualis*). Throughout the centuries he found quite a number of followers.⁸ One should not reject all insights contained in this sort of thinking. It contains a true conviction that human history is not deprived of expectation, hope and newness. On the other hand, the expectation of an epoch of the Holy Spirit, an epoch of the spiritualized people in the spiritual Church, an epoch of “the eternal Gospel” (*Evangelium aeternum*) and of “fully free and spiritual religion” (*religio omnino libera et spiritualis*) – all this betrays an impatient willingness and utopian hope to realize within the framework of history an eschatological reality, a wish to accelerate the coming of this reality through the creative power of the Spirit.

With such a historiosophical approach it **is easy to forget about the kenotic character of the Holy Spirit’s action in human history**. The age of the Spirit is in fact no particular historical epoch but rather an intensive state of inner spiritual life in people. Since the day of Pentecost the history of the Church has already become the last epoch, the eschatological time. According to the Apostle Paul, we are therefore those “on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Co 10:11; NIV). We can speak finally about a special activity of the Spirit in these “last days” which have already begun (cf. Ac 2:17). Through the history of humankind he prepares us for the coming of God’s kingdom.

As we shall see further on in our reflections, the life of the Church stands under the sign of the epiclesis – the cry for the coming down of the Holy Spirit. To speak figuratively, without his action the word of the Gospel would remain in the Church as only a seed without water and light. On the other hand, without the divine Logos and his Gospel the Spirit would be only water and light without seed. Fortunately, the time of Christ is also the time of the Holy Spirit

In unity with Christ the Holy Spirit permeates the history of humanity and every single human being. The Church invoking his coming (*Veni Creator Spiritus*) is a privileged place of his active presence.

⁸ See Y. Congar, *Je crois en l’Esprit Saint*, vol. I, Paris 1979, pp. 175-189. Similar ideas were propagated by a Polish philosopher August Cieszkowski (1814-1894) in his books *Ojciec nasz (Our Father)*, vol. 1-3, Poznań 1922-1923.

Nevertheless, he remains “**the Unknown beyond the Word,**”⁹ hiding his presence in the mystery of the incarnate Logos. During our earthly life the Spirit will always remain beyond all our words about him. His action remains mysterious and inscrutable. This makes him the Unknown and the Hidden although he inspires our free decisions, attracts us and enlightens us. From the beginning he is always present at the fulfillment of everything that is good – he, the ultimate source of newness in human history. Without him, even Christ would belong only to the past, and the Gospel would become a dead letter.

This article of faith in the Creed reminds us that the presence of Christ’s Spirit is a sign of the nearness of God himself. The cry of the Church *Come, Spirit-Creator*, repeated with particular insistence during the feast of Pentecost, is nothing other than **the cry for God’s closeness** in our everyday life. We need the Counselor to help us in following Christ’s Gospel. If Jesus is “the Way” (*hē hodós*, Jn 14:6), the Holy Spirit is our Guide (*ho hodēgós*) on the way. The whole newness of the New Covenant consists in “the ministry of the Spirit”, *hē diakonía toũ Pneúματος* (2 Co 3:8), permeated by his transforming presence, which gives life rather than by the letter which kills (cf. 2 Co 3:6).

It is the Holy Spirit who secures the fidelity of the Church to the apostolic faith. He was promised and given to her in order not to depart from her saving mission in the world. Such is the basic sense of the concept of indefectibility applied to the whole existence of the Church. The memory of the Church being the community of the Holy Spirit protects against the temptation of relying only on human qualities, strengths and possibilities. The Church does not live only by the efficiency of her organizational structures and the tactics of human instructions. These have to be subordinated to the requirements of the Spirit to become truly charismatic. Church institutions have only subsidiary and eschatological characters as icons pointing to the ultimate reality and as announcements of the coming kingdom of God. Their true effectiveness depends upon the constant and humble invocation of the Holy Spirit. It is he, the *Spiritus Consummator*, who will fully reveal his transfiguring power only on the last day of the consummation of history. He already reminds the Church of the iconic character of all her institutions.

A biblical image of the Spirit is living water, clean and flowing. His presence is the opposite of any lifelessness, uncleanness, frozenness, muddiness, disintegration and corruption. In reality, since the very beginning, there has been in the Church **an inevitable tension between her institutional and charismatic dimension**. These are the two complementary aspects which should serve the same purpose – building the Church as a true Pentecostal community which constantly embodies the

⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Der Unbekannte jenseits des Wortes*, in *Interpretation der Welt*. Festgabe R. Guardini, hrsg. H. Kuhn, Würzburg 1966, 638-645.

miracle of Pentecost in the world. The institutional church is not an end in itself. One aspect should not be unilaterally subordinated to the other one. However, as history herself teaches, the preservation of a due balance is never easy. Charismatic leadership in the Church is an existential requirement.

The Russian Orthodox émigré theologian Nicolas Afanassiev was convinced that **the suppression of charismatic life already in the second century occurred against the will of God**, who has bestowed various gifts on his Church.¹⁰ Also in the view of the French Orthodox theologian, Olivier Clément, at some moment of her history the Church became afraid of the Spirit. Being afraid of life and personal freedom she shrank into the moralistic ritualism of the East and the juridical thinking of the West. “Then impulses of the Spirit”, – wrote Clément – “have blown on the peripheries of the Church, and sometimes even against her in **a powerful cry for creative life, justice, union and beauty**. But a prophetic quality deprived of rootedness in the Eucharist and in its resuscitating power, sooner or later gets broken against the wall of nothingness.”¹¹

THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH: A TASK TO BE FULFILLED WITH THE HELP OF THE SPIRIT

The existence of the Church is a consequence of God’s intervention, presence and activity in the history of the humankind. One can speak therefore of the essential attributes of the church because they characterize the action of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is an action which unites people, sanctifies them, pervades everything and involves believers in the mission of the salvation of the world.

The formula for the confession of faith contained in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed emphasizes in the first place, concerning the Church, the very fact that it is **one**. This priority of unity was not only the consequence of deep divisions in Christianity of the 4th century but also the result of faith in the one God, in Christ the Savior, and in the Holy Spirit:

There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is the Father of all, over all, through all and within all (Ep 4:4-6).

These words manifest a striking universalism. They show that unity is not uniformity but consists in mutual acknowledgement of the rich variety

¹⁰ See P. Plank, *Die Eucharistieversammlung als Kirche. Zur Entstehung und Entfaltung der eucharistischen Ekklesiologie Nikolai Afanassevs (1893-1966)*, Würzburg 1980, p. 169ff.

¹¹ O. Clément, « *Je crois en l’Esprit Saint* », “Contacts” 34 (1982) No. 117, pp. 44-45 (28-46). Boldface is mine, W.H.

of all local churches united in confessing the common apostolic faith and witnessing to the one Gospel of Jesus Christ. This unity of the church is a result of the action of the one Lord and his Spirit in all her members, in every place and time. It is God himself, God of all and over all, acting through all and within all, who calls out and convenes the community of believers by his Spirit. “A basic bond of unity” – says an important ecumenical statement of Lima (1982) – is “our common baptism”, “a sign and seal of our common discipleship”.¹² The unity of the Church finds and will find its full expression in the common celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

The Creed calls the Church **holy** because the Holy Spirit of God, present in it, transforms human lives in his faithfulness, love and benevolence. The holiness of the Church is the holiness of Christ and the Holy Spirit. A concrete church community is composed of imperfect and sinful people who daily ask the Father: “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”. Paradoxically, the Church is at the same time holy and sinful, and the frontier line goes deeply through human hearts. The history of the Church knows, of course, many dark pages of errors, faults and sinful infidelity to its mission. We are, all of us, sinful people to whom God forgives our trespasses and calls to forgive the others. The very presence of sin and guilt in the Church is **a constant cry to God’s Spirit for the purification and transformation** of human hearts. He it is, as one liturgical prayer puts it, “the remission of sins” (*ipse est remissio peccatorum*).¹³ A genuine holiness is a demanding imperative for all of us, a difficult task and duty to be realized during our whole life.

The words **Catholic Church** in the Creed should not be understood in any denominational sense. It is an attribute of the Church as such, of the Church universal, and does not apply only to the Roman Catholic Church. This catholicity, i.e. universality, results from the very nature of the Church as “a kind of sacrament or sign of the intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind”.¹⁴ It arises ultimately from the fact of the unlimited extent of the salvific activity of the risen Christ and of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world.

It is also worth recalling here the ancient axiom: *ubi Christus – ibi ecclesia, ubi Spiritus – ibi ecclesia*. The Church is where Christ is present and where the Holy Spirit acts. One of the earliest church Fathers, Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 107), explained it for the first time more accurately: “Where there is Christ Jesus [or even more precisely: Where there would be Christ Jesus, *hópou àn ē Christòs Iēsoûs*], there is the catholic church”, *hē katholikē ekklesía*.¹⁵ In other words, in each congregation, even the smallest

¹² *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, WCC, Geneva 1982, p. 3 (*Baptism*, par. 6).

¹³ A liturgical prayer of the seventh Saturday after Easter in the Roman Missal. Cf. Jn 20:22-23.

¹⁴ The Constitution *Lumen gentium*, par. 1.

¹⁵ *Ad Smyrnenses* 8,1. Sch 10, p. 138.

local church, the whole mystery of Christ with all its fullness (in Greek the adjective *katholikós* derives from *kat' holou* = according to the whole) is really made present. The catholicity of the church, both in space and time, is a participation in the universality of the glorified Christ and the Holy Spirit. The mystery of Christ fulfilled in Pentecost is the only lasting event in human history which overcomes the barrier of time, which brings death to us all, and the barrier of space, which separates us from our brothers and sisters. This catholicity requires an exchange of the gifts of the Holy Spirit between different churches, nations, traditions and cultures.

The genuine meaning of **apostolicity** in the church should also be understood in light of the salvific mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Apostles was a continuation of the mission of Christ: "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). To fulfill this mission they had to receive first the very source of the apostolic energy: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22). With the help of the Spirit the Church can also persist in the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostolic succession is not only a handing down of the apostolic teaching, of the ministry of the word and sacrament, but also a participation in the sufferings and labors of the Apostles, a real *successio passionum* sustained in the proclamation of the Gospel to the world.

These four attributes (one, holy, catholic and apostolic) of the Church are mutually interrelated. One of them cannot be isolated from the other. Each one is related to the very beginnings of the Church and is an expression of concordance with these beginnings. At the same time all these attributes are **directed toward the eschatological fulfillment** of the pilgrim Church. They are a great gift to the Church and as such they determine her **basic task to be realized** throughout history. That is why unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are not static concepts at all. They contain in themselves a hidden imperative for the Church to become what she should be according to her divine calling: "a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ep 2:22; NIV). In this sense they are **determinants of the hope of the Church** for the even greater fulfillment of God's promise in the world to come. The history of the new creation already begins with the resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit.

The great symbols of the Christian faith formulated in the first centuries enumerate only three (the Apostles' Creed) or four (the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed) essential attributes of the church. This does not mean, however, that they exhaust the whole nature of the Church. Their list does not exclude the **possibility of adding some further features of the genuine Church** if they are required by her mission in changed historical circumstances. For this reason some great theologians of the Reformation have not rejected the traditional four attributes of the church but have put forward ahead of them two others: 1) preaching the pure Gospel in accordance with the whole message of Scripture; 2) the right administration of the sacraments according to the commandment of Christ.

The situation of the Church has changed considerably in today's world, marked by various conflicts and divisions among people. So unity in the Church should be connected with freedom, holiness with simplicity and poverty, apostolicity with labor and suffering, and catholicity with proclamation in favor of the oppressed, wronged, humiliated and degraded in order to help wrongdoers to find the way to conversion (*metánoia*). Such an understanding of the essential attributes of the church is at the same time a warning against triumphalism and the temptation to concentrate inwardly on herself alone. Any narcissism will only lead to a distorted and unreal vision of the church.

And finally one more remark. The memory of the paschal mystery of Christ requires that we should, more strongly than ever before, emphasize the feature of the **permanent readiness of the Church to serve people**. This must exist in the world following the example of Christ who "emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave" (Ph 2:7; cf. also Lk 22:27). The ability to resign earthly power and glory, the courage of self-limitation and unselfish love – such an attitude is indeed a participation in the kenosis of Jesus himself and in the real **kenosis of the Holy Spirit**. The attribute of the Church's permanent *diakonía* is closely related to her apostolicity and universality. It is the service and ministry of the whole Church towards all people until the end of time, accompanied by the hope of final victory in Christ and in the Holy Spirit over all evil powers. The divine kenosis will then attain its end.

EPICLESIS AS THE CRY OF CHURCH AND WORLD

In the most general and basic sense epiclesis (also spelled epiklesis) means an invocation or calling down (from the Greek *kaleō*) of the divine name upon (*epí*) human persons or on some things, so that they may be filled with God's power and thus be transfigured. It is therefore an act with rich meaning, characterized not only by its imploring nature. In the epiclesis we have to deal with a specific act of handing someone or something over to God to be his possession. The acceptance of such a gift depends entirely on God's will and goodness. It cannot be forced on him. One can only pray for acceptance of the gift. For this reason the epiclesis, as developed in Christian liturgy, has a deprecatory character. The invocation of God and the transmitting of human gifts to the Creator take place in epiclesis when his name is explicitly invoked.

The deep meaning of the epiclesis appears in the light of Christian theology of the divine name. The Church Fathers paid great attention to this aspect mainly in the celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁶ The invocation of the

¹⁶ Cf. Jerzy Klinger, *Geneza sporu o epiklezę. Eschatologiczny a memorialny aspekt Eucharystii w kanonie pierwszych wieków (Origin of the Controversy about Epiclesis: Eschatological and Memorial Aspect of the Eucharist in the Canon of the First Centuries)*, Warszawa 1969.

divine name on the gifts of bread and wine has a special importance. Already in the early *Didache* (10,2), written at the turn of the first and second centuries, there resounds a warm thanksgiving directed to God for his “holy name to which he has prepared the dwelling place in our hearts”. One can see in it a sort of a hidden epiclesis of the divine name. It is for this reason that early Christian literature gave a privileged place to words from the prophesy of the prophet Malachi:

My name will be great among the nations from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord Almighty (Ml 1:11; NIV).

Many Church Fathers quoted and commented upon these words in relation to the Eucharist. According to Justin the martyr, the Eucharistic sacrifice is “offered in the name of Jesus”.¹⁷ According to Irenaeus, this “name”, linked directly with God the Father in Malachi’s prophesy, can also be related to the name of Jesus through whom the Father is glorified.¹⁸

This Christological interpretation of “the name” may be understood only with difficulty outside the liturgical practice of the Church’s invoking the name of Jesus in the Eucharist. The great dignity of the eucharistic bread consists in the fact that the name of the triune God is invoked upon it. The Fathers emphasized in various ways the role of this name, thus expressing faith in its sanctifying and transfiguring power as witnessed to by the Bible. The name signifies the person and, in a way, hides his presence. It is a certain form of the presence of the person himself. The invocation of the name calls upon the invoked person as much as it reveals his presence and his acting force.

The Church lives by continually invoking the Holy Spirit. By doing this she admits her own weakness and poverty in the face of God. In this sense the epiclesis is **a constant cry of the Church and, through her intermediary, of the world.** For this reason one can speak about an epicletic dimension to the existence of the entire church.

A special meaning of epiclesis, as the invocation of the Holy Spirit, is usually linked with the Eucharist. In fact the Church invokes the Holy Spirit in every sacrament, prayer and blessing. In various situations she calls upon him to transfigure and unite not only human beings but also the whole of creation. The eucharistic elements of bread and wine become, by the action of the Holy Spirit, the Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharist is the action of the Holy Trinity. It is the Father who gives us the Body and the Blood of Christ by the descent of the Holy Spirit in response to the

¹⁷ *Dialogus* 117,1.

¹⁸ *Adv. Haereses* IV,17,6. SCh 100, p. 594.

Church's prayer. The liturgical celebration is one great invocation on the part of the Church and God's loving answer to his people (*Philánthropos*).

The exact form of words used at the epiclesis varies in different Christian liturgies. It would be an error to isolate the epiclesis from the rest of the Eucharistic prayer (*anáphora*). The consecration of the eucharistic gifts is brought about by the whole liturgy although in the Eastern traditions the decisive and culminating moment is seen in the epiclesis, when the Father is asked to send the Holy Spirit on the participants and to change the bread and wine. In most of these traditions the epiclesis comes after the *anámnesis* (remembrance of Jesus' words and deeds, the so-called words of institution) whereas in the eucharistic Western rites the latter comes first.

In fact **the whole celebration of the Eucharist is a great epiclesis invoking the descent of the Holy Spirit – a great cry of the Church imploring him to renew the face of the world and thanking the Father for the Spirit's presence in human history.** The symbol of the faith (the Creed) and the eucharistic anaphora are thus closely interrelated. The epiclesis is a liturgical profession of faith in the transfiguring and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. It puts into practice the whole theology of the Holy Spirit in the prayer of the Church. While theology is to a large extent an activity of the mind, it becomes in the liturgy a prayer, doxology and thanksgiving of the heart, i.e., the truth lived out prayerfully by the human person in his totality.

In ecumenical dialogues among Christian churches we do not accept today any theory of consecration of the bread and the wine by formula alone – whether by Jesus' words of institution or by the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the epiclesis. One of the great ecumenists of the 20th century, Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967) stressed an inner unity of the words of institution and the epiclesis, thanks to his knowledge of the Eastern tradition. According to him, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is “a miracle of the Holy Spirit”. Owing to his efforts, the epiclesis was introduced already in the 1930's into the eucharistic liturgy celebrated in the renewal movement called “Hochkirchliche Vereinigung des Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses”.¹⁹

It is worth emphasizing that the Spirit comes not only upon the eucharistic gifts but also upon the community so that its unity may thus be renewed and strengthened. This is why, in the Eastern Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the celebrant says: “We beg Thee, we ask Thee, we pray Thee: Send down Thy Holy Spirit **upon us and upon these gifts**”. First upon us, because, without the assistance of the Spirit, we would not be able to recognize in the eucharistic gifts the Body and the Blood of Christ. The reception of the Holy Gifts calls each time for the overcoming of our sinful divisions. One should not forget that judgment has to begin “with the family of God” (1P 4:17). An agreed Catholic-Lutheran statement (1978) *Das Herrenmahl* (par. 24) calls the epiclesis “a prayer for the irruption

¹⁹ *Die deutsche Messe*, München 1939.

(*Einbruch!*) of the forthcoming world into our present world". In the Eucharist the ultimate end of human history breaks forth invisibly into our midst, bringing the judgment and hope of a new creation.

One of the remarkable ecumenical facts of the 20th century was the growing tendency to introduce in a very clear way the epiclesis into the Eucharistic Liturgy of Western Churches. This significant process took place not only in the Roman-Catholic Church but also in some other Churches, and perhaps most evidently in the Anglican Communion. In bilateral dialogues between different denominations, the issue of epiclesis has often come into consideration as an important matter of understanding the sacramental life of the Church. It is a consequence not only of the rediscovered theology of the Holy Spirit but also the result of a return to the tradition of early Christianity being the common good of all Christian Churches.

In the Roman-Catholic Church it was the Second Vatican Council which, in the process of reforms, initiated far-reaching liturgical changes. The additional eucharistic prayers introduced into the Roman Rite in the 1969 revision have both a pre-consecration and a post-consecration communal epiclesis. The epiclesis has been split into two parts: the first part of the epiclesis is placed before the words of institution and is a prayer for sanctification of the gifts of bread and wine. In the second part the words of epiclesis implore God to send his Holy Spirit to sanctify and unite in Christ all believers who will partake of his Body and Blood. The goal of the consecration is communion. This is in actual fact just one salvific dynamism of the epiclesis which makes believers participants in the mystery of Passover and Pentecost. The mystery of Christ finds its continuation in the mystery of Pentecost.

Thanks to the introduction of the epiclesis into the eucharistic prayers, a new dimension has been recovered in the Catholic teaching on sacraments and in theology of the liturgy. It may be called **a eucharistic pneumatology** which emphasizes the organic unity of the two major events in the history of salvation, i.e. Passover and Pentecost. The Holy Spirit appears again as the main cause of the wonder of transformation in the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. The same Spirit had prepared the mystery of the incarnation. The whole eucharistic celebration is accomplished "in the Spirit". He is, to use the terminology of St. Basil the Great, "the proper place" (*tópos oikeíos*) and the proper space of this celebration.²⁰

The epiclesis has also been introduced into the Eucharistic prayers in the reformed liturgy of the Anglican Church and in some Protestant churches. In services for the Church of England it appears both before the words of institution and after them, similarly to its places in the renewed

²⁰ *De Spiritu Santo* 26,62. SCh 17bis, p. 472.

Catholic liturgy.²¹ One should also mention Anglicans in the USA. Also, American Lutheran eucharistic prayers and newer Old Catholic anaphoras tend to follow the Eastern practice, with the epiclesis following the anamnesis. In sum, as the ecumenical French Groupe de Dombes stated already in 1979, “the epiclesis in the eucharistic prayer is a common good of the undivided Church”.²²

This profound insight is expressed in the dialogue between the celebrant priest and the deacon during the Eastern “Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom” at the end of the rite called the Great Entrance: “The same Spirit will act with us all the days of our life” (in Greek: *Autó tó Pneuma sylleitourgēsei ēmin pásas tás ēméras tēs zōēs ēmōn*). The word *syllleitourgēsei* can also mean that the Spirit will “co-operate” with us or that he will act and “minister” with us. It expresses the great promise that God’s Spirit will “celebrate together with us” also the liturgy of our daily lives.

The remarkable words of this dialogue reveal the mysterious co-celebration and ministering of the Spirit with us humans when we take part in the most sacred mysteries of our faith. The amazing thing is that this occurs every day of our life. What an encouraging fact that it may be an everyday experience! The Spirit will be present not only in the eucharistic celebration but also in our existence as a whole. It is he, as Scripture says, who comes to help us in our human weakness: “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Rom 8:26; NIV). The power of the Spirit makes present the whole mystery of our salvation. Thanks to him we do not forget the Gospel of Christ, which is our inestimable treasure, nor especially the need to forgive and be reconciled.

Through the power of the Spirit not only is the Eucharistic change brought about. He also enables believers to recognize the presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharistic celebration, to partake fruitfully of his Body and Blood, and to live up, worthily and unselfishly, to the celebrated mystery of God’s love. It is the Spirit who thus prepares all of us for the coming of Christ at the end of our life and at the end of time.

The **theology of the epiclesis is a theology of communion and unity**. In this way it takes up a central concern of the priestly prayer of Christ himself: “May they all be one” (Jn 17:21), and includes it in each celebration of the Eucharist. In this perspective the epiclesis is a prayer for the full effectiveness of the received Holy Communion and for the continuation of Christ’s mystery in the unity of all. Receiving Holy

²¹ *Common Worship. Services and Prayers for the Church of England*, London: Church House Publishing 2000, pp. 184-205.

²² Groupe de Dombes, *L’Esprit Saint, l’Eglise et les sacrements*, No. 115, in *Pour la communion des Églises: L’apport du Groupe des Dombes 1937-1987*, Paris: Le Centurion 1988, p. 152 (115-156).

Communion, believers receive also the Holy Spirit – “the fire of the Spirit” as the Syriac tradition puts it in figurative language.²³

There is no need today to convince us of the benefits of reevaluation of the epiclesis in the Western Christianity. It is an irreversible fact which has initiated at the same time a new approach to many controversial questions. The epiclesis has serious theological implications for our understanding of the mystery of the Church. It shows a proper relationship between the action of Christ and the Holy Spirit within an integral theology of the Holy Trinity. In light of the epiclesis the economy of salvation is one act both of the Son of God and of the Spirit in their mutual co-operation. The Eucharist itself appears then to be a sacramental Pentecost. For this reason we should also approach the controversial question of the *Filioque* in a different, truly ecumenical way.²⁴

It is a very comforting fact that Christians have become conscious of the deep meaning of the epiclesis for the entire life of the church. To invoke the Holy Spirit is a sign of our total dependence on his transforming power. **The epiclesis is indeed a cry of the Church and the world in need.** This confirms also that the human person is an epicletic being, able to invoke the Counselor and Comforter in order to save what is most valuable in our humanity. That is why the epiclesis and its role in the church is closely connected with the idea of her kenosis.

To sum up: The epiclesis is a central category of the whole existence of the church. She is by her nature epicletic and, at the same time, kenotic because of her total dependence upon God’s grace and mercy. **Epiclesis is a sign of kenosis.** The understanding of the church in light of the epiclesis prompts us to treat seriously her kenotic and ancillary form.

THE TWO FACES OF KENOSIS IN THE CHURCH

The concept of kenosis has many connotations and implications. Some of them deserve consideration also at this place of our reflections. Jesus Christ “did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave” (Ph 2:6-7). His identity, resulting from being “in the form of God”, has in itself nothing of rapacious possession. In this way he can assume another form of existence, transcend himself in outgoing concern, become different and renounce his own glory. Kenosis is not an annihilation of his divine nature but only a means to acquire a new form of identity open to self-limitation and self-renouncement. The goal of

²³ See for example St. Ephrem, *In Hebd. Sanctam sermo 4,4* quoted by E.P. Siman, *L’expérience de l’Esprit par l’Église d’après la tradition syrienne d’Antioche*, Paris 1971, p. 106, footnote 60. Liturgical Syriac tradition often speaks symbolically about “partaking of the Fire in the bread” and “drinking the Holy Spirit in the wine”. Ibidem, pp. 107-108, 223-226.

²⁴ See W. Hryniewicz, *God’s Spirit in the World. Ecumenical and Cultural Essays*, Washington: CRVP 2012, pp. 57-70.

divine kenosis is to overcome distance from and acquire the greatest possible nearness to human beings in need of deliverance and salvation. What God himself risks is astounding. Kenosis manifests the admirable solidarity of Christ with sinful people, thanks to which occurs an unusual exchange. Becoming human he has made possible our ascent to God and the transformation of our life.

Christ's kenosis determines the existence of the church in disinterested service and resignation from purely temporal success. He, the Anointed One (*Christós*) by the Holy Spirit, is the first to embrace self-emptying and self-limitation, revealing thus his divine wisdom, not easily followed by his disciples. God's presence among people has been marked forever by kenosis. He himself has chosen this way of conduct, denying any triumphalism, whose source is a false understanding of outgoing to others. Only God, through the kenosis of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, can attract to himself even those who rebel most strongly against him because of human freedom. In this respect we will always remain resistant disciples.

One of the main difficulties in living out the complex reality of the church results from the very fact that it has its roots in the transcendence of God himself and is, at the same time, a concrete human community which exists in time and space. This situation creates tensions between belief in the church and the everyday experiences of believers. A very lofty and noble vision of the church's nature is often overshadowed or even distorted by its real shape, which does not allow us to recognize in it the face of Christ. In this way we have one of the greatest paradoxes of the church's existence in Christian life. The confession of the faith in "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" resounds in the denominational churches, visibly divided and often arguing. They do not appear then to be "holy" in their own interests and in their only too human aspirations. What should have been a clear sign of God's presence in the world, in its present appearance speaks rather about a not-yet-fulfilled expectation and hope.

This kind of discordance and the resulting tensions have always existed in the church. We are all sinners, as Pope Francis often affirms. He also said the same thing about himself in an interview given to *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Italian Jesuit journal: "I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner."²⁵. There has never been on earth a church in its ideal realization, even from its very beginnings (cf. Ac 2:42-47; 6:1; 15:2). Promises of perfection continuously and exceedingly surpass historical realizations.

Human guilt is the main cause of church kenosis. By her very nature she should be a living sign of the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit among people. However, in everyday life the face of the Church does not shine with as much radiance as expected. Very often she obscures God

²⁵ English translation: *A Big Heart Open to God*, in "America Magazine", September 30, 2013. Original Italian text in "Civiltà Cattolica" No. 3918, 19 09, 2013, pp. 449-477.

for people and does not portray Christ's kenosis. The state of guilty kenosis in the church can endure for a long time, although human guilt cannot annihilate divine patience and mercy. The infirmity and defects of the church multiply as a result of the weaknesses and sins of people in it. Already in 1923 Friedrich Heiler, a German theologian and quoted above, wrote: "The whole visible church is an incarnation, and precisely for this reason is also a kenosis of the divine (*eine Kenose des Göttlichen*); she bears the form of a servant and must always bear the form of a servant (*muss immer Knechtgestalt tragen*)."²⁶

The Church has no ground for triumphalism, self-complacency and self-sufficiency. She is "doomed", as earlier mentioned, to the constant invoking of the Holy Spirit because of her total dependence on God's assistance and grace. At all times she needs his purification, renewal and mercy. Not without reason Christian tradition speaks of the necessity for and the epicletic nature of the Church; the epiclesis is a permanent category not only of her liturgy but also of her entire existence. From this point of view **the epiclesis is a cry from the depth of the kenosis of the Church**. This kenosis reinforces still more the need for the unceasing epiclesis.

In his already quoted exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* Pope Francis many times refers to the Holy Spirit and invokes him. Speaking about "spirit-filled evangelizers" and "a spirit-filled evangelization (...) guided by the Holy Spirit" he writes: "Before offering some spiritual motivations and suggestions, I once more invoke the Holy Spirit. I implore him to come and renew the Church, to stir and impel her to go forth boldly to evangelize all peoples" (261). As the Spirit "helps us in our weakness" (*Rm* 8:26) "we need to invoke the Spirit constantly" (280). And one more quotation: "The Holy Spirit also grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness (*parrhesía*) in every time and place, even when it meets with opposition. Let us call upon him today..." (259).

There is also in church life a certain kind of kenosis which generally is not recognized as directly and clearly caused by human guilt. The concrete shape of Christianity in our churches does not correspond in many respects to a sublime theological vision. The greatness of Christian revelation is reflected only imperfectly in the church's proclamation of the Gospel, so often deprived of the power of the Holy Spirit and deep conviction (cf. 1 Th 1:5). Liturgical worship becomes easily a matter of custom. Mediocrity is usually elevated to the level of principle, which should everywhere be taken into account. In our churches and learning institutions people are rarely encouraged and educated to think independently, to be open and to search for deeper spirituality. Whatever can be assimilated by the average religious conscience finds approbation most readily. These observations are not insignificant for the presence of the church in the world and for the destinies of her faith.

²⁶ F. Heiler, *Der Katholizismus. Seine Idee und seine Erscheinung*, München 1923, reprint 1970, p. 630.

All these can easily discourage people of broad intellectual horizons, those in doubt and unbelievers. Human narrow-mindedness, stubbornness and arrogance often prevent the action of the Holy Spirit. The concrete form of church life leads in this way to coldness, distance, indifference and criticism. Belief in the Church requires us, however, to accept it not only in her ideal state but also in her kenotic reality. We are and always will be the Church of sinful people who have to ask God everyday for the forgiveness of our sins.

What has been said concerns above all the ministry of the church, her *diakonía* in “the form of a servant”, following the example of Christ himself. And here we come to **the second face of the kenosis voluntarily accepted** and consciously realized as task and mission.

Early Christianity brought about a radical reevaluation of the concept of reign and domination concerning the person and life of Jesus. He who gave his life without rest for service to others has been recognized as Lord (*Kýrios*) and King of the universe. This is a radical reversal of power and domination. His reign means service and total dedication to the cause of liberation for humans. He does not rule in the manner of the rulers of this world. He himself said: “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you.** Instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:42-45; here and below boldface is mine, W.H.). This “NOT SO”, very resolute and categorical, is repeated in all synoptic Gospels. In Luke’s version the final sentence of this passage is an even more personal witness: “**But I am among you as one who serves, *hōs ho diakonōn***” (Lk 22: 27).

This is the most binding and normative motif for the church’s existence in “the form of a servant”. The painful experience of many centuries teaches, however, that the ministry can easily degenerate into a hidden form of subordinating others and behaving like a lord to them, especially in giving orders. It ceases then to be in true service to others. And this is the real drama of ecclesiastical ministry and of the church herself. The church’s true greatness does not need temporal authority of earthly rulers. “She is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim humility and self-sacrifice, even by her own example” – says the dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* par. 8) of Vatican Council II. All her glory and radiance have to come out from the inside.

The church dedicated to service preserves, thanks to this mission, her credibility and genuineness. The way of the church is the way of disinterested service and true humility. The ethics of temporal success is opposite to the spirit of kenosis. According to the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (d. 1965), “**success is none among the names of God**”. The spirit of the Gospel is often victorious when the Church is persecuted, humbled and defenseless. That does not mean, of course, that we have to

propagate only passivity and defeatism. Richness, haughtiness and privileges destroy every human society. The church is not allowed to become only “the church *for* the poor”. She has to be the poor church herself, as Pope Francis often repeats, because this solidarity with the poor is a sign of protest against poverty, misery and injustice in the world.

To the author of the Book of Proverbs we owe a very wise prayer guided to God: “Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (Pr 30:7-9; NIV). What great wisdom for life, handed over by the Bible to all believers! It would be difficult to say this more succinctly and pointedly.

The church becomes truly herself through the disinterested gift of herself, when she ceases to care too much about her own identity and devotes her whole effort to God and people. The identity of the church is an identity of openness and service. Christ’s kenosis reminds us all the time that this is the way God himself has chosen to act with us. The Christ from the Book of Revelation asks and warns the church in Laodicea: “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Rv 3:17; NIV). These are words directed to the last of the seven churches of Asia. The number seven stands here as a symbol of the Church universal. It means totality and fullness. Seven times are repeated the moving words: “He who has an ear, let him **hear what the Spirit says to the churches**”. They are directed by name to each one of the churches, preceded by a divine criticism of earthly and sinful communities.

The vision of the Church in “the form of a servant” will always remain the most difficult program to put into practice. To see the presence of Christ in “the least of brothers” [and sisters!] of his is a specific criterion of the church’s ministry (cf. Mt 25: 40,45). He identifies himself with them and makes their needs the only norm and test of the judgment on everyone’s life. He who passed through the kenosis of his life, sufferings and death for the salvation of people has the highest right, as the Risen One, to perform judgment in this way. People totally dependent on others are brothers and sisters of the Judge himself. This is their eschatological dignity. Without this ultimate perspective the *diakonía* of the Church would be deprived of its most essential motif.

Misery and suffering should be fought against as an evil which ruins human life and profoundly wounds people. Jesus did not glorify suffering as such. The evangelists diligently noted cases when he liberated people from their diseases, misery and affliction, which often lead to the temptation of despair and revolt. In the interview already quoted Pope Francis said: “I see clearly, that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see **the church as a field hospital** after battle. It is

useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. **Heal the wounds, heal the wounds....**And you have to start from the ground up.”²⁷

It does not come easily to believers to be convinced of the vision of the kenotic church, friendly to people, disinterested and poor in earthly means. The church which is great, strong and victorious that better suits our human aspirations. Instead, the church usually finds refuge in what is weak, wounded and mediocre. As the outstanding French theologian, Henri de Lubac SJ, observed many years ago, crowds of such people had in the church a homely feeling and everywhere took the lead.²⁸ No wonder that, from its very beginnings, Christianity used to meet with contempt or indifference from the intellectual elite of the Gentiles. Quite often this contempt is transformed into a fierce enmity. So Kelsos derided Christians that they won exclusively fools, simpletons, madmen, slaves, plain women and little children. Origen refuted such charges, emphasizing the Christian obligation to seek wisdom: “Christian doctrine more than any other calls for wisdom”, and that is why bishops especially should be sages.²⁹

The kenotic state of church life marked by human guilt often provokes criticism coming from the inside. History also provides in this respect some eloquent examples. St. Hieronymus reprimanded Pope Damasus.³⁰ St. Bernard came out against conduct of bad pastors. In his famous writing *De consideratione* he censures the style of the papacy at that time, condemns common corruption and proposes reform programs.³¹ St. Catharine of Siena did not mince words in stigmatizing the highest ranks of the church hierarchy.³² The list of this kind of “saint critics” could be extended considerably. Times have changed, however, as well as the situation of the church in the world. Now has come a period of “non-saint critics”. The so-called “Christian centuries” have passed away. The church itself has become an object of criticism coming from the outside. One has to deal with it wisely and humbly, carefully “recognizing spirits” (1 Co 12:10).

Early Christian tradition did dare speak about kenosis, renouncement and service. In this respect none of our denominational churches can present itself on all accounts as a perfect model for others. None of them is absolutely free of confessional egoism and earthly ambition. I believe that only the more disinterested, humble and truly kenotic Church of Christ and the Holy Spirit will be given the grace to approach more closely the end, at least, of the great confessional divisions.

²⁷ Boldface is mine, W.H.

²⁸ H. de Lubac, *Méditations sur l'Église*, 3^e éd. Paris 1954, p. 260.

²⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum* III, 44 and 48. SCh 136, pp. 105, 115.

³⁰ *Epistula* 15. PL 22,355.

³¹ *De consideratione* 4. PL 182,771-788.

³² Lester 315 quoted by de Lubac, op. cit., p. 247.

A NECESSARY RETURN TO A KENOTIC ETHOS

The conversion of the Churches to Christ and mutually to one another includes the readiness to correct one's own self-understanding, to give up everything which diminishes credibility and 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.

Metropolitan Stylianos (Harkianakis) of Australia spoke some time ago about an inclination in the Roman Catholic Church to the pride of power (*Hochmut der Macht*) and in the Orthodox Church to the pride of truth (*Hochmut der Wahrheit*).³³ The distinction between these two temptations has been made not without reason. It helps us to understand why this dangerous inclination must 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 the humility of service and the searching for truth to the haughtiness of power and truth. Any kind of domination is alien to the spirit of the Gospel.

During his official visit to the Vatican, the ecumenical patriarch Bartholomaios I. delivered a homily in the basilica of St. Peter on June 29, 1995. The Eucharist was presided over by John Paul II. In his presence the Patriarch also spoke about the primacy of *kenosis*. He stressed the need for humility and repentance which can make us wiser and keep 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'.³⁴

³³ 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 Stirmemann, Innsbruck: Tyrolia Verlag 1987, pp. 350-364, here 361 f.

³⁴ *Visite officielle du Patriarche œcuménique à l'Église de Rome...*, in « *Episkepsis* », No. 520, 31. 07. 1995, p. 15: "...c'est seulement quand le primat de l'éthos kénotique prévaudra d'une manière convaincante dans l'Église 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

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’”.³⁵

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 us the necessity of this ethos for the re-establishment of Christian unity.

We have to learn from and with each other. *Kenosis* is required on all sides for true unity to come about. Theological dialogue should continue, in order to clarify the issues of primacy, synodality, authority and relations among 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 (*hōs ho diakonōn*)’” (Lk 22:24-27; RSV CE).

The evil spirit of this early dispute among the disciples of Christ, presented by the Evangelist in the context of the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist, 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.

Reformulation of doctrine and a 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 some time 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

d'éprouver ce que la révélation de Dieu a promis à ceux qui aiment le Seigneur, 'une terre nouvelle et un ciel nouveau'".

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 10

serious about the goal of unity, we must be serious about the cost of unity.³⁶

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 *parrēsía*, i.e. openness, frankness, boldness, confidence. Without courageous vision, kenotic ecclesiology will remain purely declarative phraseology. A necessary return to the idea of Christ's *kenosis* means also an urgent return to the *kenosis* of the Holy Spirit.

KENOTIC ETHOS AND THE QUESTION 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 outlined briefly a kenotic way of dealing with this painful issue. He wrote:

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 that 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 that annihilates a part...³⁷

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 (Ac 15) over the burning doctrinal and disciplinary issue of the Mosaic Law. It is worth recalling that the Council of Constance (1414-1418) decreed during its 39th session that there should be regularly scheduled councils every ten years. Had that decree been observed, the history of the Reformation would perhaps have been different.

Ecumenism requires new forms of exercising papal primacy, openness to new situations, more credibility and more acceptability. New forms in which the Petrine ministry can be exercised have a chance of being found only when past and current forms are evaluated, in real dialogue, as

³⁶ John R. Quinn, *The Exercise of the Primacy: Facing the Cost of Christian Unity*, in “Commonweal” 123 (1996), No. 13, pp. 11-20, here 19.

³⁷ Metropolitte Georges (Khodr), *Vers Rome ou avec Rome?*, “Service Orthodoxe de Presse”, No. 193, décembre 1994, pp. 30-32, here 32.

inadequate and in need of 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 demanded surely an admirable amount of courage. **Trusting in the Holy Spirit**, the Apostles made that historical decision in spite of intense opposition to it.

Our situation today as regards 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 that will be the case, but nobody knows. Such a decision must demand much care, effort, attention and, let me repeat it, self-determination and self-denial. Such is the cost of Christian unity. Precisely here we have to speak in biblical terms about true *kenosis*, self-limitation and self-renouncement.

Kenosis means here concretely structural reform of the papacy. The lesson of history should not be forgotten. A purely moral reform would not be sufficient to bring about 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. Moments of good will 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*).³⁸ 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 and several of them.

I am fully aware of the difficulties of other Christians who face a pope who is regarded as the supreme head and immediate pastor. The West developed through the centuries according to the logic of ecclesiastical centralism and has remained one huge Western patriarchate. To consider the pope as the patriarch of the West seems until today "a too much neglected reality".³⁹ One could however imagine a new structure in the reconciled Church in the form of a concrete collegiality of patriarchates already existing (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia), and those which still should be established, e.g.

³⁸ Yves Congar, *Diversités et communion. Dossier historique et conclusion théologique*, Paris: Cerf 1982, p. 9.

³⁹ Y. Congar, *Le pape, patriarche d'Occident: Approche d'une réalité trop négligée*, in idem, *Église et papauté*, Paris: Cerf 1994, pp. 11-30 [reprinted from: « Istina » 28,1983, pp. 374-390].

Canterbury, in Africa, North and Latin America, Australia, Asia or some more areas. Is this only a utopian vision? It surely is not when we think in light of the ecclesiology of the ancient Church.

In 2006 Pope Benedict XVI renounced the title “Patriarch of the West” as obsolete. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity clarified that, with this renouncement, the Pope hoped to promote ecumenical dialogue. The Council explained that the title “Patriarch of the West” was introduced in the East during the ambit of the imperial ecclesiastical system of Justinian (527-565), alongside the four Eastern patriarchates: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. In Rome this title was not used.⁴⁰

Perhaps the future Roman Catholic Church will find enough courage to begin a structural reform which requires a new logic of thinking. It means that it should respect the autonomy of local and regional Churches, give up the claim for immediate jurisdiction over those Churches and understand primacy as a real *diakonia* for the unity of the Sister Churches. For the time being this seems rather to be only a dream or a song of the future....Nothing indicates that it could be realized any time soon.

At the beginning of the third millennium such thoughts are nevertheless justifiable. A **kenotic type of ecclesiology** requires courage and theological imagination. Have we enough of them both? Be that as it may, we already have now the possibility of restoring patiently a theological balance to ecclesiology, through dialogue and a sincere desire to learn from and with each other in an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence. New insights are possible. An example of this can be found in the document, *The Gift of Authority*, which was agreed upon by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.⁴¹

On the one hand, 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 a panacea able to solve all our problems. We have 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

⁴⁰ The Vatican statement adds that the title “Patriarch of the West” was used in the year 642 by Pope Theodore I. Thereafter it appeared only occasionally and did not have a clear meaning. It flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries in the context of a general increase in the Pope's titles. That is why this title was never very clear. Over history it has become obsolete and practically unusable.

⁴¹ *The Gift of Authority. Authority in the Church III: An Agreed Statement by the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission ARCIC*. Published for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, London-Toronto-New York 1999.

in ecumenical *koinonía*, the Churches will be able to discover appropriate new structures of primacy and collegiality.

There must exist something like a 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 practiced in the Catholic Church in a sufficient and effective way. In his encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* (par. 87) Pope John Paul II 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.”

The Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church is still working on the so-called document of Ravenna (2007) entitled: “*Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority*.” It deals with the role of the Bishop of Rome in the communion of the universal Church, with particular reference to the first millennium of Christian history. At the twelfth plenary session in Vienna/Austria (September 2010), the Commission was unable to reach an agreement. According to the Russian Orthodox Church, the elaborated document does not reflect the attitude of the Orthodox side to the problem of primacy of the bishop of Rome and can be viewed only as a purely auxiliary paper awaiting further work.

Much more successful was the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, which published in 2010 an agreed statement: *Steps towards a Reunited Church: a Sketch of an Orthodox-Catholic vision for the Future*. In conclusion it states: “Conscience holds us back from celebrating our unity as complete in sacramental terms, until it is complete in faith, Church structure, and common action; but conscience also calls us to move beyond complacency in our divisions, **in the power of the Spirit** and in a longing for the fullness of Christ’s life-giving presence in our midst”.

In the interview already quoted, Pope Francis stressed the necessity and benefits of the dialogue especially with the Orthodox:

From them we can learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and the tradition of synodality. The joint effort of reflection, looking at how the church was governed in the early centuries, before the breakup between East and West, will bear fruit in due time. In ecumenical relations it is important not only to know each other better, but also **to recognize what the Spirit has sown in the other as a gift for us**. I want to continue the discussion that was begun in 2007 by the joint [Catholic–Orthodox] commission on how to exercise the Petrine primacy, which

led to the signing of the Ravenna Document. We must continue on this path.”⁴²

In his exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* the Pope goes much further and strikes a very personal tone:

Since I am called to put into practice what I ask of others, I too must think about a *conversion of the papacy*. It is my duty, as the Bishop of Rome, to be open to suggestions which can help make the exercise of my ministry more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it and to the present needs of evangelization. Pope John Paul II asked for help in finding “a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation”.⁴³ We have made little progress in this regard. The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to *pastoral conversion* (par. 32; italics are mine, W.H.).

For this purpose one has to reevaluate episcopal conferences and the collegial spirit. So the Pope adds: “Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.” In another place he reminds again of those urgent ecumenical tasks that await us:

How many important things unite us! If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us. To give but one example, in the dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality. Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness (246).

⁴² English translation: *A Big Heart Open to God*, in “America Magazine”, September 30, 2013. Boldface is mine, W.H. Unfortunately the Ravenna document has not been signed.

⁴³ Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995), 95; AAS 87 (1995), 977-978.

THE SPIRIT URGES CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Many biblical stories show that decisions, initiatives and journeys in our life have an unknown destination. One cannot foresee their final outcome. We need the guidance of God's Spirit. It is he who protects us from making the mystery of Christ something irrelevant to human living.

A specific role of the Holy Spirit is to help us in crossing boundaries. The Acts of the Apostles gives some striking examples of this.

1. The most important is **the account of the day of Pentecost** (Ac 2: 1-13). According to Luke, in Jerusalem are gathered not only local Jews but also those diaspora Jews who have come "from every nation under heaven" (Ac 2:5). They were bewildered, amazed and astonished to hear Galileans speaking their own native language. The diaspora Jews represented their homelands and the Gentile inhabitants of those lands: "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya; as well as visitors from Rome – Jews and proselytes alike – Cretans and Arabs" (Ac 2:9-11).

The presence of those people in Jerusalem is a powerful symbol that the Gospel is to be addressed both to all Israel scattered throughout the world and to Gentiles in the nations from which these Jews come. The universality of the Gospel message is thus strongly emphasized. It is a message "for all those who are far away" (Ac 2:39) and for "all the families of the earth" (Ac 3:25).

Indeed, **the Gospel mission will cross ethnic and religious boundaries**. The Church, located at the beginning in Jerusalem, will thus become in the course of time a universal communion. This was symbolized already by the gift of tongues which enabled the apostles to proclaim a new message in Jerusalem to people of all nations and to be understood by all. So from the day of Pentecost **the Holy Spirit will accompany the messengers** (cf. Ac 8:29; 10:19) **and guide the missionary task of the Church** to evangelize the world, first in Asia and around the Mediterranean Sea. The gift of salvation has been offered to all nations.

2. Another telling example is the well known case connected with **the apostle Peter and the Roman centurion Cornelius**, a pious and charitable Gentile (Ac 10:1-48), who was neither Jewish nor Christian. The episode concerns the conversion to the Christian faith of someone who, with his household, relatives and friends, represents here the whole Gentile world. The religious experience of this "outsider" brings him into close intimacy with God. Cornelius receives in a vision a divine message to send for Simon Peter and invite him to visit his household. This message will in consequence change the lives of them both. Everything seems to indicate that a law abiding Jew will not dare to accept an invitation to enter into the house of an unclean non-Jew. He would normally not even associate with a Gentile, being afraid of the danger of defilement (cf. Ac 10:28). But then Peter himself has in turn a symbolic vision and is prompted by the Holy

Spirit (cf. Ac 10:19) to accept the invitation. This is a very decisive intervention and a major lesson for Peter. God's Spirit uses the symbolism of clean and unclean food to teach him a new understanding of the role of Gentiles in the divine plan of salvation. The vision explains to him that, as all food is clean, similarly no human being can be considered unclean and unworthy of God's gift of salvation. One is not allowed to treat the Gentiles as unclean and unacceptable to God. So Peter comes to Cornelius with a new understanding "that God does not have favorites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Ac 10:34-35). God himself through his Spirit has helped Peter to remove all barriers that previously kept him at a distance from an alien people of different culture and faith.

And then something unexpected happens there: while he is still sharing the good news about Jesus, "the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners" (v. 44). This is a repeated event of Pentecost. Jewish Christians who had accompanied Peter are all greatly astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit has been poured out even on the Gentiles. All this persuades Peter that those who have received the Holy Spirit should be baptized without delay. Through such an intervention of God's Spirit, Cornelius together with his family and friends become the normative precedent for admitting Gentiles into Christian life. Any human being can receive a life-changing vision if he or she does what is right. That was a significant crossing of borders and boundaries!

3. When some frightened Jewish Christians in Jerusalem start to question Peter's conduct with the Gentiles, he becomes their defender, recalling what had happened in Cornelius' house (cf. Ac 11:1-18). Later, at the so-called '**Council of Jerusalem**' he does it even in a more detailed theological way (cf. Ac 15:5-29). It proves necessary because a controversy arose about the conditions for admitting Gentiles into the Church. The community in Jerusalem, led by the apostles and elders, decides under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, after a thorough debate, not to impose on Gentile converts circumcision and other prescriptions of the Mosaic law. They are asked to abstain above all from irregular marriages ("fornication") and meat sacrificed to idols. The decision taken is clear and expressed in the council's letter to Gentile believers: "**It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you** with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality" (Ac 15:28-29).

So these are **three typical cases of crossing boundaries with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit**. Thanks to the decisions taken at the Council of Jerusalem, the mission to the Gentiles is inaugurated. They are accepted as part of God's people, without obligation to obey the prescriptions of the Mosaic law. One can say that what happens is a sort of quiet revolution in the religious thinking of the early Church.

What **an admirable turn towards universalism of the Gospel** which changes the lives of innumerable people! Thus we have to learn to be

open and be ready to acknowledge the religious experiences of God granted to others. Those we call strangers and “outsiders” can be favored with divine visions and interventions of the Spirit. Standing in the presence of God, one has to listen to all that he commands us to do through his Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who reminds us also today that Jesus is not merely Lord of the Jewish people (cf. Lk 2:11), but “Lord of all” (Ac 10:36) in whom there is salvation for all (Ac 4:12).

KENOTIC CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH TODAY

Turning towards our present time we may ask: What are our boundaries today waiting for crossing? Can we count on the guidance of the Holy Spirit who hears **the cry of the church and of the world for change**? Here opens a vast area of problems to be reflected on. I may mention here only some of them, as examples.

How do we cope with the **marginality of certain people in the church**? The notion of marginality suggests dwelling on boundaries. More and more often one hears today about the **exodus of women from the church. Their cry should be heard**. Their exodus is caused by wrong and alienated relationships. But where should they go? To the new religious movements of aneo-pentecostal or charismatic nature? There is always a risk of journeying into the unknown and of being eventually even more disenchanting. We have, first of all, to appreciate theologically the full humanity of women who feel that they are rendered mute and that the all-comprehensive mystery of Christ is something unrelated to their living human experiences.

It is not enough to repeat the words of the apostle Paul: “There is neither Jew or Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Ga 3:28). Following the Bible, liturgical language is still dominated by old images and ancient masculine categories of thought, in which there are only “the sons of God” and “brothers”. God seems not to have any daughters at all! Such language fails to reach the lived experience of women. Shouldn’t we leave behind such images, inadequate symbols and rituals marked by male domination? – ask many women today. But will the church community accept the tentative categories of a new ecclesial praxis? Does the Spirit urge us today to cross this boundary as well?

Some sociologists of religion emphasize that the central question for the future of the church is “gender justice” (*Geschlechtergerechtigkeit*). Since its beginning in the 18th century European secularization has influenced until recently mostly, if not exclusively, men: intellectuals first, the middle class next, and finally the proletariat. Women religiously kept being religious. Religious continuity was thus to a large extent preserved. But now as José Casanova, an American sociologist,

observes, the secular dynamic of modernity also embraces women.⁴⁴ One can see this, for example, in a Catholic country such as Brazil. Also in the USA, the percentage of nonreligious people drastically increased twofold in the last decade or so, and this refers above all to former Catholics, although not exclusively.

So even “religious America”, which in contradistinction to Europe was for a long time spared by secularization, now massively suffers from it. This was confirmed by a Lutheran bishop of Berlin, Markus Dröge after his journey to the USA. The main problem seems to be the indifference rapidly spreading in society. It is particularly difficult to convince young people of the existential significance of faith.⁴⁵

In the view of the American reporter on the Vatican, John L. Allen, there are few objections to the Roman Catholic Church which can be raised more permanently than the accusation that women are being treated badly by the Church at the very moment of their emancipation in society at large. Many women demand reforms in the Church. Their understanding of leadership and pastoral care in the church has rapidly changed and should also be taken into consideration. The affirmation is often heard that the church is antifeminist and that a gender gap exists.

Pope Francis has not kept silence on this issue. He took up the matter during the return trip from Rio de Janeiro on the occasion of the 28th World Youth Day (22-29 July 2013). According to him, **the church still lacks a profound theology of women.** In his interview quoted above he makes some suggestions on how to make their role in the church more visible today, avoiding however certain dangers:

I am wary of a solution that can be reduced to a kind of ‘female *machismo*,’ because a woman has a different make-up than a man. But what I hear about the role of women is often inspired by an ideology of *machismo*. **Women are asking deep questions that must be addressed.** The church cannot be herself without the woman and her role. **The woman is essential for the church.** Mary, a woman, is more important than the bishops. I say this because we must not confuse the function with the dignity. We must therefore investigate further the role of women in the church. **We have to work harder to develop a profound theology of the woman.** Only by making this step will it be possible to better reflect

⁴⁴ *Nicht nur Jerusalem und Athen, sondern auch Benares.* Der Innsbrucker Pastoraltheologe Christian E. Baur sprach mit dem amerikanischen Religionssoziologen José Casanova..., “Christ in der Gegenwart” 64 (2012) Nr. 38, pp. 421-422.

⁴⁵ See *Amerika, atheistisch.* “Christ in der Gegenwart” 64 (2012) nr. 35, p. 382.

on their function within the church. **The feminine genius** is needed wherever we make important decisions. The challenge today is this: to think about the specific place of women also in those places where the authority of the church is exercised for various areas of the church.⁴⁶

These words were critically received by feminist theologians. Is feminist philosophy and theology not good enough for the pope? – they asked. He still seems to be afraid that the emancipation of women can jeopardize what is specifically feminine. It is a pity that in this interview the pope did not say more about the theology of the woman and its role in the church. What did he exactly mean when he spoke about an ideology of *machismo* and not confusing the function with the dignity? Such words, compared with those about “the feminine genius”, can arouse unrest and concern. Has the reference to Christ’s Mother, Mary, produced in Catholic religiosity anything good for women? Female theologians have long demanded a new partner anthropology which would be able to determine more justly the role of men and women. Compassionate love, respect and protectiveness are simply human features, and not only feminine. On the other hand, why should rationality and strength of character be ascribed only to men?

Being the second half of humankind, women feel that they are considered defective, and therefore not listened to and not admitted to real participation in the shaping of ecclesiastical reality. The church is to a large extent clericalized. One has to talk with women themselves, whose theology we want to develop. Over the centuries theology was, in fact, developed predominantly, if not exclusively, by men. How should it be treated by women as an adequate presentation of their views? The experience of the faith by millions of women seems to be treated as negligible. They are often right, but nobody asks for their opinion. Turning towards the poor in the church means also noticing the fact that the majority of poor in this world are precisely women and children. They are mostly victims of violence and sex-trafficking transactions. Feminist theologians from Asia, Africa and South America have for years been drawing attention to such contemporary phenomena as sexism, racism, poverty, family life, economic exploitation and eco-feminism.

Women were the most active group of the faithful in the history of Christianity. In the Roman Catholic Church, however, since the Second Vatican Council, it is among them that we can observe the largest decline in religiosity. There is a sharp contrast between the role of women in the American church and in Poland. Statistics from America show that out of thirty one thousand lay people fulfilling pastoral duties in parishes, 80% are taken by women. Among them 48.4% work in the administration of single dioceses. Women also make up 26.8% of managing posts. They make real

⁴⁶ Boldface is mine, WH.

decisions, and bishops have to reckon with them. They want something more, but face a wall of ecclesiastical male chauvinism. Real participation in church life is certainly closer in practice to the spirit of the Gospel than the situation in my own country Poland where nuns are placed in bishops' curias as mere ancillaries with very little authority.

No wonder the German theologian Gisbert Greshake put forward some concrete proposals to reevaluate the role of women in the church. He did it in the form of a "Pope's Letter to the whole church".⁴⁷ Here are some of his most important postulates. Ecclesiastical bodies of bishop's advisers and administrators should be transformed in such a way that around half of them are women. Besides an ordained bishop, all other diocesan offices should be entrusted to women, maintaining parity with men. To become a cardinal it should no more necessary to accept only those who have received the sacrament of ordination to the priesthood. The cardinal's function with all its privileges and obligations will, from now on, be accessible also to women, and we should aim at parity here as well. All higher posts in the church do not require episcopal ordination. In this way women can have access to the highest ranks of church administration.

Has this dream any chance of becoming reality? Is this only music for the future? We may ask today whether it will be possible sometime in the future whether, in papal elections, women will be able to participate along with men. Should not representatives of science, artists and other distinguished people of different professions from all over the world – not only cardinals – participate with voting rights?. Why should the idea of a papal election at fixed intervals be totally excluded? For example, would not a period of six years with the possibility of a single reelection give younger candidates an opportunity to be elected. (One might mention here the resignation of Benedict XVI for health reasons and weakening spiritual energy.)

At present such thoughts may seem provocative and absurd. They do not appear as such when one thinks of the early history of Christianity. There are many ways to revive the synodal principle in the life of the church (etymologically the word "synod" comes from the Greek: *synodos*, i.e. the road which one follows *with* others, *syn-ódos*).

THE CRY OF WOMEN CONTINUES

It is said that John Paul II wanted to introduce Mother Teresa from Calcutta to the college of cardinals, but she refused. Some hope today that this will happen in the time of Pope Francis. Does he notice that something more and innovative can be said in this regard? It seems that there are in the church quite a number of women who would deserve the cardinal's hat.

⁴⁷ See Jacek Prusak SJ, *W Kościele władza nie ma płci* (Authority Has No Gender in the Church), "Tygodnik Powszechny" (Cracow) No. 40, October 6 (2013), p. 20.

According to this analysis, machismo in cassock seems to be as equally dangerous as machismo in skirt. We all have to learn concern and mercy. Jesus' words apply to all of us: "go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'" (Mt 9:13; NIV; cf. Ho 6:6). He teaches us that power has no gender, but is only service and responsibility. Sociologists will further ask the question: what is the main cause of the "gender gap" in religion?.

Already during the first day of the election of Pope Francis a happening was organized by Women's Ordination Worldwide. They wanted to draw attention to the fact that women have nothing to say in this matter and that the new pope is elected only by a group of an "old boys' club". Now women are not sure what can be hoped for in the time of the new pontificate. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of John Paul II's apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, Pope Francis said "yes" to a greater role of women in the church and "no" to the ordination of women for the priesthood. In the view of some feminist theologians the misogynist thinking of Jerome, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas is still well entrenched in Rome. Unless this question is addressed soon, the pope's interviews and utterances will be for naught.

From an ecumenical point of view, **the problem of women priests** is seriously dividing Christians. In Protestant, Anglican and even Old-Catholic Churches the ordination of women priests has become a regular practice. These churches have good experiences in this respect. Women successfully lead communities of believers, preside at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, effectively preach the Gospel and give evidence of great responsibility. Opposition comes unchangingly from the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. Debate on this issue has been going on for a long time.⁴⁸ A segment of women advocating for women priests in the Catholic Church has become radical. Ignoring excommunication they have accepted ordination in other denominations and established their parishes. Other women religious, feeling that they have a vocation to become priests, still wait patiently and believe that changes will come sometime in the future.

Pope Francis says in his interview quoted above that we have "**to live on the border and be audacious**".⁴⁹ Will he listen to what women want to tell him? Women remind us of his own words:

The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people's night, into the darkness, but without getting lost. The people of God want pastors, not

⁴⁸ See Sue Walrond-Skinner, *Crossing the Boundary: What Will Women Priests Mean?*, London 1994.

⁴⁹ See the subtitle "Frontiers and Laboratories".

clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials. The bishops, particularly, must be able to support the movements of God among their people with patience, so that no one is left behind. But they must also be able to accompany the flock that has a flair for finding new paths.⁵⁰

Where there is a sincere dialogue between the faithful, bishops and the pope we can hope for the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The time has come to initiate such a dialogue with women. They do not want to be admitted simply into the church structures of power, which might lead only to ever greater clericalization in the church, but to aim at another style of ministry in the church.

Christianity as a whole still has to examine more thoroughly what women priests would mean for the Gospel of Christ and for the church community. Supported by feminist theology, women are already crossing boundaries and challenging traditional gender roles within the patriarchal church structures. They reflect on richer anthropological notions of autonomy and relational selfhood. This reflection often takes place in an intercultural, inter-denominational and inter-religious way. Maybe in search of openness and a new freedom they prepare more effectively than men priests and cross boundaries under the influence of the kenotic Spirit of God. This is really a kenotic but hopeful journeying into the future.

We do not know yet where this question of the ordination of women to the priesthood will lead us in the Roman Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II stated in his apostolic letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* that “the church has no authority whatsoever (*Ecclesiam facultatem nullatenus habere*) to confer priestly ordination on women” (No. 4).⁵¹ According to commentators, if “the church” cannot do it, then also a council cannot do it, no matter what the “signs of the times” may be.⁵² However, one has to take into account the fact that the apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* is not an infallible ex cathedra papal dogma. Nevertheless, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explained that the doctrine about women’s ordination belongs to the deposit of faith and has been constantly held in the church’s tradition and infallibly set forth by the ordinary and universal magisterium.⁵³

It seems that responsible theological discussion will still continue for a long time. Biblical scholars point out to the fact that the New Testament tradition never tells us that Jesus ordained the Twelve or anybody else, either apostles or disciples. Nowhere in the New Testament

⁵⁰ Ibidem, the subtitle “The Church as Field Hospital”.

⁵¹ “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 86 (1994) 545-548.

⁵² See Joseph A. Fitzmyer SJ, *Fidelity to Jesus and the Ordination of Women*, “America” 175 (1996), pp. 9-12

⁵³ AAS 87 (1995) 1114.

do we learn that the Twelve were ever regarded as priests or as bishops (*epískopoi*, “overseers”). This silence is very eloquent and speaks volumes.

Dogmatic theologians sometimes appeal to the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19d; cf. 1 Cor. 11:24c) as a directive to perform the same action that he has just performed in memory of him. However, Jesus’ words in such a commission do not imply “ordination” even if the dogmatic tradition of the church has so understood them. It is the tradition of the church, not Scripture, that has in fact become the source of the understanding of those words of Jesus in the sense of sacramental ordination.

All that can be said on the basis of New Testament testimony is simply that Jesus commanded his disciples to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in memory of him.⁵⁴ The New Testament has nothing specific to say about the ordination of women to the priesthood. The traditional Christian rite of ordination is rooted in such verses of the Pastoral Epistles as 1 Tm 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tm 1:6. Imposition of hands is found here in the sense of what was later called “ordination.” To what status Timothy was ordained is not clear. The Biblical Commission admitted: “It does not seem that the New Testament by itself alone will permit us to settle in a clear way and once and for all the problem of the possible accession of women to the presbyterate.” One has to know that the text of the Biblical Commission was never officially published. It is not a document of the church’s magisterium but has only an advisory character.

Is something going to be changed during Pope Francis’ pontificate? In the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013) he writes:

I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church (par. 103).

And then he adds:

The reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not

⁵⁴ Quite often the question returns as to whether, during Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples, women were in fact absent. Did he really give bread and wine only to men? Women were the most faithful companions of Jesus until the very end of his earthly life. They supported him and his disciples also “out of their own resources” (Lk 8:3). How should we interpret the reticence of the Gospels about their absence at the Last Supper? Is it enough to recall the cultural and sociological context of those times or recur to some theological reasons?

a question open to discussion, but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general. (...) The ministerial priesthood is one means employed by Jesus for the service of his people, yet our great dignity derives from baptism, which is accessible to all. The configuration of the priest to Christ the head – namely, as the principal source of grace – does not imply an exaltation which would set him above others. In the Church, functions “do not favour the superiority of some vis-à-vis the others”. Indeed, a woman, Mary, is more important than the bishops” (par. 104).

Our optimism should therefore be cautious. Personally, I have no false hopes in the short term for the priestly ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church. We know nothing about what it can or cannot do in the future. *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* is not an infallible definition of revealed truth. I share the opinion of those who say, with due respect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, that it is not an expression of the infallible ordinary magisterium either, since it is not the case that all bishops taught in union with the Pope in that document.

In fact John Paul II ordered the bishops in a letter addressed to them (not to the entire church) to stop discussing the issue. It is a statement about the past and the present but not about the future. Speaking figuratively, the door is closed but not locked forever. Pope Francis often speaks about a necessary row in the church. Maybe such a row in the cause of women will also be profitable for the Church.

Another question is **the sacramental diaconate for women**. Cardinal Walter Kasper, a former president of the Vatican Council for Promoting Christian Unity, does not see such a possibility in the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁵ In his view it has no sufficient foundation, and its introduction would be “a new creation”. In the ancient church there was a female diaconate in many Eastern churches and, sporadically for a short period of time, also in the West. It continues to exist partly in the East even today. However, one has to take into consideration the fact that the ordination of deaconesses was different from the ordination of deacons. The former had no function at the altar. Their task was to serve at the baptism of adult women (baptism by immersion!) and in pastoral care for them. So it was a very specific ministry sui generis.

A different opinion was recently expressed by the Greek Orthodox theologian Theodor Nikolaou, the founder and many years director of the Institute of Orthodox Theology at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University in Munich. According to him the Churches in the Catholic tradition should

⁵⁵ Kardinal Walter Kasper, *Für ein Amt eigener Art. Ein sakramentaler Diakonat der Frau hat keine Grundlage*, “KNA-Ökumenische Information” No. 9, 26. Februar 2013, Dokumentation pp. I-IX (Literature).

reintroduce without delay the sacramental ordination of the diaconate for women. This step would certainly find positive repercussions in all the Churches. The hardened denominational fronts arisen in the question of the ordination of women would thus be softened and help to start a serious and fruitful dialogue.⁵⁶

What does the Spirit say to the Churches today? How do we get out of this net of divergent proposals? Does God's Spirit urge the responsible authorities of our Churches to cross the boundaries of ecclesiastical traditions or calmly to acknowledge the variety of existing practices? The practice of the diaconate of women in the early Church encourages us today to take a similar step.

CHRISTIAN APORETICS AND THE 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 Christian "aporetics", expressed in a dialectical way by St. Paul in two Greek words difficult to translate: *aporoúmenoi all'ouk egzaporoúmenoi* (2 Co 4:8). Their meaning is clear: we are perplexed but not driven to despair; 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 short and a transitional one (cf. 2 Co 1:8). His words show an essential element of Christian existence as such, a dialectical coexistence of helplessness and the courage to hold on.

Ancient stoics used to see *aporía* in all questions. For this reason they were called aporetics. *Aporía* means an apparently insurmountable difficulty or contradiction. 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*. On the other hand they trust in God and believe in the power of Christ and his Spirit. They know that Christendom is not only a religion of the Cross but also a religion of the Resurrection, hope, courage and joy. The experience of difficulties and the dark sides of existence may lead to pessimistic feelings. Church life is no exception in this respect. Christians know that there will be here on earth no total victory over helplessness. This consciousness warns them of a naive and false optimism which overshadows all the bitter

⁵⁶ Th. Nikolaou, *Glaube und Forsche. Ausgewählte Studien zur Griechischen Patristik und Byzantinischen Geistesgeschichte*, EOS Verlag St. Ottilien 2012, p. 450.

realities of life. **Aporetics is an integral part of the kenotic dimension of the church.**

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 labor and of the cross, God leads us to the joy of the Resurrection, to better days of the reconciled diversity among Christians.

Only God can solve the final aporetics of our existence. For this reason pessimism has to give way to a difficult paschal optimism. Paschal spirituality is a spirituality of hope. It looks not only at the crucified Jesus, but at the same time at the risen Christ who is the only source of our hope and confidence and at the Holy Spirit present in human history.

The difficult ecumenical process of reconciliation and mutual forgiveness cannot be accomplished without an ethos of compassion. We are too severe in our judgments. We think too readily of differences in our understanding of the one faith. Of course, we should not underestimate the importance of doctrinal dialogues. But far more difficult to handle are the centuries of living out of communion, very often marked by the spirit of intransigence, harshness and lack of compassion. Out of our controversies and disputes we have built institutionalized divisions and have acquiesced in those divisions. This approach, deprived of the sense of solidarity and compassion, has proved itself unable to discover the essential content of faith in other churches.

Today we are more aware that an ecumenism of the mind is not enough. We also need also an ecumenism of the heart and that is not possible without compassion. The Papyrus Oxyrhynchos 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".⁵⁷ Nobody is lost for God and his Kingdom. A truly paschal hope does not forget that tomorrow God's Reign will have no limits.

Whoever reads the mystics will find in them the negation of all fundamentalism and spiritual parochialism. He will discover their mercy and compassion embracing everyone and everything. Mystics can descend into the tragic depths of human nature but without abandoning the hope that "all shall be well", as Julian of Norwich wrote in the 14th century.⁵⁸ That is why hope for the salvation of all is so close and dear to some mystics. Thanks to them they are our best allies of genuine universalism.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Cf. *Synopsis quattuor evangeliorum*, ed. K. Aland, Stuttgart, 1985, p. 248.

⁵⁸ Julian of Norwich, *Showings*. Translated from the critical text with an introduction by E. College OSA and J. Wals SJ, Mahwah NJ 1978, p. 149 [The Short Text, chapter XIII].

⁵⁹ Cf. W. Hryniewicz, *Dramat nadziei zbawienia (The Drama of the Hope of Salvation)*, Warsaw, 1996, pp. 149-170, 182-186; 2nd ed. 2008, pp. 179-206,

The universalism of hope is a cure for all temptations to appropriate the gift of salvation for the benefit of one's own religious community. Such hope is on the side of mercy, compassion and ecumenism. The duty of expecting salvation for all may then become an eschatological motive for love and concern. It is not only a passive hope that someday God will be able to reconcile all creation and gather it into the harmony of the new world. The hope of universal salvation also relates to the present day. Already today it requires a new attitude towards all people whom we will meet beyond this life. It is a universal hope, free from the limitations of any ecclesiastical particularism.

The soteriological universalism of hope requires a new mentality and a new pedagogy. Christendom contains in itself a vast and creative potential that 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 everyone. This awareness is a great liberation for the church, ecumenism and universalism. I believe that 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.⁶⁰

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 over things in silence, in waiting and delaying. Perhaps it is motivated, behind all appearances, by a fear that we have of recognizing the fundamental identity of faith and life in other churches. Whoever understands his or her own identity in opposition to that of 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 it is possible to overcome at least the greater historical schisms among the churches. Controversial differences can be dealt with through patient and persistent dialogue in such a way that they lose their divisive character. One example is the common Catholic-Lutheran declaration on the doctrine of justification signed in Augsburg (1999). It is an encouraging sign of hope. God himself will not cease to urge us to be more courageous.

The future destiny of ecumenical dialogue depends upon 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

220-225; idem, *Świadkowie wielkiej nadziei. Zbawienie powszechne w myśli wczesnochrześcijańskiej* (*Witnesses of the Great Hope: Universal Salvation in the Early Christian Thought*), Warszawa: Verbinum 2009, pp. 297-349.

⁶⁰ Cf. W. Hryniewicz, *Chrześcijaństwo nadziei. Przyszłość wiary i duchowości chrześcijańskiej* (*Christianity of Hope: The Future of Christian Faith and Spirituality*), Kraków: Znak 2002.

confessionalism are found in the past. But as long as we remain prisoners of the past, there will be no real advance towards reconciliation. Our ecclesiologies are under the 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 *epiclesis*. At the beginning of the third millennium we may do it in a way similar to that of St. Symeon the New Theologian (d. 1022) who said at the turn of the second millennium: *Elthè tò phōs tò alēthinón*, Come, true Light...⁶¹

In the last resort **it is God's Spirit who renews and changes the face of the world**. I am inclined to think that Christendom is still more ahead of us than behind us, still very young, increasing slowly in wisdom, learning how to cherish unity in diversity.

THE SPIRIT OF PENTECOST: THE GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

In the following reflections of this paragraph I refer to a recent document entitled *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, unanimously approved by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in Crete, Greece on 5 September 2012. It was presented also to the 10th General Assembly of the WCC (30.October – 8. November 2013) in Busan, South Korea.

The declaration seeks vision, concepts and directions for a renewed understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in a changing and diverse world today. It is remarkable especially for its trinitarian and pneumatological approach. Of special interest for our reflections is a renewed appreciation of the mission of the Holy Spirit which throws light also on the very understanding of our Christian mission and evangelism. Not without influence on this development has certainly been the emergence of Pentecostal and charismatic movements which characterize Christianity today. The mission of the Holy Spirit should be understood within the mission of the Triune God to the whole world:

We believe in the Triune God who is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all life. God created the whole oikoumene in God's image and constantly works in the world to affirm and safeguard life. We believe in Jesus Christ, the Life of the world, the incarnation of God's love for the world (John 3:16). Affirming life in all its fullness is Jesus Christ's ultimate concern and mission (John 10:10). We believe in God, **the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver, who sustains and empowers life and renews the whole creation** (Genesis 2:7; John 3:8). A denial of life is a

⁶¹ *Oratio mystica*, PG 120,507-510; SChr 156, pp. 150-155

rejection of the God of life. God invites us into the life-giving mission of the Triune God and empowers us to bear witness to the vision of abundant life for all in the new heaven and earth” (par. 1; boldface here and below is mine, W.H.).

We humans can only participate in the mission of God himself. It is not our own initiative. It comes from elsewhere. So the aforementioned declaration affirms in a farseeing way:

Mission begins in the heart of the Triune God and the love which binds together the Holy Trinity overflows to all humanity and creation. The missionary God who sent the Son into the world calls all God’s people (John 20:21) and empowers them to be **a community of hope**. The church is commissioned to celebrate life, and **to resist and transform all life-destroying forces, in the power of the Holy Spirit**. How important it is to “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22) to become living witnesses to the coming reign of God!” (par. 2).

In this perspective one has to appreciate the significance of spirituality which gives deepest meaning to our lives, and energy and dynamic of transformation to our Christian existence. For this reason “life in the Holy Spirit is the essence of mission” (par. 3). What is at stake is not the salvation of humanity alone. **The Gospel is good news for all of creation**. God’s mission, realized by Christ and the Holy Spirit, has a cosmic dimension. This has to be particularly stressed today since threats to the future of our planet are already so evident. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of salvation for all people and all God’s creatures. The Holy Spirit blows wherever he wills, thus embracing the whole cosmos.

The statement on mission and evangelism stresses the universality of the Spirit’s economy in creation and the particularity of the Spirit’s work in redemption (par. 15). Both realities “have to be understood together as the mission of the Spirit for the new heaven and earth, when God finally will be “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)”. And the document adds: “The Holy Spirit works in the world often **in mysterious and unknown ways** beyond our imagination (Luke 1:34-35; John 3:8; Acts 2:16-21)”. In this way it indirectly indicates **a kenotic presence of the Spirit in the world**. The same insight finds later even more concrete explication. One has to take into account the fact that we live today in a world marked by plurality of many different faiths, ideologies and convictions.

We believe that the Spirit of Life brings joy and fullness of life. God’s Spirit, therefore, can be found in all cultures that affirm life. The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways,

and **we do not fully understand the workings of the Spirit in other faith traditions**. We acknowledge that there is inherent value and wisdom in diverse life-giving spiritualities (par. 93).

In this context a particularly important role belongs to the dialogue between people of different faiths. An authentic evangelism should take place in the spirit of dialogue, in an attitude of friendship and **respect for the mysterious ways of the working of the Spirit** in other faith traditions.

Dialogue at the religious level is possible only if we begin with the expectation of meeting **God who has preceded us** and has been present with people within their own contexts. God is there before we come (Acts 17) and our task is not to bring God along, but to witness to the God who is already there. Dialogue provides for an honest encounter where each party brings to the table all that they are in an open, patient and respectful manner (par. 94). Evangelism entails not only proclamation of our deepest convictions, but also listening to others, and being challenged and enriched by others (Acts 10) (par. 95).

Reading attentively the whole declaration on mission and evangelism, one can notice how respect for the kenotic presence of the Spirit in different contexts and traditions determines our spiritual attitude. “Evangelism is **a confident but humble sharing of our faith and conviction with other people**” (par. 8). The Gospel of Jesus Christ as the good news of salvation requires **confidence and humility**.

This attitude results from a deep consciousness that “it is only God’s Spirit who creates new life and brings about rebirth” (par. 82). Evangelism has been distorted and lost its credibility each time when Christians have tried to force “conversions” by violent means or the abuse of power. God’s Spirit himself does not proceed in this way. He invites, convinces and attracts by the very truth and beauty of the Gospel message.

One has to share one’s faith and conviction with others, inviting them to discipleship, but such sharing should always take place with confidence and humility.⁶² These are, so to speak, **kenotic virtues in service of faith, hope and love**. They express our love for God, people and the world. In this way we answer **the cry of the Spirit, who himself always acts humbly and discretely**. Humility means also respect for all. If our words are not consistent with our actions, our evangelism is inauthentic. Then we betray rather than incarnate the Gospel. Christian witness is as

⁶² Reference to humility is to be found also in paragraphs 22, 23, 62, 87, 89, 106, 109, 112.

much by our presence as by our words consonant with our deeds. Here the document on mission and evangelism is very clear:

The enforcement of uniformity discredits the uniqueness of each individual created in the image and likeness of God. Whereas Babel attempted to enforce uniformity, the preaching of the disciples on the day of Pentecost resulted in a unity in which personal particularities and community identities were not lost but respected – they heard the good news in their own languages (par. 99).

The Spirit calls everyone of us personally to repentance, conversion and transformation. This requires a constant **kenotic readiness of self-denial and self-limitation**. That is why the declaration on mission and evangelism refers several times to **the kenosis of Christ**:

Jesus became our Christ not through power or money but through his self-emptying (kenosis) and death on the cross. This **humble understanding of mission** does not merely shape our methods, but is the very nature and essence of our faith in Christ. The church is a servant in God's mission and not the master. **The missionary church glorifies God in self-emptying love** (par. 62).

Jesus calls us out of the narrow concerns of our own kingdom, our own liberation and our own independence (Acts 1:6) by unveiling to us a larger vision and empowering us by the Holy Spirit to go "to the ends of the earth" as witnesses in each context of time and space to God's justice, freedom and peace. Our calling is to point all to Jesus, rather than to ourselves or our institutions, looking out for the interests of others rather than our own (cf. Philippians 2:3-4) (par. 100; italics in the original version).

The Spirit who was in Christ Jesus inspires us all today to a self-emptying and cross-bearing life-style. It means also that we should show **solidarity with suffering people** and harmony with nature. Evangelism is carried out "in self-emptying humility, with respect towards others and in dialogue with people of different cultures and faiths" (par. 106; cf. also 103). A new life in Christ and genuine discipleship liberate and transform. "There is no greater gift we can offer to our fellow human beings than to share [the good news with them] and introduce them to the love, grace and mercy of God in Christ" (par. 83). But in consequence evangelism has also a more demanding kenotic side. In our time too, some people have paid with their life for their Christian witness.

Standing against evil or injustice and being prophetic can sometimes be met with suppression and violence, and thus consequently lead to suffering, persecution, and even death. **Authentic evangelism involves being vulnerable, following the example of Christ by carrying the cross and emptying oneself** (Philippians 2:5-11). Just as the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church under Roman persecution, today the pursuit of justice and righteousness makes a powerful witness to Christ. Jesus linked such self-denial with the call to follow him and with eternal salvation (Mark 8:34-38) (par. 92).

This is the cost of a genuine discipleship and eventual price to be paid. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the powerless, gives Christians courage to live out their firm convictions, even in the face of suffering, persecution and martyrdom. So only in the perspective of eschatological hope, the cross of Christ appears as the power of God for salvation.

The Triune God invites the whole creation to the Feast of Life, through Jesus Christ who came “that they may have life, and may have it in all its fullness” (John 10:10, REB), through the Holy Spirit who affirms the vision of the reign of God, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth!” (Isaiah 65:17, KJV). We commit ourselves together in humility and hope to the mission of God, who recreates all and reconciles all (par. 112).

These are some of the inspiring ideas contained in ecumenical declaration on mission and evangelism today. It responds to the cry of the Spirit in the Church of the risen Christ. We have to recognize that “**God’s Spirit is often subversive, leading us beyond boundaries and surprising us**” (par. 25). He is present with us “as companion, yet never domesticated or ‘tame’” (par. 35). And may God be blessed that it is so! Veni Creator Spiritus!

THE JOYS AND THE HOPES, THE GRIEFS AND THE ANXIETIES OF THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

In this chapter I tried to draw some ecclesiological consequences of the biblical concept of “a God who hides himself” (Is 45:15; NIV). This vision of “a hidden God”, *Deus absconditus*, should have clear repercussions also on our understanding of the church as *ecclesia abscondita*. Our quest of the kenotic God, with special reference to the kenotic presence of the Holy Spirit, prompts us to see the Church more humble, modest and conscious of its defects and insufficiencies, always in need of a constant reform, of a “*perennis reformatio*” (Decree on

Ecumenism, 6). This applies also to the relations of the Church with other Christian churches, other religions and worldviews. A truly kenotic ecclesiology will never be tempted to assume a triumphalistic and arrogant character. The Holy Spirit himself does not triumph in face of the present situation of the Church, but gives life and stimulates “with groans that words cannot express” (Rm 8:26; NIV).

The Second Vatican Council spoke about the radiance of Christ (*claritas Christi*) which should brighten the countenance of the Church (cf. Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 1). That affirmation in no way implies its triumphalistic vision. Christian ecclesiology needs to be reoriented in the light of the kenosis of Christ, inseparable from the kenotic presence of the Holy Spirit. In this perspective the guiding principle will always remain the mystery of Christ’s cross and resurrection, and of Pentecost. Such a program of Church reform was launched by the Council, “so that the sign of Christ (*signum Christi*) may shine more brightly over the face of the Church” (*Lumen gentium*, 15).

The question is whether this program has been so far consequently and sufficiently pursued.⁶³ During these years the Roman Catholic Church commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). One often emphasizes the need to attend to the signs of times. In this regard it is noteworthy to draw special attention to the first sentence of the Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, which expresses **the solidarity with people**: “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 the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ”.

In these words the Church has solemnly promised to be faithful and attentive to people, to respect their expectations and love them. Can we honestly and with a clear conscience celebrate this golden jubilee? To what extent has the Church itself remained faithful to this promise? Can we witness enough openness and courage? It seems that still more openness is needed towards those who seek and ask questions. To understand the signs of times means to be ready to accompany those who are in search for ways that the radiance of Christ the Servant, and of the kenotic presence of the Holy Spirit, should brighten the

⁶³ In some texts of the Council one can still see, however, some remaining features of a triumphalistic ecclesiology. Here are just a few examples: 1. the affirmation of the fullness of means of salvation in the Roman Catholic Church, whereas in other churches there are only “elements” or endowments which build the church (*Decree on Ecumenism*, 3); 2. the subsistence and presence in the Roman Catholic Church of all that belongs to the church in the full sense; 3. such conception exerts a negative influence on the relations of the church with all the “outsiders”. Cf. J. Brosseder, *Der verborgene Gott und die Kirche. Eine Einführung*, in: *Verborgener Gott – verborgene Kirche? Die kenotische Theologie und ihre ekklesiologische Implikationen*, hrsg. von J. Brosseder, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln 2001, 9-25, esp. 16-18.

countenance of the Church. These must be the ways leading into the depth of faith, hope and love.

CHAPTER VI

CRY OF THE SPIRIT AND THE CRISIS IN THE CHURCH: SOME THEOLOGICAL AND ECUMENICAL REFLECTIONS

The time of crisis is a special moment in the history of the Church when the cry of the Spirit in human life resounds more strongly and more frequently. "If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rv 2:7). In the Book of Revelation this cry is repeated seven times in the call addressed to the seven churches (see chapters 2-3). It is difficult to imagine how it would be possible to express as simply today the urgency of the cry of the Spirit in the world.

Many people ask a serious question: What is wrong with the Church today? A simple answer was given years ago by Mother Theresa of Calcutta: "It is you and me". In fact it is a matter of conscience for every one of us. Self-examination is recommended for all. As a theologian and ecumenist I offer some theological suggestions which may show the extent to which a truly ecumenical task may be carried out both in our thinking and in our actions.

Critics of the present situation in the Roman Catholic Church have identified such problems as a need for decentralization, greater participation of women in her life and her decision making bodies, more liberal approaches to ethical issues and more democracy. All these views may be helpful and justified but remain somehow on the surface.

The diagnosis seems to demand a much more thorough theological and ecumenical approach. Each crisis is at the same time an opportunity to understand better the signs of the time. One should not dwell on superficialities but go into the depth of things. Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches today!

THE CHURCH IS NO GOAL IN HERSELF

Christianity is not an easy religion. It has something complex in its very nature. Many difficulties arise from the inner tension between different aspects of this complexity, bipolarity and duality. This tension may lead to a fruitful dialectic between the old and the new, but it may also produce a destructive dualism. Some flexibility is required to keep a balance between stability and change, continuity and discontinuity. One tendency should not exclude and fight another one as harmful and hostile.

It is in this way that the danger of traditionalism and fundamentalism can be avoided. Tradition is the Church's way in succeeding human generations. It is a dynamic process of continuous *aggiornamento*, both a continuation and a purification. If tradition loses its

dynamism, then it buries itself and turns into harmful traditionalism. As a matter of fact traditionalism means destruction of the true dynamism of a living tradition. The pilgrim Church goes through the centuries towards the final fulfillment of human history. She is not the goal in herself but only a means and instrument of salvation. In her life tradition means to be always on the way, to be open, to encounter people and in them Jesus Christ himself, who is present in their lives “to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20) as their Lord and Savior. We are, all of us, only his disciples.

The Church fulfills her role when she does not concentrate on her own structures, hierarchies and privileges. God himself and the good of people should always remain in the very center of her concern in preaching the Good News of salvation. I do not deny the importance of questions concerning the structures. However, although in the time of crisis they should be discussed, in the whole set of questions linked to the Christian faith they should have a subordinate place. To show the way to God, the Church has **to divert her attention from herself**. If she in her preaching constantly turns around her own concerns and interests, she cannot expect to invitingly attract others to follow Jesus Christ, who is portrayed in the Gospel as totally devoted to people, their liberation from evil and their salvation in the reign of God.

THE BASIC SOURCE OF OUR DIFFICULTIES

In the following reflections I will first draw attention to some examples of inner tensions resulting from duality and bipolarity contained in Christian teachings. During church history these tensions often led to a dangerous dualism and consequently to hostile and contradictory attitudes among believers.

1) **The image of God** as presented in church teaching is in this respect of utmost importance. But precisely here we can already see some unavoidable tension. In light of the Christian faith God is the Triune Being, the communion of three Divine Persons. The prominent Greek Orthodox theologian, Joannis Zizioulas, explains this in the following way:

Being means life, and life means communion. (...) The being of God is a relational being; without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God. (...) In this way, communion becomes an ontological concept in patristic thought. Nothing in existence is conceivable in itself, as an individual (...), since even God exists thanks to an event of communion. In this manner the ancient world heard for the first time that it

is communion which makes beings “be”: nothing exists without it, not even God.¹

A tension is evident here: the unity is equally essential and equally determining as the triune diversity. The human mind immediately faces in such a vision of communion a striking paradox, a challenging antinomy difficult to accept from a purely rational point of view. The history of Christian doctrine gives eloquent witness to the way in which each epoch faced some serious problems in reconciling unity with diversity, *one* with *many* in a vision of the reality of God and in the very concept of the faith itself.

The consequences are enormous: the unilateral emphasis placed on the moment of unity can easily lead to the danger of authoritarian absolutism, while the aspect of multiplicity (“triuneness”!) and variety may open space for an unlimited plurality in different areas of church life. When kept apart or unilaterally and excessively stressed upon, both approaches can be equally damaging. The two poles must be held in balance. Unity understood as uniformity would mean the destruction of Christianity.

This seems also to be a basic source of many contemporary difficulties. They arise from the duality and bipolarity that characterize Christian faith and teaching. Existing tensions are not easily harmonized and kept in fruitful dialectic. They can degenerate into a harmful dualism when one dominating dimension of reality excludes another, subjects it or opposes it as something hostile. Let us look closer at these issues, very much relevant to our problem of the crisis in the Church.²

2) In the Christian **teaching about Christ** (Christology) we can find a similar divergence and place for a possible conflict of interpretations. For some believers the role of Christ consists above all in the redemption of the sinful world, in introducing and proclaiming the reign of God. He is the only Savior of the world. In this perspective, what is not Christian is considered as evil, opposite and hostile to the Christian world. A tendency to exclude and condemn would then dominate in this kind of thinking. Here Christian exclusivity and soteriological exclusivism have their main roots.

There is yet another approach. Since the divine Logos has entered through his incarnation into the history of humankind and the whole world, one can therefore speak about his full solidarity with every human being and the whole of creation. Such is the teaching of the II. Vatican Council: “For by his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man” (*Gaudium et spes*, par. 22). This is a guideline already formulated by many church Fathers who emphasized the universal, truly cosmic extent of the redemption by Christ. They used to affirm: “what has

¹ J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, London 1985, pp. 16-17.

² For some inspiring reflections see W. Beinert, *Wege aus der Kirchenkrise*, “Christ in der Gegenwart” 64 (2012) Nr. 21, 237-238.

not been assumed, has not been healed” (*quod non est assumptum, non est sanatum*), that is to say, it has not been redeemed and saved. This conception is marked by an unlimited openness of Christianity towards the non-Christian world of spiritual values. What results from this vision is a truly comprehensive catholicity, wholeness and universality which has its limit only in what is evidently sin and evil. This approach tends in the direction of inclusivity and the all-embracing love and mercy of God.

3) A similar bipolarity and tension appear in the **biblical view of creation**. The world in which we live and where the Church fulfills her mission is an ambivalent reality and not simply a good one. The New Testament knows a concept of duality in the cosmos. Especially in the writings of John the Evangelist a characteristic expression of “this world” (*ho kósmos touútos*) often appears as a synonym for that realm of existence and way of life which is opposed to the purpose of God. Because of sin, it finds itself in the power of evil: “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 Jn 5:19; NIV). The lot of the Redeemer himself was determined by the fact that “the world did not recognize him” (Jn 1:10). But he will finally defeat “the prince of this world” (Jn 14:30) and “overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). Christians are therefore encouraged not to love the world “or anything in the world” (1 Jn 2:15). This is an attitude of historical pessimism.

On the other hand the world is shown to be God’s creation, and his work is described as “very good” or “very beautiful” (Gn 1:31). God himself “so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (Jn 3:15). The ultimate goal of Jesus Christ’s saving mission was to transform the world into a new reality, “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rv 21:1). This view strikes a tone of confidence and optimism.

Because of this ambivalent character of the world, Christians have to discern critically their attitude – to accept the world with gratitude as a good gift of the Creator, but not to sinfully succumb to it. According to Paul the Apostle, our conduct towards the world requires, with the help of the Holy Spirit, a wise “distinguishing between the spirits” (1 Co 12:10). **The discernment of spirits is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit**. On the one hand, we have to discern the Spirit of God acting in the world for liberation of the oppressed, for the healing and reconciliation of people. On the other hand, we have also to discern evil spirits working for the destruction of life. The future belongs to the “new world”. Christian hope is oriented towards the eschatological coming of Christ and the transformation of the world, “for this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Co 7:31).

4) Still another example of bipolar, unsolved tension is **a teaching about the Church** (ecclesiology). There are, based on New Testament images, many descriptions of what the Church is. They express its different aspects. In St. Paul’s letters a privileged place belongs to the image of the Body of Christ endowed with different charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit. As the human body has different equally important members, so by analogy the Church has a communion of believers whose head is Christ himself and

who are all equal in the face of God. The tension begins when the hierarchical structure of the Church, with the special role of the pope (traditionally called *vicarius Christi!*) is excessively emphasized. This leads inevitably to the development of a centralism in church structures. Today in our ecumenical situation this is one of the main obstacles to a restoration of unity in the Church. The category of the pilgrim People of God awaits its consequent implementation.

In this regard the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI can be considered a courageous and humble act that implies a certain demythologization and demystification of the supreme authority in the Roman Catholic Church, an authority that claims infallibility in clearly defined cases. The pope's ministry appears to be more human and closer to our human condition. That pope who stressed so much the role of tradition was paradoxically the one who, through his retirement, has broken it. In this way he has shown that the petrine ministry consists in opening the way to Christ, the Servant and Savior of all people. This break of tradition may facilitate, at least to some extent, dialogue on this thorny issue.

IN SEARCH FOR WAYS TO OVERCOME THE CRISIS

The tensions resulting from a bipolarity of central Christian teachings have their serious repercussions on church life. This happens when one pole is unilaterally stressed at the cost of the other one. Then difficulties arise which cannot be easily resolved. The present crisis in the church has its roots in such unilateral developments of Christian consciousness. The democratic mentality and attitudes of modern society also have their influence on what is now going on in the church. Any unilateral and dualistic outgrowth produces damaging tensions and hostile reactions.

Historical change is now taking place in our lifetime and thinking. The future of the Church depends very much on the way in which present tensions in Christian life will be dealt with. We stand at the crossroads where it is necessary to make a difficult, truly epoch-making decision about which direction we should take into the future. In the eyes of some people it is modernity that is the source of all misfortunes and has exercised a negative influence on the critical situation of the Church; for this reason they try to fight it in a very rigid and fundamentalist way. However, we are not allowed to forget that **God is the supreme Lord and master of the whole of human history**. The present time is not entirely an epoch of an irreversible fall and apostasy – an epoch which allegedly has fallen out of God's hands.

This kind of apocalyptic vision is stubbornly propagated by some traditionalist and fundamentalist groups, which often find a benevolent hearing even within decision-making bodies. In many decisions we can find simply a lack of historical thinking. Life is not a pure and rigid doctrine. The history of the Church, with its turbulences and tragedies, does not

develop simply according to such a “pure doctrine”. It is subjected to a dialectic of both regularity (accordance with the rules) and different “providential accidents” which mark the lives of believers.³

In fact the Church finds, in every age, its **renewal in returning to the Gospel message and not in announcing an apocalyptic apostasy**. Such was the idea of *aggiornamento* put forward by Pope John XXIII to overcome a fatal hiatus and a time of disparity between the Church and the world. It was the program of the Second Vatican Council convoked by him over fifty years ago. The Council has assimilated many insights from the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment: a basic appreciation of human progress, knowledge, democracy and independent value of terrestrial realities; the recognition of human rights, the freedom of religion and conscience. In addition the Council acknowledged the main postulates of the Reformation (above all the central role of Holy Scripture and using vernacular languages in the liturgy), and found a new relationship to other religions. Papal centralism has been balanced by a reevaluation of the bishop’s ministry and the role of local churches.

The Council wanted to assist all people in our time, whether they believe in God, or do not explicitly recognize him.⁴ The purpose was to help us to gain a clearer insight into our full destiny and surpassing dignity and to search for universal brotherhood. This conciliar program was deliberately a general outline of problems, given the variety of situations and human cultures in the world. Many things are still in a constant state of development. So the program of *aggiornamento* has to be continued, the more so because all urgent questions were not answered during the Council. Theologians often draw attention today to such unsolved issues as divorced people who live together in new unions and are not allowed to receive communion, obligatory celibacy for Latin clergy, human sexuality and birth-control, the present custom of appointing bishops, reform of the Roman curia, a new approach to the problem of papal primacy. All these issues regained a new actuality when Pope Francis was elected (2013) after the resignation of Benedict XVI. New hopes are being born for necessary changes in the Church.

How shall we respond to the cry of God’s Spirit? Are we truly listening to what he has to say to the churches today? **Do we understand also the cry of the world and the signs of the times?** (cf. Lk 12:56; *Gaudium et spes*, par. 4). What can be done to overcome the present crisis in the Church? I can point out only a few theological ideas that may be of some help for the discernment of our tasks.

First of all, our sensitivity to **the presence and action of the Holy Spirit has to be deepened**. The Church is no exclusive possessor of the

³ See Geza Vermes, *Providential Accidents: An Autobiography*, London 1998. The Author (died on May 8, 2013 in Oxford) was one of the most outstanding researchers of the historical Jesus and early Christianity.

⁴ See *Gaudium et spes*, par. 91.

truth. We all are only disciples of Christ and his Spirit. It is the promised Spirit of truth who can guide people “into all truth” (Jn 16:13). We have therefore to take seriously the warning of the apostle Paul: “Never try to suppress the Spirit or treat the gift of prophesy with contempt; think before you do anything – hold on to what is good and avoid every form of evil” (1 Th 5:19-22).

It is very important in times of crisis to have a living consciousness of the **eschatological orientation of Christian life and message**, turned towards God “who is to come” (Rv 1:4.8). We await the everlasting fulfillment of earthly history. As the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed proclaims, Jesus Christ “will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end”. This fact should be seriously taken into account. It helps us to recover a sense proportion between our temporal existence and the forthcoming world and to distinguish between what has lasting value and what is passing away. But there is a widespread tendency to postpone the coming of Christ to a very distant future while it is constantly occurring in the death of each human being and in the succession of living generations. Eschatological newness is already present in the world. Defending ourselves against the present time, we prove ourselves unready and unwilling to accept the ultimate reality of the One who is “coming soon” (Rv 22:12.20). In this way we may miss “the Bridegroom” as happens in Jesus’ parable of the ten bridesmaids. “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (Mt 25:13; NIV).

People of our time are very sensitive to the question of human freedom. Our special task today is to reflect deeply on the **biblical themes of liberation and freedom**. God the Father is shown in the Bible as the Creator of all, as the God of Exodus and of the liberation of all enslaved human beings. In turn, the New Testament shows Jesus as Savior of the world and the Holy Spirit as *Paráklitos*, i.e. Defender, Counselor and Consummator of the whole work of creation and salvation. This biblical tradition is an urgent appeal for the **solidarity of the Church with all people**. Let us also not forget that, in the Christian tradition, the concept of personhood was developed which became the foundation of our modern notion of human rights.

Wherefrom results our duty to reevaluate the essential attribute of the Church as **a serving or diaconal community, following the way of its Servant Lord**. Such is a logical consequence of the kenosis of Christ himself. Serving the needs of poor people is to hear their cry for help. The church’s real spiritual power is manifested through acts of service, surpassing the power of domination. In his homily, delivered on May 21, 2013 during a morning Mass in the residence “Domus Sanctae Marthae”, Pope Francis said: “the true power of the Church lies in serving”. Unfortunately, he added, the aspiration for power also has not escaped the

Church.⁵ This does not mean, of course, that we should throw out the basic hierarchical structures of the Church, but these are not goals in themselves.

According to the II. Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* (par. 1), "the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity". We may conclude: the Church and her structures are only a means and an instrument in the service of the salvation of people. In this respect, the decentralization of church structures in the Roman Catholic Church and the strengthening of regional bishops' conferences in local churches is a necessary and legitimate postulate today.

These are some introductory theological reflections on how to deal with the present crisis in the Church of Christ and of the Holy Spirit so that she may become a real space for the continuous Pentecost, in spite of human weakness and sin. Although Christianity is not an easy religion, when truly accepted and lived out, it can fascinate us, bring us joy, give us the sense of fulfillment in our lives and broaden our cognitive horizons. It very much depends on the quality of our preaching and experiencing the Gospel of Christ. If it is presented in incomprehensible language and deprived of living witness, then Christian experience becomes more difficult, unattractive and even too strange to be believed. Christian witness is credible when it is brought about through the convincing words and deeds of the disciples of Christ who follow their Master.

IN THE CAPTIVITY OF DOCTRINES

Let us 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 on the island of 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

⁵ See www.zenit.org, 22 May, 2013.

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.⁶

Those are very courageous and sincere words. Personally, as a member of the Joint Commission, I was very much impressed by them. In fact, we are all, even 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 has become more and more doctrinaire. The care for integrity, coherence and identity of doctrine has overshadowed so often 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. The history of the church with its tragedies and turbulences does not simply develop according to logic or an ideal of "pure doctrine". Nor does human life. They have their own dialectic.

In my own country, Poland, a bishop of the Evangelical-Reformed Church, Zdzislaw Tranda, has put forward a very challenging interpretation of Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37). Usually we see in the parable only a warning against lack of sensitivity to the situation of a human being in need. Bishop Tranda draws attention to the Old Testament regulations that forbade priests to approach the dead body for fear of ritual impurity. "None of them shall defile himself for the dead among his people" (Lv 21:1; cf. Nb 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 able to perform respective functions in the temple. Ritual purification should then last for seven days.

One can reasonably assume that, when the priest and the Levite passed by and saw the wounded man, they were not motivated by callousness, soullessness or sheer fear. They might 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 then about their duties in the temple?

For this reason it is not so much the priest and the Levite who should be blamed but rather the religious system which has exposed them

⁶ The text of this address was distributed to all members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

to the dilemma of 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 made one decision and not another. They were, so to speak, prisoners and slaves of the system. Mercy was shown by the good Samaritan, a schismatic and heretic.

The meaning of Jesus's parable is therefore more profound than it seems at first sight. It shows his opposition to the captivity of doctrine and numerous regulations. In this way we touch upon a very delicate and important issue. It is not enough to repeat doctrinal formulations and in this way to justify one's behavior 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 20th 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 the whole social groups who live in the captivity not only of a religious doctrine, but also in the captivity of their own party, politics and society. It is worthwhile to ask a 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?⁷

There is no need, I think, to comment on these words. Their relevance for the present-day ecumenical situation is clear. I would rather like to refer in this context to the late Fr. 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 some courageous Catholic nuns. He decided 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 has been lost in the universal Church, which, during past centuries, has undergone a long process of "de-hebraization", hellenization and latinization.

⁷ Z. Tranda, *W niewoli doktryny (In the Captivity of Doctrine)*, in "Gazeta Wyborcza", January 4-5, 1997, p. 17.

Fr. Daniel criticized a doctrinal type of Christianity in which the faith has been submitted to the logic of doctrines.⁸ 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. Humans have to cling to him and in this way to know Him. The early Judaeo-Christian Church of James offers some new possibilities also for ecumenism. Instead of stressing unceasingly the importance of 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 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 their 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 is characterized by its open character, richness of views, often contradictory ones. The reader himself has to reconcile them or simply to live with them. This openness and variety of religious perspectives is, as we shall see, one of the main features of Judaism.

THE NEED FOR DOCTRINAL CORRECTIONS

As said earlier, Christianity has become too doctrinaire. It has run away from the doxological understanding of dogma in the ancient Church. Ecclesiastical doctrines need significant corrections. On the threshold of the new millennium one spoke willingly, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, about the necessity to confess guilt concerning wrong attitudes of the past, contradicting the Gospel of Christ. Pope John Paul II wrote with regret in his apostolic letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (1994) about those “painful chapters of history” to which the Church must return with a spirit of repentance. One such chapter was “the acquiescence given, specially in

⁸ See Kinga Strzelecka OSU, *B^erit-Przymierze (B^erit-Covenant)*, Warsaw 1995, pp. 117-136 [interview with Fr. Daniel]; Daniel 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)*, in “Wież” (Warsaw) 42 (1999), No. 7, pp. 60-65.

certain centuries, to intolerance and even the use of violence in the service of truth” (par. 35).

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 other Churches, faiths, different cultures, women and the rights of all peoples to freedom and human dignity. Many traditional interpretations claimed a monopoly on the truth and to be 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, to conquer other peoples and to destroy their “pagan” religions. Thus, for many centuries Christian theology gave powerful ideological support for Western colonialism. It understood the mission of the Church to be the salvation of “infidels” by converting them to the Church even with the help of colonial conquerors.

Raising such issues is an expression of faith and loyalty to the Church. They must be answered clearly and quietly. All present-day efforts related to a necessary “purification” and conversion of the Church remain until now on the level of ethics. They do not touch ecclesiastical doctrines as such. It is clear that ethically orientated self-criticism is a very important step, but for ecumenism it is not sufficient. Ecclesiastical doctrines also need correction. 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 ethics, they will remain partial and insufficient, without decisive influence on ecumenism. The debate over 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 is today taught by the Church, very often far away from the real **“hierarchy of the truths”** proclaimed by the second Vatican Council (*Decree on Ecumenism*, par. 11). The very idea of a 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*.⁹ 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

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.

'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 (par. 12).

This is a very cautious statement that 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 is discussed by theologians of different denominations. It may become one of the most decisive ones for the future of ecumenism. The first step was already made 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"¹⁰, thus avoiding calling 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 us to further ecumenical investigations. The reconciliation of the Churches requires such an ecumenical reexamination 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 schism of 1054 from the ecumenical councils received unanimously by the East and the West.

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.¹¹ Only after the schism was this recognition withdrawn for the benefit of the Ignatian synod (869-870), which until today is considered in the Roman 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 effort, as the eighth ecumenical council. The problem of the *Filioque* dealt with successfully during that synod could 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**

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.

pluralism was found precisely in the decisions of the Photian Synod. It determined that each See could retain the ancient usages of its tradition.¹² Many unhappy events and controversies would have been spared had the Churches followed that rule in subsequent ages. True unity does not mean uniformity. Rather, it requires respect for 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 all of us.

THE WORD OF GOD ACCESSIBLE ONLY IN A VARIETY OF INTERPRETATIONS

As already said, the Bible displays a great tradition of freedom. A striking witness appears in the prophesy of Jeremiah: "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jr 23:29; RSVCE). Even the hardest rock cannot resist the force of a hammer. When the rabbis interpreted this verse of the Scripture, they emphasized above all the fullness of different meanings of God's words. One reads for example in the Talmud: "As the rock is broken into many pieces under the hit of hammer, so also every word which had come from the mouth of the Highest (let He be blessed!) was split into seventy languages".¹³ This means that the word of God is accessible only in its multiplicity to human beings. It is worth noting that this insight was shared by Jewish writers and compilers of the Gospels in the New Testament. The events of Jesus' life have been narrated by them not only once, in one narrative, but in four different versions and perspectives.

To discover the proper sense of the word of God we often need many human, even contradictory, words. The image of the divine word in seventy languages, as mentioned in the Talmud, contains a serious warning. It is a barrier against all fundamentalist attempts which lead to a falsification of religion. The word of God split into seventy languages does not allow it to be instrumentalized for different purposes, but is a double-edged sword, like the fire and hammer, which breaks the rock. Nobody can dispose of it according to his or her own will: "The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit,

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. All documents in *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 John Borelli and John H. Ericson, Crestwood, NY-Washington, DC 1996.

¹³ Shabbat 88b.

or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts” (Hbr 4:12; JB).

We have to be grateful to God that, in the religious and ecumenical dialogue, we have as a basis for interpretation the multi-layered, rich witness of the Bible and not only one condensed word. Scripture gathers unto itself wisdom from many centuries and different contexts, although the latter may, at least partly, contradict each other and remain in constant tension. Only in their witness as a whole do they convey the wisdom of the divine word and stimulate dialogue about its real content. In this way we may more easily avoid the danger of a fundamentalist interpretation of the written word. On the other hand, the plurality of biblical witnesses obligates us to take care that it does not lead to a sheer arbitrariness which would undermine the very sense of dialogue.

Genuine dialogue requires mutual confidence, responsibility, hermeneutical honesty and reliability. We have constantly to learn these attitudes. In this respect the interpretation of biblical texts is a very serious and delicate problem. Our translations abound with inaccuracies and often distort their original sense. Confrontation with the original text is in each case a necessity and by no means a vain effort.

All of us are invited first to join the dialogue of the biblical texts themselves. In their polyphonic variety they give testimony to one God only and to the truth and vitality of his word. The biblical writers speak about the self-revealing God in different ways, but it is always the Good News (cf. Ex 3:1-15; Jn 1:1-18; Ga 1,11-17). Both in the Old and the New Testaments God does not speak directly but uses human words to transmit his words and manifest his image. In the New Testament the image of God who forgives and determines the meaning of human life acquires some specific features because it becomes very concrete (*personale concretissimum*) in the historical and unique figure of Jesus Christ.

Nothing that is human is alien to the Bible. While reading it we understand its words in the light of our human experiences. The biblical text and the context of human life are the two mutually interrelated challenges. The revelation of God expressed by human words in the books of the Scripture is linked inseparably with our language, our images, conceptions and historical situations.

The Bible teaches us to understand and respect various interpretations. It is its unusual feature, rarely perceived and appreciated. Some contemporary Jewish thinkers draw attention to the fact that in the Hebrew Bible different interpretations are present and that this variety is sometimes also expressed in contradictions.¹⁴ Various interpretations are

¹⁴ See G. Scholem. *Tradition und Kommentar als religiöse Kategorien im Judentum*. “Eranos Jahrbuch” 1962, pp. 19-48, esp. 29-30; J. Petuchowski. *Wie unsere Meister die Schrift erklären*. Freiburg i. Br. 1982, pp. 131, 160; Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible*, New Haven: Yale UP 1988.

considered to be something positive. One should not even try, at all costs, to harmonize these contradictions. They should not be leveled nor neutralized for it has been said: “*Once* God has spoken; *twice* have I heard this: that power belongs to God; and that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love” (Ps 62: 11-12; RSVCE; italics mine, W.H.).

Admirable indeed is this **divine “once” and human “twice”!** It is worth pondering. What strikes me is precisely this openness of the Hebrew Bible. Whoever reads it has to reconcile these inconsistent views for himself or simply to learn to live with them while being conscious of certain unavoidable tensions and contradictions in this paradoxical wisdom.

I am tempted to say that this is a fundamental and wise school of dialogue for all believers. The revelation of God is actualized in people at any time through the intermediary of interpretation. It is polyphonic and opens many perspectives, but it is subject to the conditions of human communication and culture and, at the same time, depends upon the limited possibilities of human language. Ultimately divine revelation remains for us humans a mystery which can be honored doxologically. All human attempts to understand its depth are not able to disclose its mystery and explain it adequately. The human passion to understand everything often demands too much.

We seem to know the Scriptures well, but they still remain for us a largely Unknown Book, not to mention alien and unfamiliar. We feel inside unable to fully assimilate its wisdom. In our attitude towards the Bible in our life we experience both a closeness and a distance which separates what is already known from what still remains unknown. In this experience we can see the greatness and wisdom of the divine word. Human life itself is something so complex and full of hidden meanings that the whole truth about it cannot be expressed by only one story. Just think: the gift of existence, the world and our life are magnificent and astonishing realities, but at the same time they can so often fill us with awe and dismay. Therein lies a certain paradox and “coincidence of oppositions” described long ago so perceptively by Nicolas from Kues.

Perhaps some contradictions in the biblical texts mentioned above are also reflections of life with all its inconsistencies. Encountering what is alien and unknown to us can help us to discover something more than we knew previously. It is the unknown meaning which urges us on to further investigations. When our ears are too familiar with certain texts, it can be impossible to detect their deeper meaning. In this way knowledge of the living truth in its richness is often thwarted. It is quite dangerous merely to repeat the biblical texts endlessly and to be resistant to new insights. What is discovered anew makes our religious experience more authentic and fruitful. Biblical texts certainly have more to say to us than we suppose or expect. Constant personal contact with Scripture is an unceasing lesson in modesty and astonishment. A newly disclosed meaning of the text may become each time a deeply spiritual and personal event.

The word of God alone does not end discussion or exclude controversial interpretations. Rather, sometimes it opens up necessary debate and dialogue. It is precisely in this effort of interpretation that a genuine culture of honesty and dispute becomes so urgent. Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches today!

A CULTURE OF DIALOGUE IS A CULTURE OF HONESTY

Every epoch asks the question about the future of Christianity and the everlasting newness of the Gospel message. In the four-version Gospel one has to look for a deeper understanding of Jesus' intentions and the meaning of questions people ask today at the beginning of the third millennium. Reflecting on the future of Christianity we ask at the same time about the sense of our own existence as Christians, witnesses of the risen Christ, who are called to be his people open to dialogue.

In 2001 an important document called *Charta Oecumenica: Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe* was signed in Strasbourg. It emphasizes in the preface that, following the Gospel, the European Churches want to stand up for the dignity of the human person and contribute to reconciling peoples and cultures. The document is designed "to promote *an ecumenical culture of dialogue* and co-operation at all levels of church life, and to provide agreed criteria for this"¹⁵.

From the very beginning, I was a member of the international and interdenominational drafting committee of the text of the *Charta Oecumenica*. The following reflections will concentrate first on the need for a new culture of ecumenical honesty as required by dialogue itself, which today encounters so many difficulties.

To pass over real problems in silence only generates painful experience, disenchantment and frustration in partners to the dialogue, who deserve benevolence, understanding and respect. Ecumenical honesty does not permit our own theological position to be considered the only dominant and decisive criterion for dialogue. If our Church faces some criticism, we should not immediately jump to ascribe to the partner of the dialogue some hidden or even impure motives. Only in an atmosphere of mutual respect can we represent the standpoints of the Churches without aggressive attitude and defensive polemics.

Experienced ecumenists encourage us all the time to preserve patience and perseverance in dialogue, thus opposing denominational self-sufficiency and any tendency to remain separated from one another. In this regard it is somehow their prophetic function to call to mind that the very heart of the Christian identity is the turn to Christ and his Gospel. In the

¹⁵ *Charta Oecumenica: A Text, a Process, and a Dream of the Churches in Europe*. Edited by Viorel Ionita and Sarah Numico, Geneva 2003, p. 8. Italics mine, W.H.

historic shape of our Churches there are certain elements which do not serve a genuine Christian identity. Their conversion to Christ and mutually to each other requires that they resign from everything which makes reconciliation impossible. The measure of this resignation and self-limitation is the example given by Christ himself who “emptied himself (*eaυtòn ekénōsen*), to assume the condition of a slave” (Ph 2:7; JB). This is an inspiring idea of *kenosis*, that truly divine ability of self-limitation and resignation. It requires a profound change of consciousness without which the multiplicity of divided denominations will not manage to become a reconciled diversity.

Let us not treat this biblical insight as something jeopardizing our confessional identity! It hides in itself an unusual potential for ecumenical wisdom – difficult but real “wisdom that comes down from above” (Jm 3:17; JB). This wisdom, as the same apostle James explains, “makes for peace, and is kindly and considerate; it is full of compassion and shows itself by doing good”.

Today we already have **enough theological premises** which allow us to reach consensus on fundamental truths of the faith. What is needed is a sincere will on each side to achieve it. Some unresolved differences could then be regarded as open to further discussion because they are not main obstacles to the work of reconciliation in the Churches. Let us not abuse the statement that the unity of the Church is a gift of God which cannot be demanded of him. This unity was also entrusted to us as a difficult task which demands dedication, involvement, vigilance and continuous effort on our part. The fragment of the Letter to Ephesians (written probably by one of the disciples of the apostle Paul), expressed in the form of a fervent request, is incomparable in this regard:

I, the prisoner in the Lord, implore you therefore to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve *the unity of the Spirit* by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, *one Spirit*, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all (Ep 4:1-6; JB; italics mine, W.H.).

Let us add to these words also an unusual encouragement from another verse of the same chapter: “If we live by the truth and in love (*alētheúontes dè en agapē*), we shall grow in all ways into Christ, who is the head by whom the whole body is fitted and joined together...” (Ep 4:15). Giving in this way witness to the truth, we can grow together, and not merely individually, in the living knowledge of Christ. Ecumenical honesty can then be described as witnessing and confessing the truth in love. Only

through benevolence, understanding and love can the witness to the truth achieve its aim and truly serve unity. Selflessness, gentleness and patience, so much emphasized by the author, are the three privileged attitudes as concrete expressions of love.

Our commitment, worthy of our vocation, to the work of restoring unity becomes in this way an everyday form of honoring the one Lord and the one Spirit. We should never forget that the Father of all is “over all, through all and within all”. Our true concern about “the unity of the Spirit” in the Church, and also about the plurality of the forms of this unity, should be our criterion of honesty in the behavior of the disciples of Christ, “called into one and the same hope”. A special responsibility in this respect reposes on those whom he has made apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (cf. Ep 4:11).

The sincere will to be in communion with all who also confess Christ as our Lord and Savior is an essential feature of Christian identity. Baptism administered in the name of the triune God confirms our belonging to Him. It is, as the so-called “Lima Text” (1982) explains, “the sign of new life through Jesus Christ (...), participation in Christ’s death and resurrection”, “a sign and seal of our common discipleship”, “**a basic bond of unity**”.¹⁶ One should not underestimate the significance of these statements, because “our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship”.¹⁷ The same document stresses the role of the Spirit: “**The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in and after their baptism**”.¹⁸ In this perspective baptism has “a dynamic which embraces the whole of life”.¹⁹

Christian identity manifests itself in the acceptance of all who have also been called by God to the same hope, mentioned by the author of the Letter to Ephesians. The peace that should bind all together binds us first with our Church, being for us a historical transmitter of the faith. While remaining in unity with it we give witness to the honesty of our ecumenical commitment. However, through this commitment we have chosen at the same time to follow the way of encounter and dialogue. In this way we come to know other dimensions of the Christian life which have not found fuller realization in our own church. Being open to others brings us the possibility of encountering other ways of living up to the Gospel. This may help us to appreciate the depth of our faith and to overcome denominational one-sidedness.

I strongly believe that ecumenical initiatives come from the **inspiration of God’s Spirit**. We are not sheer dreamers but take seriously

¹⁶ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva 1982, here: *Baptism*, par. 2 and 6.

¹⁷ *Baptism*, par. 6.

¹⁸ *Baptism*, par. 5. Bold-face mine, W.H.

¹⁹ *Baptism*, par. 7.

the urgent sevenfold appeal of the Book of Revelation: "If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches!" Do we hear this inner voice today?

Many people in our churches have not yet been convinced that ecumenism and dialogue are a living exchange of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Maybe they have been personally wounded by someone or nurture a deeply rooted concern and anxiety about the preservation of their confessional identity. One can observe it today not only in the world of Orthodox Christians.

For those of us who have been committed to ecumenical efforts and are often accused of being unfaithful to our own church, it is a difficult experience. Ecumenical openness requires a lot of courage which is a mark of sincerity and inner honesty. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that, to fellow members of our church who are unfavorable to ecumenism, we should show humility, selflessness, gentleness and patience, as recommended in the Letter to the Ephesians.

The culture of honesty helps us bear witness to the truth in our feeling of loyalty to our own church. It especially concerns the situation when, in the opinion of our church, other Christians have not preserved the whole truth considered important for the mutual recognition of the identity of faith. Thank God today we have become, to a large extent and after some painful experiences linked with the Vatican document *Dominus Iesus*, more careful in passing judgment on the ecclesial status of other churches. Ecumenical dialogue has deepened the awareness that, outside our church, the Spirit of God is present and active as well, bestowing his gifts on others as well. They also live their lives in obedience to the Gospel although we are often reluctant to acknowledge this fact. This makes it easier to recognize the Christian identity in other churches who lead their believers on the way to salvation. In this way our denominational logic, predominant in many judgments of the past, proves to be unfair and unjust and needs thorough correction. Let us learn from each other to accept the gifts so abundantly given to all of us by the Spirit of God!

Under the influence of ecumenism some significant corrections have already been made in our theological thinking on matters of faith. Our deeper understanding of the action of the Holy Spirit in all churches has contributed to overcoming a narrow-mindedness in our judgments. We have learned how to reconcile a reflection on the institutional continuity of the salvific action of Christ with the sovereignty of the Spirit, "the Lord, the giver of life" (the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed). It is he who enables us all to address God with confidence, saying "Abba, Father!" (Rm 8:15; Ga 4:6). The apostle Paul wrote: "The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words..." (Rm 8:26; JB). Our insufficient human words are those of confidence, groaning inwardly (cf. Rm 8:23), confessing our insufficiency, thanksgiving and praise of divine kindness.

This confident, inspired-by-the-Spirit crying out to God is a primary Christian experience in different churches – an existential experience which precedes any theological reflection. It should not be ignored. This attitude teaches a leniency and forbearing recommended by the Apostle: “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters” (Rm 14:1; NIV). Such an attitude of mind and heart is justified by what Christ himself did to all of us: “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rm 15:7).

In other words, one should not demand from others too much and above all not judge them and start an argument. The Christian virtue of discretion accords to the other the right to judge according to his or her own conscience: “Hold on to your own belief, as between yourself and God – and consider the man fortunate who can make his decision without going against his conscience. (...) And every act done in bad faith is a sin” (Rm 14:22.23; JB).

We have become more and more aware that the truth revealed in the divine economy of salvation is no detailed set of assertions and norms of behavior. It is above all a fundamental truth about the immense benevolence of God towards humankind. The tradition of the Christian East describes him as a Loving Friend of every human being (*Philánthropos*).

THE CULTURE OF CONTENTION IN THE CHURCH

The dispute about the truth of the Gospel in the history of the church and theology has gone on since the very beginning of Christianity. Its causes were often human ambitions, needs and interests. The contention about priority and superiority started even in the very circle of Jesus’ closest disciples. According to the account of the evangelists they argued among themselves in different circumstances about who among them was the greatest (cf. Mt 18:1; Mk 9:3; Lk 9:46). Even during the Last Supper “a dispute arose also between them about which should be reckoned the greatest” (Lk 22:24; JB). Jesus dampened their sick ambitions. He encouraged them to follow example of children and reject any temptation to dominate people:

This must not happen with you. No, the greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves. (...) Yet here am I among you as one who serves, *hōs ho diakonōn* (Lk 22:26-27).

An echo of these words will come back in the letter written most probably by a disciple of the apostle Peter:

Be the shepherds of the flock of God that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, because God wants it (...). Never be a dictator over any group that

is put in your charge, but be an example that the whole flock can follow” (1 Pt 5:2-3).

A striking fact is that the New Testament shows a realistic vision of the church. It does not hide the fact that the lives of Christians were, since the beginning, also marked by conflicts and attempts to deal with them. The time of the Apostles and their disciples was no exception. The same applies to the first centuries of Christianity, when controversies around false teachings convulsed the church even during its persecutions. Many Christians have been uncomfortable with such an image of the church. The author of the Acts of the Apostles (2:43-47) and then the church Fathers usually showed an ideal vision of unity and agreement among the Apostles and in the primitive community of Jesus’ disciples. In succeeding centuries, especially in times of different dangers, an ideal image of the church was also placed before the eyes of the faithful.

An exemplary case of a dispute in the New Testament appears to be what happened in Antioch in the relationship between the Apostles Paul and Peter. A reliable account of this contention is known only in the Pauline version (Ga 2:11-21). Thus in Antioch, an important city for the early Christianity, Paul openly opposed Peter. He did it “in front of everyone” (v. 14). Unfortunately, neither the reaction of Peter nor the result of the dispute is known to us in the writings of the New Testament.

The objection raised by Paul referred to the ambiguous behavior of Peter who, being a Jew, had meals in Antioch with Christians of pagan origin, but “after certain friends of James arrived he stopped doing this and kept away from them altogether for fear of the group that insisted on circumcision” (v. 12). And this was his fault. Other Jews also joined Peter in this hypocrisy, including Barnabas, Paul’s companion. In the eyes of the Apostle of the nations, it was behavior not in line with the truth of the Gospel. Paul objected especially to Peter that, as a Jew, he lives like a pagan and not like a Jew, but at the same time he forces Gentiles to follow Jewish customs. In this way a fundamental Christian message was questioned: “what makes a man righteous is not obedience to the Law, but faith in Jesus Christ” (v. 16).

So it was in fact a situation of dramatic confrontation. No wonder it has become a topic of recurring reflection since the time of the church Fathers. Following Martin Luther the protagonists of the Reformation saw in this confrontation the prototype of the doctrinal conflict with the papal church, which in turn led to confessional polemics. It seems, however, that the behavior of Peter was rather a practical denial of the truth of the Good News than a real deviation from the basic principles of Christianity recognized by both Apostles.²⁰ Perhaps Peter tried to assume a conciliatory attitude between James and Paul. In this regard we have no clear vision of the situation. If, on the one hand, Paul was right when he boldly rebuked

²⁰ See H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, Göttingen 1989, pp. 84-86.

Peter, on the other hand we have to praise also humility of the first of the Apostles, as it was emphasized already in the 3rd century by bishop Cyprian of Carthage in his letter to bishop Quintus.²¹

From an ecumenical point of view, this early contention in Antioch makes it possible for us to formulate certain **conditions and criteria of the culture of dispute in the Church**. It would be a mistake to project anachronistically our present interdenominational situation into the time of the first century of the Christian faith when teaching about the church was only at an early stage. Nevertheless, contention in the Church about the truth of the Gospel has not lost its actuality or become out-of-date. It should not be excluded as something alien to Christianity because it contributes to a better understanding of the faith.

At the beginning of the Letter to Galatians Paul has risked some unusually severe words: “let me warn you that if anyone preaches a version of the Good News different from the one we have already preached to you, whether it be ourselves or an angel from heaven, he is to be condemned” (Ga 1:8). It is very significant that this threat of condemnation is not directed in the dispute with Peter. Had he admitted that Peter preached a different Gospel, then he would certainly not have referred to him with benevolence, approval and appreciation (cf. Ga 2:7-9). The account of the dispute in Antioch testifies that Paul did not question the apostolic dignity and competence of Peter. Therefore, an important condition of the culture of dispute in the church is a clear acknowledgment also of the fact that **an opponent still remains a fellow-Christian**. One should not refuse him this dignity.

It is an extremely helpful statement when one has to deal with controversial questions and to promote a culture of contention. In this regard the determinant criterion is the decision the early church took in consequence of the dispute. It was then acknowledged that in Christianity the most important, reliable and authoritative thing is reference to the person of Jesus and to the truth of the Good News preached by him. They constitute the critical norm in an evaluation of particular positions which confront each other during a given dispute.

The confrontation between two Apostles in Antioch cannot be a casual model for recurring conflicts between church hierarchy and charismatic people in the Church endowed with a prophetic gift of the Spirit. Certainly, Peter enjoyed great respect in the antiochian church because followers of James and Paul reckoned with his opinion. Feeling responsible for the others, he did not after all deny the accusation of being “manifestly in the wrong” (v. 11). During forthcoming centuries the question of guilt and error will once again return, especially concerning the most responsible persons in the church. How in such cases are we able to discern effectively the truth of the Gospel? When can we speak about legitimate resistance to ecclesiastical teaching and its authoritative and

²¹ See PL 4,191-438.

normative value? We are still searching for a truly ecumenical answer to such questions.

In the face of false doctrines, Christians of past centuries were concerned about the integrity of the Gospel. Today we also have to overcome tensions and solve conflicts in the church. I am inclined to see in this situation a specific sort of **participation in the mystery of the divine kenosis of Christ and of the Holy Spirit**. God rejects violence and does not impose his gift of salvation upon anyone. He draws us to himself by his goodness and beauty, and he invites us to cooperate: "We are fellow workers with God" (1 Co 3:9).

The exhortation to follow Jesus' attitude of humility (cf. Ph 2:5-7) and to love people (cf. 1 Co 13) is addressed to all of us. Love should govern all attempts to cope with situations of conflict and contention in the Church. People inspired by love are ready to acknowledge also their own weakness. They take seriously the warning: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged (...). Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own?" (Mt 7:1.3). Those who truly love people are also able to pray for their opponents and even for those who persecute them (cf. Mt 5:44).

We are surprised to learn that Scripture suggests different ways of resolving the problem of conflicts in the community of believers. Let us mention some of them: anathema by means of which someone is condemned, excommunication, accusation of being a servant of the devil (cf. 1 Co 5:3-5), defamation and the postulate of intolerance towards opponents. These different attitudes were certainly conditioned by the mentality of earlier times. They cannot be uncritically followed and strictly applied today. A good example has been given in this respect by the Second Vatican Council which avoided the condemnation of errors and did not revert to anathemas or other disciplinary sanctions. At present, when we observe a higher level of education in society, we have to treat believers as mature church members, able to witness responsibly to the truth of the Gospel. They have the right to their own discernment in matters of faith, the more so because they are assumed to have the so-called sense of faith (*sensus fidei*).

This way was chosen by the apostle Paul. He used to require believers that they judge certain matters for themselves: "I say to you as sensible people: judge for yourselves what I am saying" (1 Co 10:15). This attitude demands a humble admission of human weakness by those who have positions of great responsibility in the Church. Today we must avoid everything that may appear as sheer aspiration for power or as manipulation of the truth. Particularly harmful are such phenomena as a refusal to engage in true dialogue and an infliction of punishment for holding any critical opinion. What is needed in the process of solving conflicts is, above all, **a convincing argumentation**. Thanks to it we can find a language which does not inflame passions but favors a patient search for an appropriate solution. Such an effort is not futile although we may not see immediately

any result of an attempt at reconciliation and agreement. Effort and labor are required in the long run. God is patient. Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches! He is patient and humble too!

THE CRY OF THE SPIRIT AND ECUMENICAL IMPATIENCE TODAY

As mentioned earlier, today we already have solid theological premises to reach consensus in the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. Where there is a will, there also is a way out of difficult situations.

Such a conviction inspired the initiative of some prominent Catholics and Protestants in Germany to publish on September 5, 2012 their urgent appeal, entitled *Ecumenism now – One God, One Faith, One Church*, to overcome divisions between them²². There is a good occasion for this sort of appeal: 500 years after the Reformation and 50 years after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The document addressed to church authorities and to local communities was initially signed by 23 German Christians of both churches. They stress that it is high time to end separation. As Christians in the country of the Reformation, they feel a special responsibility to encourage that the common faith be lived in the common church. To discuss without end controversial issues among hierarchs and theologians is not enough.

Their appeal is an expression of ecumenical impatience among committed German Catholics and Protestants. It mistrusts the hierarchy and official church representatives of both churches. One of those who started the initiative, the Protestant theologian Christian Führer, said openly in an interview: “From the hierarchy there is nothing to be expected”.²³ The document is directed above all to all theological brake operators who do not want to change anything in the status quo. The initiative, which first came from some lay people in the Catholic Church (esp. professor Norbert Lammert, president of the German Bundestag), makes clear that ordinary believers “from below” want to bring about necessary change in the situation. They have become more and more anxious and upset. We see all the time their growing longing for unity. The effects of the division are painfully felt in the everyday life of Christians, especially in mixed marriages.

For this reason the appeal bears a simple and eloquent title: “Ecumenism now!” One should not wait any longer. It resumes what, many times in the past, has already been said without any practical consequences. As far as the content of the appeal is concerned, there is nothing new in it.

²² “Wir dürfen nicht warten”. *Prominente Christen fordern “Ökumene jetzt”*, “KNA-Ökumenische Information” 37, 11. September 2012, pp. 3-4. In internet: <http://oecumene-jetzt.de>

²³ <http://www.publik-forum.de/religion-kirchen/artikel/wir-wollen-unruhe-stiften-online>

Only the strategy is new because the initiative was initiated by prominent Christians involved in politics, economy, science, culture and church life. This might stir consciences and attract the attention of many people who are aware that what brings Catholics and Protestants together is much more than what divides them. Is this troublesome impatience?

Of course, those who came up with the appeal knew very well the objections that would be immediately raised. These are the theological differences between the Churches of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church. They concern what is actually taught about the Lord's Supper, the ministry and the church itself. But to take theology seriously does not mean to put those differences that came into being in the past over the authority of Scripture and the priorities set by it. The concern about the unity of the church cannot be postponed until full theological agreement has been reached on those controversial issues. Existing differences do not justify separation any longer. Various Christian traditions should be recognized as enrichments of the one church. There are good reasons to speak about an "ecumenism of gifts", i.e. about the mutual exchange of charismata given to the churches by the Holy Spirit. This is certainly a far better way than stubborn professed separation from one another.

Those who first signed the document explained that their goal was not to create any organization or to formulate certain postulates. Rather and above all, they wanted to give witness to their views and to open wide discussion with the participation of ordinary Christians. For this reason the description of their aim may be a bit diffuse and undetermined: "We do not want reconciliation while continuing separation, but lived unity in the consciousness of historically originated diversity". Necessary concretizations are expected to come in future discussions. The great anniversaries will soon pass by. German Christians signing the document declared: "we want to do everything to insure that, after the jubilees are over, nothing will be the same again."

The well-known Catholic theologian, Otto Herman Pesch, one of those who first signed the document, has expressed the view that in fact we do not need so much serious theological clarifications of fundamental issues. They have already been achieved. With regard to those controversial questions which still remain, do they really separate our churches? – he asked. They are rather differences in spirituality, theological theory and legitimate existential priorities. The only realistic goal of ecumenical reconciliation is the communion of churches, and not organic unity. A good example in this regard can be seen in the mutual relationships of ancient patriarchates. They differed legally and in their church structures, but this was no obstacle to their mutual communion²⁴.

So, is there any real chance for the success of this appeal? Will it push the process of reconciliation any further? "One God, One Faith, one

²⁴ See *Kritische Stimmen überwiegen in Debatte zum Ökumene-Aufruf*, "KNA-Ökumenische Information" 37, 11. September 2012, pp. 8-9.

Church” (cf. Ef 4:4-6) – is it for the moment only a utopian idea? Or is it a prophetic and mobilizing vision?

WHAT DOES THE SPIRIT SAY TO THE CHURCHES TODAY?

As the history of post-war Germany shows, the common voice of laypeople has had a significant influence on decisions of the hierarchy. This time, while many laypeople are enthusiastic about this ecumenical initiative, skepticism prevails, as usual and above all, among church institutions. Such is the attitude of official representatives of the two German churches. They emphasize the need for taking into account the solid theological agreement on existing differences. Without it unity would be built only “on sand” (Archbishop Robert Zollitsch, the chairman of the German Conference of Bishops). In the opinion of Cardinal Kurt Koch, the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the Christian Unity, the appeal of German Christians oversimplifies the problem of unity although the desire for reconciliation itself deserves praise.

According to the former president of the Pontifical Council, Cardinal Walter Kasper, ecumenical dialogue has found itself in a dangerous “stalemate situation”. Protestant Christians do not have the same vision of the Church as Catholics do, and consequently their understanding of unity and of its goal is also different. The whole ecumenical movement faces a much longer and steeper path than expected. The difficulties of official ecumenism have led to the formation of “a liberal Catholic-Evangelical ecumenism” which ignores the differences and goes its own way. According to Kasper, this stream is jeopardized by ending sooner or later. In the matter of church unity nothing can be forced.²⁵ The ecumenical climate has now worsened considerably. Division between the churches has contributed to the growing secularization of all areas of life, especially in Europe. In a world deprived of orientation, our denominational differences have shifted from the dogmatic level to existential and ethical questions. Mutual understanding is more difficult and, at the same time, more urgent. We have to strengthen the faith in the basic Christian truths which every generation should assimilate (faith in God and Jesus, presence and action of the Holy Spirit and hope of eternal life). The fundamental necessity to embrace the Christian faith is not so evident today, especially among the young people. Finally, the Cardinal welcomes the fact that, alongside “official ecumenism”, we see developing everywhere a calmer and more

²⁵ See *Kasper: Ökumene erlebt “Epoche des Atemholens”*, “KNA-Ökumenische Information” 41, 9. Oktober 2012, p. 14. Cf. also Walter Kasper, *Wege zur Einheit der Christen* (Gesammelte Werke, Band 14), Freiburg: Verlag Herder 2012.

promising “spiritual ecumenism”, which is practiced by Christians of various denominations.²⁶

Are there any signs of hope? More positive voices in the official chorus of criticism are rather rare. They express joy that the ecumenical cause comes closer to the consciousness of people. They declare that they want to work persistently on removing differences between churches. The Working Community of Christian Churches in Germany (*die Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland*, ACK) supports an appeal for more ecumenical engagement but wants to include in it also Orthodox Churches, Free Churches and other minority Churches. At the same time the ACK has drawn attention to the need for taking into account differences in theological issues. We still do not have a common answer to the question: how can unity and historically developed plurality be brought into harmony.

Some church representatives in the former East Germany have welcomed the passionate appeal “Ecumenism now” as “a matter of the heart” (*eine Herzensangelegenheit*). They appreciate in it the reference to baptism and its binding force, but at the same time they indicate a lack of agreement on fundamental doctrinal questions. The Protestant bishop of Berlin, Markus Dröge, reminds us that the Roman Catholic Church does not officially recognize the Evangelical Church as a Church in the full sense of the word. The ordination of women still remains a dividing issue. Much more positive is the evangelical-Lutheran bishop of Hannover, Ralf Meister, who stressed the fact that churches are today marginalized. According to him, the dynamic of ecumenism has always come from below and will continue to be so in the future as well. “Do not wait for ecumenism from the bishops!” (*Wartet in der Ökumene nicht auf die Bischöfe!*) – he said.²⁷

A reaction to this statement came shortly after from Bishop Gerhard Feige, who is responsible in the German episcopate for ecumenism. He sees things differently. First of all, he points out that some concrete ecumenical initiatives started by some leading hierarchs did not find reception in mainline communities. Then he evokes some unsolved, aggravating problems in the Protestant-Catholic dialogue. Some local commission of evangelical churches, e.g. people without ordination, have attempted to lead in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, a practice which opposes Catholic understanding of the ministry. Also, the conception of the role of the pope in the church still remains a serious obstacle. Finally, another problem is the admission to the Eucharist of non-Catholic partners

²⁶ “Gefährliche Pattsituation”. *Kardinal Kasper: Ökumene steckt in schwieriger Phase*, “KNA-Ökumenische Information” 38, 18. September 2012, p. 8.

²⁷ ACK: *Ökumene weiter fassen. Aufruf von Prominenten sorgt weiter für Diskussion*, *ibidem*, p. 7.

in mixed marriages. How can we simply jump over these difficulties? – asks Feige.²⁸

According to authors of the appeal, theological divergences in understanding the Lord's Supper, the ministry and the church do not justify continuation of existing divisions. In the opinion of the Jesuit theologian, Werner Löser, such a view diminishes the appeal's possible influence on the difficult process of ecumenical reconciliation.²⁹ Not enough consideration was accorded to different theological positions, closely connected with the very foundations of faith. Besides, the appeal has limited itself by taking into consideration only the Roman-Catholic Church and Protestant Churches but does not the positions of other Churches. It concentrates in fact on the situation in Central Europe, with special reference to the situation in Germany. Thus, the multilateralism and internationality of the ecumenical movement has been unduly neglected. For decades Christians have ceased to live in isolation and opposition. They still have to learn to respect with confidence the otherness of so many diverse churches.

According to the chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Nikolaus Schneider, confessional binding and belonging have lost their significance for many Christians today. He expressed his gratitude for the appeal *Ecumenism Now*, but admitted that, for many questions, it remains inconclusive and lacks concrete proposals.³⁰

One of the initiators of the appeal, Wolfgang Thierse, vice-president of the German Parliament, struck another tone. According to him unity in the church is not idyllic. Also in the future there will be controversial theological and ethical questions. "It is not the differences which harm the credibility of the Christian witness, but the claim to be always in the right (*Rechthaberei*)" – he said.³¹

Some conservative Catholics have nominally attacked Professor Norbert Lammert, a leading subscriber of the appeal, and objected to his impatience over matters of church unity and his abusing a reference to the Holy Spirit³². According to them, he constantly ignores the historical fact that it was above all the Reformation which caused division in the church. He remains indifferent, so they say, to the contents of the Catholic faith. Moreover, he is convinced that unity will be achieved despite all difficulties

²⁸ Feige: *Gemischte Gefühle zu Reformationsjubiläum*, "KNA-Ökumenische Information" 44, 30 Oktober 2012, p. 7.

²⁹ W. Löser, *Ökumene heute und morgen*, "Stimmen der Zeit" Bd. 231, Jg. 138 (2013) H. 1, pp. 1-2.

³⁰ K. Rüdiger Durth, *Hoffnung auf "Aufbruch" 2017. Letzter Bericht Schneiders stark von der Ökumene geprägt*, "KNA-Ökumenische Information" 1-2, 8 Januar 2013, pp. 3-4.

³¹ *Ökumene ohne Überheblichkeit*. "KNA-Ökumenische Information" 4, 22. Januar 2013, pp. 3-4, here p. 4.

³² *Norbert Lammert und der Heilige Geist*; see an internet-account in "Zenit. Die Welt von Rom aus gesehen", 15. November 2012.

because the Holy Spirit is stronger than our theology. He seems to be saying that the Holy Spirit acts not in the area of theology but high above it. For this reason he gives the impression of wanting to help the Spirit with an ecumenical spring forward. But the sovereign Spirit does not allow itself to be determined on a course of action by professor Lammert. Is the Holy Spirit more present in his impatient pressure – which does not take into account denominational differences in the faith – than in the leadership of the whole church by the pope and his bishops? – ask those Catholics. “Ecumenism of the crowbar will never function. The crowbar splits but does not unite. It is no instrument of the Holy Spirit” – they assure us. Instead, patience is highly praised as a sign of divine love and of the Holy Spirit himself. Only patience can serve the *oikoumene* and not the spiritual crowbar of Norbert Lammert, who is a visible sign of impatience and mistrust of God’s Spirit. He is also accused of being far away from people’s real lives. If we look only at the Church in Germany (2% in the world’s scale), we have to notice even there the young and living Church of spiritual movements inspired by the Spirit, and the commitment of lay people, especially of women. In fact, say conservative Catholics, since Lammert opposes the bishops and the pope, he should ask himself whether he is still a Catholic and wants to remain one. Is his attitude also inspired by the Holy Spirit? – his critics ironically ask.

In 2013 the ecumenical scene was aggravated when the Evangelical Church of Germany published a controversial document on the family.³³ It extends the traditional understanding of marriage and family to other forms of communal life that hope for God’s blessing. Marriage is God’s good gift and ordinance, but not the only form of life. Divine assistance is not limited to marriage between a man and a woman. In this way homosexual partnerships are theologically recognized as equivalent; their blessing diminishes in no way the value of Church marriage between a man and a woman. The document intended to give some orientation in this delicate matter. In fact, it aroused much criticism not only in the Roman Catholic Church but also in the Protestant Churches themselves.³⁴ Many critics saw in this move a revolutionary and arbitrary break with the biblical concept of marriage and family, a relativistic view which caused irritation and a deep split in ecumenical relations. Thus, in their view marriage loses its deep meaning and normative character.³⁵

³³ “Zwischen Autonomie und Angewiesenheit – Familien als verlässliche Gemeinschaft stärken”. *Eine Orientierungshilfe des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche Deutschland*, Gütersloh 2013.

³⁴ According to Evangelical bishop of Hannover, Ralf Meister, biblical witness concerning marriage and family is blurred. *EKD-Familienpapier verwischt biblische Aussagen*, “KNA-ÖKI” Nr. 36, 3. September 2013, p. 6.

³⁵ See Norbert Zonker, “Ohne erhobenen Zeigefinger”: *Die evangelische Kirche tritt für ein neues Familienbild ein*, “KNA-Ökumenische Information (ÖKI)” Nr. 26, 25 Juni 2013, p. 6; *Keine “göttliche Stiftung”?*

Taking into account massive criticism of the document on the family, the Council of the Evangelical Church decided to review its text and to add necessary explanations and clearer formulations.³⁶ One such formulation is that traditional marriage and family constitute a leading image (*Leitbild*) for all forms of common family life. It is worth noting that differences over the question of marriage have existed since the time of the Reformation. Those churches that separated do not understand marriage as a sacrament. In the formulation of Martin Luther it is a “secular matter” (*ein weltlich Ding*), although that does not mean that marriage is something of lesser importance and value.³⁷

So, in short, this is a diversified image of the complex present situation after the appeal of *Ecumenism/oikoumene Now*. We can see in the ongoing debate a huge gap between the feelings of many Christians and the attitude of Church representatives and of conservative believers. It seems that fear of provoking new divisions and creating new problems in the Christian world still paralyzes some more courageous initiatives.

Do we really listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches? Is it easy to “distinguish between spirits” (1 Co 12:10)? Is the gift of recognizing spirits disappearing among Christians?

HOW TO OVERCOME THE HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION?

The meager reception of the documents agreed upon in dialogues tells us how difficult it is to overcome mistrust, fears and negative memories of the past. Reception requires the experience of a true encounter, a new thinking and a new mentality. A true encounter influences our very way of understanding, broadens our horizons and becomes a learning process. In

“Orientierungshilfe” der EKD zur Familie in der Kritik, *ibidem*, pp. VII-VIII (Dokumentation); N. Zonker, *Protestanten im “Shitstorm”*: Die Debatte um das Familienpapier der EKD hält unvermindert an, “KNA-ÖKI” Nr. 27, 2 Juli 2013, pp. 7-10; “Beliebigkeit und Relativierung”: Statements von Kardinal Meisner, Landesbischof July und Hartmut Löwe, *ibidem*, pp. VI-VIII (Dokumentation); *Diskussion über EKD-Familienpapier hält an*, *ibidem*, Nr. 28, 9. Juli 2013, pp. 8-9; *Das EKD-Familienpapier bleibt heftig umstritten*, *ibidem*, Nr. 29, 16 Juli 2013, pp. 4-5. The evangelical bishop, Markus Dröge of Berlin, defends the practice of blessing homosexual couples in the Evangelical Church. See “KNA-ÖKI” Nr. 34, 20 August 2013, p. 6. This is criticized in his own church as contrary to the Bible.

³⁶ See K. Rüdiger Durth, *Das Ringen um die Ehe hält an. Die EKD lud nach Berlin zum Symposium über ihre Orientierungshilfe*, “KNA-ÖKI” Nr. 40, 1. Oktober 2013, pp. 3-6.

³⁷ See Benjamin Lassiwe, “Erläuternde Texte schreiben”. *Schneider: Rat der EKD will auf Kritik an Familienpapier eingehen*, “KNA-ÖKI” Nr. 35, 27. August 2013, pp. 3-5; Ulrich Fischer, “Überzogene Kritik”. *Landesbischof rügt Berichterstattung über EKD-Familienpapier*, *ibidem*, Nr. 37, 10. September 2013, pp. I-IV (Dokumentation).

this way the process of reception launched by dialogues may contribute to a new shape of ecumenical spirituality that takes into account the whole of Christian experience. It is a spirituality of the whole (*kat' hólon*), frequently demanding correction of our confessional way of thinking.

The dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches has contributed significantly in recent years to broadening our very understanding of the expression "Sister Churches", used so far only in relation to the Orthodox Church. In the mutual relationship between Catholics and Lutherans this expression has become an almost self-explanatory concept.

The clarification and reinterpretation of doctrines is surely necessary, but they cannot be done hastily by way of pure relativism and liberalism. The first step would be to cease suspecting that others live in a state of permanent error and distortion of the Christian faith. We can only support those who stress today an urgent need to develop a positive hermeneutics of confidence and trust paving the way for mutual recognition. Whoever 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 in 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 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.

Divisions in the Church have something tragic in them, especially when they cause mutual alienation, distrust, conflict, hostility and hatred. But these remain only on the surface of church life and are linked primarily to the canonical and institutional dimensions of Christian existence without reaching into the inner ontological depths of the mystery of the Church. The divided Church still remains **the only Church of the risen Lord and of the Holy Spirit** in the history of humanity. Human sins have no power to destroy a reality which comes from God himself and which he sustains unceasingly. As God's gift, the unity of the Church is stronger than any divisions. **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" (*Pneûma hegemonikón*) will never be at our command.

The late Father Jerzy Klinger (1918-1976), 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:

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 person! But this will not prevent him or her 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...?³⁸

According to this view, the entire Church can make up for the insufficiencies and defects of our communities. Personally I would rather say that it is Christ and his Spirit who do it in their divine freedom and goodness. In the same study Fr. Klinger himself referred also to the Holy Spirit and to the miracle of unity that already exists:

If we honor the Holy Spirit (...), the Eucharistic *epiclesis* 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.³⁹

There is one possible benefit of the present ecumenical crisis: it forces us to reconsider seriously the very foundations of 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 separation between existing denominational Churches without trying to suppress them. The only realistic way toward visible unity of the Churches leads through our mutual recognition as Sister Churches.

This also impacts issues of evangelization and ecumenism. Both are closely linked. They cannot be treated as alternatives. A competitive kind of evangelization that has no real concern for reconciliation among Christians is simply dishonest and false. With our proclamation of the Gospel we are not allowed to export our divisions and rivalries. Evangelization should serve all God's people, who are not simply property of the Church. A true evangelization brings hope and gives courage to overcome fear. As St. Clement of Alexandria said long ago, "the whole of religion is protreptic" (*protreptikē gār hē pāsa theosēbeia*), i.e. it gives confidence and encouragement.⁴⁰ One has to give up an exaggerated tendency towards church-making. Evangelization should be understood

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ Ibidem, pp. 111,114.

⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*. I,1,3 (SChr 70, p. 110. Boldface is mine, W.H.

within a broader perspective, that of the Kingdom of God. His Kingdom is the ultimate horizon of evangelization. Such an approach can help to overcome the mentality of proselytism and competition.

LOVE AND BENEVOLENCE IN DIALOGUE ARE GOOD TEACHERS

Christianity is a religion of dialogue. According to the spirit of the Gospel every Christian, not only for tactical reasons, should be open to dialogue. This attitude results from the very nature of the Christian faith. We believe in a God who is in continuous dialogue among three Divine Persons, the most astonishing interpersonal communion, incomprehensible love and goodness. God himself is in dialogue to the highest degree: he is outgoing communication, the word of reconciliation, unity and peace for the whole world. Being love (cf. 1 Jo 4:8.16) he constantly calls to dialogue every human being so that that being may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (cf. 1 Tm 2:3). He communicates his love and life to all his creatures.

Human life is a continual dialogue with God and other people. God himself has chosen dialogue with human beings as the salvific way to attract and win their freedom. This dialogue is not only a temporary means or a transient instrument of the encounter. The Creator has called us to be in his image and likeness, to be made participants in his own life. Love and dialogue have no end; they are inseparable, can develop, mature and find their ultimate fulfillment. Love without dialogue and outgoing concern for others would be self-seeking and closed in upon itself. The history of salvation described in the Bible is a long narration about the unending and manifold dialogue of God with humankind. It is God's dialogue with every human person. He calls us by name, in the depths of our heart, spirit and conscience.

For Christians it is Jesus Christ himself who is the incarnate Word of God in this dialogue. His incarnation, life, death and resurrection are the greatest call and invitation to believe which have ever resounded in the history of this planet. Jesus' earthly mission was an uninterrupted series of encounters, contacts, invitations, calls, answers and interventions in the most painful human situations. He interrogated people, listened to their questions and answered them in true dialogue. The Gospel shows that he treated others with unusual benevolence, kindness, respect, attention, and even admiration. If he argued, it was only in disputes with followers of the Jewish religious traditions, especially with Pharisees and teachers of the Law. He did not pronounce anything against adherents of other religions present in Palestine although he met Samaritans, Canaanites and Romans. Jesus did not fail to notice the faith of a Roman centurion, faith greater than any he had found among his fellow-citizens (cf. Lk 7:9). He admires and praises the faith of a Canaanite woman, a Syrophenician, letting himself be taught by her excuse for little dogs who eat scraps falling from the

children's table (cf. Mk 7:26-29). Would it be possible not to mention also an astonishing dialogue with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (cf. Jo 4:6-42)? Today one can say that Jesus often made use of dialogue and the asking of questions. This is also evident in his conversation with Nicodemus (Jo 3:1-21) or with the two disciples going to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-32). One might mention here also the account of curing of the paralytic lowered through the roof and Jesus' dialogue with the scribes. He answers their two questions with two questions of his own (Mk 2:7-9). Unfortunately, we think about these facts too rarely although they give us an excellent example of conduct for all of us to follow.

One should not forget that **Jesus always acted as "filled with the Holy Spirit", "led by the Spirit" and "with the power of the Spirit"** (Lk 4:1.14). This Spirit "descended on him in bodily shape, like a dove" (Lk 3:21) already when he was baptized. There is an intimate mutual relationship between Jesus Christ and the Spirit who rested upon him.

This is the most convincing inspiration for us also to form in ourselves an attitude of dialogue in relation to other people. Jesus promised to reveal himself to those who love him, listen to his words and carry them into effect: "anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him" (Jo 14:21). The dialogue of people with God has thus become an essential component of his providential plan for humankind and the world.

Dialogue can transmit what is most valuable in different churches and religions. The spirituality of dialogue is an effective inspiration for a fuller vision of reality. We relate then in a different way to God, to people and to the whole created world. We look differently at human and religious values. We behave and act differently. Ecumenical spirituality is no simple addition to Christianity, but an inner disposition to be a Christian in today's world, a world marked by a pluralism of beliefs, denominations and religions. A deep and genuine spirituality supports dialogue and makes it fruitful. We can say that it is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Those who believe have, in the central truths of their faith, sufficient motivation to appreciate the way of dialogue in solving their problems. Even more: the spirituality of dialogue has serious justifications based not only on faith in the one and triune God, but also on anthropological and humanistic grounds as well. What should unite us is a sensitivity to the mystery of human existence and a necessary aspiration for mutual understanding and harmonious coexistence extended also to the world of nature.

Thus we have to emphasize again the indissoluble link between dialogue and love. Here I would like to quote an incomparable passage from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. The following words are spoken by the wise elder Zosima:

Brothers, have no fear of men's sin. Love a man even in his sin, for this is the semblance of Divine Love and is the

highest love on earth. Love all 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. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love. (...) 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 occasionally, for a moment, but forever. Everyone can love occasionally, even the wicked can.⁴¹

Love, benevolence, friendship and dialogue are good teachers indeed! When we realize who another human person is and in what situation he or she lives, then we better understand that our doctrines and institutions are not goals in themselves, but they exist for people and for a better spiritual quality in their lives. We have to know the difference between what is at the very center of our faith and what is subordinated and only secondary. The words of Jesus are a constant challenge to all of us: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). His Gospel contains universal values relevant to all believers and all people.

Genuine dialogue involves the whole human person. In the encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* (par. 37 and 49) Pope Paul VI characterized it as "the inner impulse of love", which is able to overcome the cold of mutual alienation. Its climate is friendship and mutual service, and these are no obstacle to the requirements of truth. The frontier of dialogue goes through the heart of every person. The human heart is the central place of the encounter between God and humans. In terms of the eastern tradition, the human intellect descends into the heart, and thus both of them open the way to true knowledge and the loving exchange of gifts.

ECUMENISM – AN ATTITUDE OF THE SPIRIT

Dialogue is a fundamental dimension of human and Christian existence. It is the way to self-realization and maturation of the human person. This attitude of dialogue results from its nature and unique dignity. The opposites of dialogue are, for example, such attitudes as monologue, intolerance, use of violence, polemical disposition, lack of inner introspection and self-control, doctrinal imperialism and an excessive self-confidence. All these attitudes manifest what can be described as a counter-

⁴¹ F. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated by Constance Garnett, New York 1950, 382-383 (Part II, Book VI, Chapter III). The italics are mine, W.H.

culture of dialogue inspired by fundamentalism and a willingness to restore the epoch of radical confessionalism.

A long way still awaits us for overcoming the greatest divisions in the Christian world. It depends so much on the quality of our being Christians, on our openness and the culture of dialogue. Some medieval thinkers often repeated: *ubi est amor tuus, ibi oculus*, “where your love is, there is also your eye”. In other words: where your heart is, there also are your understanding and real change of thinking (*metánoia*).

The Orthodox metropolitan Anthony Bloom (1914-2003) wrote some time ago: ecumenism is not a kind of compromise of tactics or of strategy. It is above all *an attitude of the spirit* that recognizes that Christ is the Lord of the world and that our role is to bring to this world the truth that leads it to beauty and an ultimate transfiguration that it did not know. We can only add that this transfiguration is precisely the work of the Spirit acting inseparably with Christ, the Lord.

I am not inclined to believe in the speedily approaching ecumenical Pentecost. In this regard I rather share the opinion of the late French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément (died 2009). In an interview published 2001 on the occasion of his 80th birthday, he did not hide his disenchantment about the state of ecumenism today.

I do not expect anything from an official ecumenism (*Je n'espère rien de l'écuménisme officiel*). I think that what remains and what shapes the future is in reality friendship, small groups of friends connecting Orthodox, Catholics, sometimes Protestants. That is what counts. It is there that the ecumenism of tomorrow is being worked out. I believe also in changes that are about to occur with the youth of Orthodox countries. (...) I am 80 years old, and I do not think that something important will happen in my lifetime. I think there are many possibilities in people. It is not so, for the moment, on the level of the episcopate...⁴²

Ecumenical dialogue has already opened some new horizons in the history of Christianity. The dedication to ecumenism demands a deep change of heart and mind, magnanimity and persistent hope. Ecumenical passion reaches into the depth of the human heart and opens it up for dialogue with Others. One single life would not be enough to accomplish this passion...

I often say to myself: Now is the time to create closeness. So, at the end of these reflections, after so many years of experience with ecumenism, I express my own passion in a simple short formula:

⁴² *L'orthodoxie doit digérer ce terrible XX^e siècle*. Entretien Olivier Clément, “La Croix” 17-18 Novembre 2001.

- Do you want to dialog?
- Have the dialogue in yourself! Become a living dialogue in your inner self!

It is worth repeating again and again: **Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches today. His voice may be very quiet, truly kenotic, but nevertheless all the time troubling our conscience...** If we do not listen to this voice, the crisis in the Church of Christ and his Spirit will continue and damage the credibility of Christian witness in the world.

CHAPTER VII

THE KENOTIC SPIRIT OF GOD AND THE CRY OF NATURE

This is a largely forgotten dimension of Christian reflection on the Holy Spirit. It was he, “the Spirit of God”, as the Bible says, who “was hovering over the waters” at the very beginning of creation (Gn 1:2). The biblical narrative of creation of the world shows the presence of God’s Spirit in its very origins. The prominent Russian Orthodox theologian, Sergius Bulgakov (d. 1944), saw in this event the first cosmic Pentecost.¹ In the figurative words of the Bible is contained the important insight that God’s Spirit (*ruah*) has been a creative power and an active presence of God in creation since its very beginnings. All creation is permeated by the creative action of the Spirit. The world of nature is therefore no mechanistic and purely materialistic reality, but God’s creation full of the Spirit’s active presence. The initial mention of the Spirit may signalize that he will be present and active in a kenotic way during the whole history of the created world as its Guardian, Defender and Protector. It is he who keeps all the creatures in existence and leads them towards their ultimate fulfillment.

Meanwhile the contemporary ecological crisis is a fact which threatens the destruction of nature and life on earth. The technology of exploitation on the part of industrialized societies assumes terrifying dimensions. Life on the great surface of the earth is slowly dying out. Whereas forests die – rivers, lakes and seas are poisoned. A ruthless and arbitrary dominion of people over nature serves the immediate interests of human greed. We are already witnesses of the sad harvest of destruction of life. Progress becomes an instrument of death. Where should we seek rescue? Does the wisdom of the Bible, inspired by God’s Spirit, have a sobering word to say in this situation?

CHRISTIANITY AND THE WORLD OF NATURE: OUR COLLECTIVE AMNESIA

The Bible speaks about the world as God’s creation. It is not the world as the exclusive possession of humans. It belongs to God. Plants and animals make up a visible part of creation that also waits for liberation and ultimate transfiguration. Nature develops and therefore makes its own history.² In the past many theologians did not consider any idea that irrational nature could have some sort of history. But we should not forget

¹ S. Bulgakov, *Utešitel’. O bogočelovečestve*, čast’ II, Paris 1936, p. 191. Cf also p. 389.

² See C.F. von Weizsäcker, *Die Geschichte der Natur*, Göttingen 1957.

the self-evident truth that the history of humankind takes place on earth and is totally dependent on it. The very belief in the creation of the world inclines us to broaden our concept of history and free it from anthropocentric narcissism.

According to Karl Rahner, a famous Jesuit theologian, the history of nature and the history of the human incarnate spirit form ultimately just one history.³ All created reality has, in its ontology and becoming, a transcendental source in God. Because his love and creative power act in all creation, we can also speak about a certain active self-transcendence of nature and in this way the formation of something new. The history of evolution witnesses to the long development of matter towards spirit, consciousness and freedom. The world of matter is able to surpass itself in order finally to enter into the history of the spirit and to find its own realization in the fulfillment of the spirit as well. The history of nature and the history of the self-conscious spirit of rational and personal beings, form, in sum, one history of the created being, whose aim is the good and salvation of humanity. In his absolute future God is the transcendent fulfillment of the whole world, but at the same time he constitutes the immanent source of the universal movement towards this ultimate fulfillment. The Christian vision of the eschatological consummation of the world confirms in a truly admirable way the inner unity of the created reality of matter and spirit. The history of the material world and that of humanity reach their final aim together, in full solidarity with the destinies of all creation.

Everything that exists is precious in the eyes of God. We are not allowed to reduce the world of nature only to its ancillary and usable function on behalf of humans. Some biblical texts suggest even the existence of a certain autonomous finality and value of the non-human world, which serves above all the Creator himself (cf. Ps 104). Grass and flowers growing after rainfall on the desert are not without value although nobody admires and collects them (cf. Jb 38:2-27). All creatures, even the smallest and the inconspicuous, have their immanent subjectivity, value and responsiveness. Their very existence is an answer to the call of the Creator.

In his teaching Jesus willingly drew comparisons from the life of flowers, trees and birds. He commanded his disciples to “proclaim the Good News to all creation” (Mk 16:15). The wisdom of the Scriptures teaches us to discover the sacramental character of nature and every existing being, which have their ultimate source in God. Our sensitivity to the miracle of existence deepens our respect and reverence for the surrounding nature of flora and fauna, which together with human beings, constitutes the great community praising God in the perennial hymn of adoration and thanksgiving.

³ K. Rahner, *Die Einheit von Geist und Materie im christlichen Glaubensverständnis*, in idem, *Schriften zur Theologie*, Band VI, Einsiedeln-Zürich-Köln 1965, pp. 185-214, esp. 208ff.

A concern for *creation* is essential to living out the Gospel. It is not an optional extra but a concrete way of life. St. Francis of Assisi experienced all of God's creation as sacred. His famous Canticle of the Creatures includes the words: "All Praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Sun (...), Sister Moon and Stars (...), Brothers Wind and Air (...), Sister Water (...), Brother Fire (...), Sister Earth (...), Sister Death. All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made. Happy those who endure in peace." St. Francis had a profound respect for all of life. He experienced true solidarity with nature, the poor and marginalized. He lived very simply, making peace in every encounter. These values should also inspire all our efforts today.

Nothing justifies the divinization of nature and its creatures as was the case in many pantheistic cults of fertility in matriarchal natural religions. Christianity clearly distinguishes God the Creator from the world created by him. This distinction, present already in the Old Testament, gives humans the freedom of rational and responsible activity for nature. Unfortunately, in modern times the concept of nature totally alienated from God began to prevail. The basic truth about nature and the cosmos as God's creation slowly fell into oblivion. The conduct of people towards nature assumed features of a brutal and pitiless atrocity destroying the environment.

Today we cease more and more to feel that we are members of the great community of all creatures. The present state of nature arouses deep concern and a sense of co-suffering with its destiny. Christians cannot remain indifferent to the work of its destruction. They feel prompted to do something not only because of general human concerns but also because of some important religious reasons. After all, it is our firm belief that God is the Creator of heaven and earth, "maker of all things, visible and invisible". What we need is a profound *metánoia* in the very way of thinking and conduct towards our natural environment. Selfish and destructive behavior is marked by sin and guilt. We have to recover **the lost sense of responsibility** for the harm and injury inflicted on creatures by irresponsible conduct.

It would be wrong to consider the history of nature only as an accidental arena in the history of humankind. Nothing allows us to imagine humans as alien beings in the world of inanimate matter, plants and animals. We do not migrate to an afterlife in a kingdom of pure spirits, leaving the material world to its own destiny. Human beings and nature make up one created reality. Already the Old Testament emphasized the inner unity of the human person as a material-spiritual entity and the unity of its history to the surrounding world. The Christian faith also speaks about the incarnation of the Son of God and the eternal duration of his humanity, about the resurrection of the body, salvation and the transfiguration of all human beings in their spiritual and bodily dimensions.

How far away now we are from a due respect for nature as God's creation! What can theology say in the face of such a state of things? Should we offer only an easy consolation, a sense of hopelessness and perplexity?

Bad theology tends to treat non-human creation as if nature were only a stage on which the historic drama of humanity takes place. Plants and animals would then become mere objects to be freely used. Such an attitude is simply selfish and arrogant.

Our post-Enlightenment theology has concentrated on the biblical motif of dominating the earth: “fill the earth and subdue it; rule over (...) every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gn 1:28; NIV). The vision of eschatological salvation has also been exclusively people-centered. Those who speak about **our collective amnesia** of the destinies of nature are right in this regard: we inhabitants of the small planet Earth do not realize that the whole of non-human life forms an integral part of our human community in the pilgrimage to a new creation. We are who we are and who we will eventually become, thanks to the larger community of living creatures and of inanimate nature. This situation is a serious challenge to Christian churches and their theologies.

IN SEARCH FOR A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE WORLD OF NATURE

Some critics of the Jewish and Christian tradition think that, precisely in it, we have to look for sources of the contemporary ecological crisis.⁴ Some biblical texts are considered as justifying the domineering attitude of humanity towards the rest of creation. The image of God as the omnipotent and sovereign ruler of the world can overshadow his goodness, love and mercy. To assimilate themselves to the Creator, humans were also supposed to dominate nature with the help of science and technology.

But in reality biblical belief in the creation of the world by God cannot justify the ruthless and domineering conduct of humans towards nature. The Scriptures do not prompt us to pitilessly possess and destroy the earth. They say that people and animals must live on its fruits. A wide spread view is simply false, i.e. that the text of Genesis 1:28 imposes on humans a quasi unlimited domination over earth and nature. In this regard the traditional theology of western Christianity, with its emphasis on *dominium terrae*, bears at least partial responsibility for the present ecological crisis. For, in the past, it has often been forgotten that the very idea of humans made in God’s image (Gn 1:26) has imposed some clear restrictions on the command to rule over nature and subdue it.

To be created in God’s image means to behave in a way similar to that in which the Creator himself treats his creatures, i.e. to be a sensible guardian, an intelligent, good and wise gardener of creation: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Gn 2:15). The Bible does not justify a despotic and uncompromising

⁴ See for example: E. Drewermann, *Der tödliche Fortschritt. Von der Zerstörung der Erde und des Menschen im Erbe des Christentums*, 2. Aufl. Regensburg 1981.

attitude but demands concern and care. It reminds us of the eschatological participation of nature in God's everlasting kingdom.

Concern for the future of humankind and life on earth, after the possibility of our own self-destruction, impels us above all to be sensitive to the fate and suffering of animals. The difficult task of recovering a proper attitude towards nature rests in a particular way on Christian churches and the followers of other religions. It requires the co-operation of all people of good will who feel a responsibility for all creation. Religions of the Far East distinguish themselves by a mystical, contemplative spirituality and a great respect for all encompassing reality. They may help people in consumer societies find a necessary "asceticism of survival".

Also in this regard the tradition of Eastern Christianity has preserved a more contemplative and sapiential attitude. It emphasizes the cosmic aspects of redemption, understood as a new creation renewing the whole world. Thanks to this, certain values in the conduct towards nature have survived in it which have been lost in the consciousness of Western Christianity, mainly under the influence of the development of science, technology and industry. The well known Russian philosopher, Nicholas Berdyaev, wrote many years ago:

In the Church grows grass and blossom flowers. The Church is a 'christified' cosmos. Christ has entered the Church. He was crucified and rose from the dead. As a result all has been changed in cosmos – it has been renewed. The whole cosmos journeys the way of the cross and resurrection.⁵

I would add to this philosopher's confession that the Holy Spirit also, the Spirit of Christ, has entered the Church and continually renews it. He helps us to renew our understanding of nature and should be continually invoked in a truly cosmic epiclesis: "Come, the Creator Spirit, renew the whole creation!"

Berdyaev sharply criticizes the western tendency to "neutralize the cosmos", initiated already by mediaeval scholastics, which separated the order of nature (*ordo naturae*) from the order of supernatural grace (*ordo gratiae*).⁶ This tendency has led to the phenomenon of European naturalism. Nature has taken the place once reserved for the cosmos and has been deprived of its connections to God and any transcendent reality. Thus nature has become an object of research by the natural sciences, whose results have

⁵ N. Berdyaev, *Filosofia svobodnago ducha. Problematika i apologia christianstva*, part II, Paris 1928, p. 195. These words are echoed by an Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov in his book: *Sacrement de l'amour*, Paris 1962, p. 173.

⁶ N. Berdyaev, *Die Krise des Protestantismus und die russische Orthodoxie*, "Orient und Okzident" (1929) No. 1, 11-25.

been utilized by technology without scruples. Neither Catholic doctrine, which had neglected to show the cosmic dimensions of redemption, nor the Protestant teaching of individual justification could prevent this evolution. Soteriological individualism does not favor perception of the cosmic dimensions of redemption.

At present Christians should also appreciate that wise attitude towards the world of nature that characterizes the Jewish practice and theology of the Sabbath, Jewish mysticism and the tradition of Hassidism.⁷ In Judaism **the Sabbath** is a sign of the covenant with God, of peace with people and nature. It is the feast of all creation – not only of humans but also of animals and the earth itself (cf. Lv 25:4-5.11).⁸ This applies especially to the Sabbath Year and every fiftieth Year of Jubilee. Nature is not only created by God but also exists and lives in his presence as a blessing for all creatures. The theology of the Sabbath as a blessed Day of God's special nearness reminds people that he is our appeasement, joy of existence, hope and the ultimate future of all things. In light of biblical teaching, the work of creation culminates not so much in human beings as in the ultimate Sabbatical reality of God's rest, joy and celebration: "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because in it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Gn 2:3; NIV). All creatures already take part in this Sabbatical reality and move towards it as their ultimate goal and everlasting happiness.

The present situation is a warning to all of us. The world of nature needs some "rest". It is indeed threatened by the danger of exhaustion and death.

A CRITICAL MOMENT IN THE EARTH'S HISTORY AND THE CALL FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

Collective amnesia has contributed in a disastrous way to the present ecological crisis. Nothing less than a transformation of our attitudes and behavior can bring about the necessary changes. All the more we should appreciate many ecumenical initiatives launched in the last decades by the World Council of Churches (WCC). An urgent appeal of Christian churches to safeguard God's creation, although already heard during the fifth general assembly of the WCC in Nairobi (1975), assumed concrete form during the sixth assembly in Vancouver (1983). The question of justice and peace was closely linked to care for the destiny of nature. Thus began a long term conciliar process called *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation* (JPIC).⁹ Its

⁷ See Martin Buber, *Die Erzählungen der Chassidim*, Zürich 1949.

⁸ See J. Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung. Ökologische Schöpfungslehre*, München 1985, pp. 45, 196-197, 204, 279ff.

⁹ See World Council of Churches, *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Resource Materials*, Geneva 1987; id. *Justice, Peace and the Integrity*

scope is clear: we have to work to bring about justice and peace in our world, to end violence, war, poverty, oppression and destruction of our planet. No wonder these efforts are often directed at systems that cause oppression and destruction. One can only hope that common efforts will gradually transform our conscience and our world.

The JPIC program found a friendly ear in particular churches and became an object of ecumenical reflection and common action. In consequence the main issue dealt with during the 7th General Assembly of the WCC in Canberra (1991) was formulated in a truly Epicletic call: **“Come, the Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation”**. The Giver of Life must be continually invoked to help us safeguard his creation. We should **not remain deaf to this dramatic cry of the whole nature**.

In turn, the 10th General Assembly of the WCC (30.October – 8. November 2013) in Busan, South Korea, emphasized in its Declaration on Unity, that the unity of the church, of humanity and of the whole creation are inseparable from each other. The church has to serve the unity of the entire creation, point out to the awaited new creation and be a prophetic sign of life promised by God to all.¹⁰ The same Assembly endorsed also the convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, in which one may read the following words: “Together with all people of goodwill, the Church seeks to care for creation, which groans to share in the freedom of the children of God (cf. Rom 8:20-22), by opposing the abuse and destruction of the earth and participating in God’s healing of broken relationships between creation and humanity (par. 66; cf. also par. 1, 13, 25-26 and 58).¹¹

As far as our relationship to nature is concerned, special significance belongs in this regard also to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992), informally named *The Earth Summit*, followed also by the *Letter to the Churches*. In this way the UN sought to help Governments rethink economic development and to find ways of halting destruction of irreplaceable natural resources and pollution of the planet. In *The Earth Charter* we read an urgent appeal:

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a

of Creation. Resource Materials, Geneva 1988; id. *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Resource Materials*, Geneva 1989.

¹⁰ Cf. Hans-Georg Link, *Morgenluft in Busan. Theologische Aspekte der 10. Vollversammlung des Weltkirchenrats*, „Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur (KNA). Ökumenische Information“ 47, 19 November 2013, p. I-X; idem, *Neue Bewegung? Die Erklärung „DIE KIRCHE“: Auf dem Weg zu einer gemeinsamen Vision*, ibidem, „Ökumenische Information“ 13, 25 März 2014, p. I-XII.

¹¹ See <http://publications.oikoumene.org>

magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on *respect for nature*, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations. We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.¹²

European churches have their own guidelines concerning the ecological question of safeguarding creation in the *Charta Oecumenica* (2001).¹³ This important document emphasizes the Creator God's love and his "gift of creation and the great value and beauty of nature". But what appalls us now is to see how natural resources are being exploited "without regard for their intrinsic value or consideration of their limits, and without

¹² Italics are mine, W.H. Here are some of those principles:

- I. Respect and care for the community of life
 1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.
 2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.
 3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.
 4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.
- II. Ecological integrity
 5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.
 6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.
 7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.
 8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

¹³ *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*. Edited by Viorel Ionita and Sarah Numico, Geneva: WCC Publications 2003, pp. 7-16. Paragraph 9 deals with "Safeguarding the creation" (p. 14).

regard for the well-being of future generations". In this situation we Christians feel that it is our responsibility before God "to help create sustainable living conditions for the whole of creation". From an ethical point of view, some common criteria should be put into effect which determine what we are not allowed to do in our scientific and technological progress. Taking all this into consideration, European churches recommend the introduction of "an Ecumenical Day of Prayer for the Preservation of Creation". They also commit themselves to adopt a lifestyle free of consumerism and to support all environmental initiatives for the safeguarding of creation.

Many recent attempts have been made to awaken ecological responsibility in Christian churches. The untiring commitment of some prominent persons and church leaders must be mentioned (above all of the ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew I), of some groups and organizations, religious orders (e.g. Franciscans, Carmelites) and congregations. Unfortunately, all these initiatives have not yet succeeded in involving on a large scale the Church as a whole. Pope Francis, following his patron saint Francis of Assisi, already in his inaugural celebration on the Eucharist, said that the whole Church and all humanity should become guardians of all creation, all should respect every one of God's creatures and the environment in which we live. And he added: "As a matter of fact all is entrusted to humans, and this is a responsibility which concerns all. Be guardians of God's gifts!"¹⁴

PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I IN DEFENSE OF THE GOODNESS AND BEAUTY OF CREATION

Perhaps the best known form of the Ecumenical Patriarch's activity is the effort he made for protection of the natural environment. That is how he won acclaim and the title of the "Green Patriarch". Together with eminent figures from the world of politics, he co-organized international seminars and ecological symposia, sailing the waters of endangered continents, rivers and seas (the Danube, the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic Sea, the Amazon, The Arctic, the Mississippi). Religion and science must, in his opinion, unite their efforts in this great and historical task.

1 September (beginning of the liturgical year in the Orthodox Church) is a day proclaimed "the Feast of Creation" by Patriarch Dimitrios and the Holy Synod in 1989. The celebration of this feast gives us a better understanding and feeling that the world of nature is owned by God as his creation. In this way, it deepens our adoration and respect for all that exists and lives. It teaches the wisdom of life and the joy of accepting it with love and gratitude as a gift from God. In an interview for the KNA, Bartholomew I said about himself: "I come from a small island of Imvros before the

¹⁴ See ZENIT.org, 19. March 2013.

Dardanelles. Already as a child, I had to save water, carefully inspect plants and animals, as we and our modest environment had to survive. The sea gave us fish and other sea fruits. This fundamental attitude of thanksgiving to the Creator through the management of his creatures, the attitude of ecology as the Eucharist, left an imprint in my young mind. Later I learned that the redemptive work of Jesus Christ affects not only us, people, but also all creatures and constitutes the sanctification of the whole creation. It is a specific, Orthodox vision of safeguarding the environment”.¹⁵

Based on these facts, it is now easier to understand the Patriarch's sincere concerns for the fate of God's creation. Every year he issues a special message on 1 September, the day of prayer for the preservation of this great good and beauty – our natural environment. In this respect, he is a visionary, tirelessly calling for the development of a new model of civilization that will be capable of surpassing the irresistible urge to consume and destroy. If not now, then when? The Patriarch's activity prompts voluntary restraint in the division of goods, the need for prophetic figures in today's world, showing the true meaning and direction of history. After the ecological disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, he wrote in a special statement (May 2010): “He who harms the environment, sins against God.”¹⁶

THE MISSIONARY OBLATES' RESPONSE TO THE CALL FOR INTEGRITY OF CREATION

In *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, Pope John Paul II asserted: “Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the Earth as we have in the past (...). The ecological crisis is a moral issue.”

A re-awakening of the religious vision of creation, alongside a deepening consciousness of the ecological crisis that we all face, has marked the response of the Congregation of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, in its U.S. Province and internationally. Action on behalf of justice, peace and the integrity of creation is an integral part of evangelization. In an effort to promote the Integrity of Creation, the General Council of the Congregation, in the JPIC “*Vade Mecum*” published in 1996, has called on its members to include this new reality in their missionary consciousness. Across the United States, local oblate communities are continually searching for new ways to respond to this call. In March 2001, the Provincial Council adopted a resolution designed to “green” the Congregation. The “*Vade Mecum*” (p. 5) on JPIC states:

¹⁵ “*Glückfall für die Ökumene*”. “Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur” – “KNA Ökumenische Information” 10, 4 March 2008, pp. 3-5, here p. 5.

¹⁶ *Bartłomiej I: ropa i pycha* (Bartholomew I: Oil and Pride), “Tygodnik Powszechny” 20, 16 May 2010, p. 21.

Creation is gifted with all kinds of resources that are entrusted to the stewardship of the human family. As they are not unlimited, we have to preserve them for ourselves and for future generations. Competition for scarce resources creates conflict, whilst the conservation of nature and natural resources contributes to justice and the maintenance of peace. These are three interlocking elements in the journey of the human family: justice, peace, integrity of creation. We have to work on all three levels.

The “Vade mecum” further states: we “begin to realize that there can be no genuine justice and peace in our world unless we begin to act as true stewards of creation, thus safeguarding the survival and integrity of the planet.”

In 2003 the US province formally established the *Oblate Ecological Initiative* as a major educational and outreach program on ecology and spirituality to embody these concerns. La Vista Ecological Learning Center, in Godfrey, Illinois, born out of the ongoing effort to respond to the priority of JPIC, was created to raise ecological awareness. In 2004 the *parish eco-mission project* was established to bring the message to local ministry sites across the country. The US Province passed an Environmental Resolution based on the “Vade Mecum” document, which was developed in order to guide decisions of the congregation concerning the natural environment. It emphasizes among other things that a serious effort is needed to simplify lifestyles and further to commit ourselves to environmental stewardship. This is an important way to become more ecologically responsible in the community of all God’s creatures.

TO ALLOW NATURE TO TEACH US HUMILITY

Let us be realistic without falling into a false apocalypticism. We dwell on Planet Earth, in more and more overcrowded cities, losing lively contact with nature. In some regions of the world poor people also dwell in shanty towns, in arid zones and flooded plains, among shrinking forests and polluted water sources. We witness a growing vulnerability to climatic hazards and even more to human greed. Are we not slowly but steadily going toward the end of Mother-Earth as we have known her so far? There are so many places on her surface where nature and poor people suffer together. Their destinies are interdependent. Both people and earth call for liberation and healing. What power can truly heal this situation?

The kenotic Spirit of God guides us to rescue the integrity of creation. The very idea of *kenosis* means in this context a real turning to the earth in sympathy and genuine *metánoia*. In consequence, we have to recover the neglected virtue of humility and **allow nature itself to teach us a necessary lesson**. Etymologically, humility reminds us all that we owe

our being to the humid and fertile *humus*, i.e. to the soil, to the ground on the surface of the earth with its rhythmic growth processes. The world of animate nature shows us the mysterious birth-growth-death cycle of life. This process displays something sacred in nature which should be relevant to our human spirituality and a deeper awareness of the gift of life.

For this reason, especially, Orthodox theologians speak in deep intuition about the sacramental character of the world.¹⁷ The world of nature created by God is a sacrament of his hidden presence. Only humans are able to receive consciously from God the gift of creation and with thanksgiving. Through our human mediation silent nature can praise and thank its Creator (cf. Ps 8; 19; 29; 33; 93; 95; 98; 104; 148). Thus, in a certain sense a truly “Eucharistic” community of all creatures comes into being.¹⁸ The tradition of eastern Christianity speaks about the “cosmic liturgy” of all created beings.¹⁹ This solidarity of destinies of all creation is, in this sense, liturgical and Eucharistic. We humans belong have a duty to intercede before God for everything that exists and lives because we are, *par excellence*, Eucharistic beings, i.e. able to give thanks and be grateful. On the other hand, all creatures also praise the Creator by their very existence, and we do this even vicariously on behalf of human beings when we rational creatures forget about our God. The Creator rejoices over his creation and loves it.

The voice of creation is not only one of “groaning” (Rm 8:22), but also one of cosmic, ontological praise for the Creator. In the renewed post-conciliar liturgy of the Catholic Church, the third Eucharistic prayer begins with the words: “Father, you are holy indeed, and *all creation* rightly gives you praise. All life (...) comes from you....” And the fourth Eucharistic prayer directs our attention to the future of transfigured creation: “Then, in your kingdom, free from the corruption of sin and death, we shall sing your glory *with every creature* through Christ our Lord” (italics mine, W.H).

Such words are not merely expressions of religious poetry, but deep theological and mystical insights which require revalorization in the consciousness of believers, independently of denomination and religion.

¹⁷ See 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; P.G. Verghese, *The Human Presence: An Orthodox View of Nature*, Geneva 1978; Olivier Clément, *La Révolte de l'Esprit. Repères pour la situation spirituelle d'aujourd'hui*, en collaboration avec Stanislas Rougier, Paris: Editions Stock 1979, p. 197.

¹⁸ The Eucharist (Gr: *eucharistía*) means thanksgiving, thanks, gratitude, thankfulness (from *eucharistéō* – to thank, give thanks, be thankful, be grateful).

¹⁹ See H. Urs von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Maximus des Bekenner*, 2. Ausg. Einsiedeln 1961; J. Zizioulas, *La vision eucharistique du monde et l'homme contemporain*, “Contacts” 19 (1967, No. 57, 83-91; O. Clément, *Le Christ, terre des vivants: Le «Corps spirituel». Le Sens de la Terre. Essais théologiques*, Abbaye de Bellefontaine 1976, 89-107.

Our initial and basic form of religious knowledge of the world consists in thanksgiving for the gift of creation and in praising the Creator with an attitude full of veneration, joy, attention, sensibility and compassion. This attitude protects us against uncompromisingly conquering and pitilessly exploiting nature, and deepens our sense of the community of destinies throughout all creation.

God is the transcendent fulfillment of the world but at the same time an immanent source of its aiming at ultimate fullness so that eventually he will be “all in all” (1 Co 15:28). Christianity does not proclaim only the salvation of the soul but also believes in “a new heaven and a new earth” (Is 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pt 3:13; Rv 21:1).

Theological knowledge of the world of nature and its destinies teaches us the humble wisdom of loving all God’s creatures. It helps us to change our attitude towards all that exists, enjoys life and suffers. A new sensibility to nature requires above all the ability to detect the real presence of God in the world and of the world in God. In this way we come back to the old wisdom contained in **Christian pan-en-theism** (*pan-en-theo* – all in God), which should be clearly distinguished from pantheism (all is God). **Through his Spirit the Creator is continually present** in the deepest structures of matter and in the life of all creatures. Through his Spirit, the giver of life, he participates in their lot, co-suffers with them and rejoices over their welfare.

A new relationship between humans and nature depends largely upon their attitude towards other persons. Injustice, unfair treatment and harm among people entail unavoidably also the destruction of nature and the natural environment. Those insensitive to the situation of other people, in consequence will not be sensitive either to the plight of other living creatures. They will remain indifferent, selfish and arrogant persons. There exists a mutual interdependence between the destinies of people and nature. Let us listen to the prophet Hosea:

There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. *Because of this* the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying (Ho 4:1b-3; NIV; italics mine, W.H.).

The lot of nature is closely connected with that of people. Their bad conduct leaves a destructive mark on the surface of all nature. The voice of the prophets is particularly strong in this respect. Here is Jeremiah’s witness:

“My people are fools;
they do not know me.

They are senseless children;
they have no understanding.
They are skilled in doing evil:
they know not how to do good.”
I looked at the earth,
and it was formless and empty;
and at the heavens,
and their light was gone.
I looked at the mountains,
and they were quaking;
all the hills were swaying.
I looked, and there were no people;
every bird in the sky had flown away.
I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert;
all its towns lay in ruins
before the Lord, before his fierce anger (Jr 4:22-26).
The land is full of adulterers;
because of the curse the land lies parched
and the pastures in the desert are withered (Jr 23:10).

A similar statement can also be found in the Book of Ezekiel: “They will eat their food in anxiety and drink their water in despair, for their land will be stripped of everything in it, *because of the violence* of all who live there” (Ez 12:19; italics mine, W.H.). The destructive force of human selfish conduct is to be seen especially in the world of animals (cf. Jr 36:29; Ez 14: 13.17.19.21). Rescue is hoped for as promised by God: “Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O Lord, you preserve both man and beast” (Ps 36:6).

Are we ready to accept these lessons about the destiny of nature? Or will western androcentrism and aggressive anthropocentrism prevail in our thinking about the non-human world? It is from this exceedingly anthropocentric perspective that nature is seen as serving only the benefit of human beings. Therefore hope lies only in a fundamental change in the intellectual and emotional attitude of humans towards nature. Churches and their theologians should not leave to the natural sciences and materialistic philosophies the task of critically interpreting our relationship to nature. This task consists in rediscovering the unity of all creation, both human and non-human.

Will our proud and aggressive attitude further distort our ability to understand properly the message of the Bible? Let me draw attention again to some forceful biblical texts. First, some remarkable words from the Book of Job:

But ask the animals, and *they will teach you*,
or the birds of the air, and *they will tell you*;

or speak to the earth, *it will teach you*²⁰,
or let the fish of the sea inform you.
Which of all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every creature
and the breath of all mankind (Jb 12:7-10; italics mine, W.H.).

It is a very striking text which gives us much to think about. It conveys a genuine biblical vision of what the world of nature is and how it can teach us. Even more, we can learn from the words of the apostle Paul in his Letter to the church in Rome.

THE WHOLE OF CREATION GROANS AND SUFFERS BIRTH-PAINS TOGETHER

It is not enough to remember the original message of the Bible that everything God created “was very good” (Gn 1:31). We have to look at the present suffering of all creation and learn compassion for all that exists. The enslavement of nature witnesses to the broken community of all God’s creation. The suffering of living creatures can be felt above all by people who look at nature in the light of everything’s final destination in the eschatological community and in the harmony of the forthcoming world. God’s promise of the new world of resurrection awakens hope for liberation and final transfiguration

In this regard the words of St. Paul in Rm 8: 19-27 are among the most significant for our theological reflection on the world of nature. Cosmological motifs are connected in this text with anthropological, soteriological and pneumatological views. The Apostle speaks not only about the waiting of creation for “the redemption of our bodies” (v. 23) but also about creation’s subjection to “frustration” and “bondage to decay” (v. 20-21) and about **the “groans” of God’s Spirit himself** that words cannot express (v. 26). Because Christians hope for “the glory that will be revealed in us” (v. 18), they feel even more painfully the present sufferings. Already bestowed with “the first-fruits of the Spirit”, they still have to “groan inwardly” and wait eagerly for the redemption of their bodies (v. 23) and the fullness of salvation, not even knowing exactly what they ought to pray for (v. 26). The Spirit that helps us in our weakness. Hope and expectation enable us to experience deep solidarity with all enslaved creation. So let us read attentively the words of the Apostle himself:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons [and daughters!] of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration (*mataiótati*), not by its own choice,

²⁰ Another translation (RSV CE): “or the plants of the earth, and *they will teach you*”.

but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay (*apò tēs douleías tēs phtorās*) and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation (*pāsa hē ktisis*) has been groaning (*systemázei*) as in the pains of childbirth [literally: and suffering birth-pains together, *kai synōdineí*] right up to the present time.²¹ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons [and daughters!], the redemption of our bodies (Rm 8:19-23).

St. Paul's text gives us an unusual witness to the depth of his empathy with the destiny of all creation, to which he confers some personal features. His great insight requires personification. Reading his words, we have the impression that the Apostle has pressed his ear down to earth to its very soil, understood her sadness, heard her groaning and longing, and at the same time guessed the meaning of the expectation of all creatures for ultimate liberation. His intuition has no equal in the entire Bible. The dramatic lot of nature and its longing have found in his intuition unparalleled expression.²²

There is a striking detail we should notice in this context. Paul says: "We know" (*oídamen*) what is going on with all creation, which has been groaning because of its frustration, decay and enslavement, but while expecting final liberation. It is our faith and hope that give us this certainty. We know by our faith that God's Spirit is already present in our lives, but we too long for the redemption of our bodies, being part of the material world. Through our bodies human destiny is intertwined with the lot of all other creatures. For this reason our waiting for the redemption of our bodies is inseparable from the eager expectation of all creation: "But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (v. 25). This situation of solidarity enables us to feel the condition of non-human creation which is subject to decay, passing away and death. No guilt weighs upon nature itself. It is not "fallen nature", but, in a way difficult to explain, it must bear the consequences of sinful conduct by fallen people and remains in a state of painful enslavement.

Of course, the Apostle's interest is centered above all, as can be seen in the whole letter to Romans, on the eschatological fulfillment of the history of humankind and its participation in God's glory. What preoccupies Paul in the first place is not the state of enslavement and redemption of the non-human world. However, we cannot a priori exclude, as some biblical

²¹ The Greek words: *systemázei* and *synōdineí* are accompanied by the prefix *syn-* = together.

²² See Clément, *Le Christ...*, pp. 101-102.

scholars seem to do,²³ his concern for liberation of “the whole creation” (*pāsa hē ktísis*), its renewal and participation in the final destiny of redeemed humanity. The very term *ktísis* signifies all visible creation, both animate and inanimate, apart from humans, which in an unconscious way expresses its eager expectation (*apokaradokía*), full of tension, anxiety and pain.

“Groaning” and “suffering birth-pains” together indicate a certain similarity to Jewish representations of waiting for the coming of the Messiah. The apocalyptic and rabbinic tradition referred such words to the whole world of plants and animals. The Apostle emphasizes the universality of this expectation in all creation, both human and not-human. The background of his view is formed by Jewish ideas of the ultimate reconciliation and liberation of the world. Thus full solidarity unites everything in longing, pain and waiting (the two Greek words: *systemázēi* and *synōdínei* contain the prefix *syn* = together). This means that all creation has been groaning together and suffering birth-pains together, i.e. in common, in solidarity with all creatures. It could be that this insight was part of the primitive Creed of the early Church, as suggested by St. Peter’s words about “universal restoration” (Ac 3:21) and by some other cosmic texts in Paul’s Letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians.

Listening to the voice of the Apostle, we realize that the suffering of destroyed and dying nature is also painful for its Creator. In the weakness and vulnerability of nature he himself becomes vulnerable. At the sight of suffering creatures, our human pain is only a participation in God’s pain. He is the first to be vulnerable. His pain is even more intense than ours. All the creatures belong to him. He is present in the places of their suffering. We must imitate the all embracing mercy and compassion of God himself. Unforgettable in this respect are the words of St. Isaac the Syrian (7th c.) about a merciful human 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; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. From the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and from his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason he offers up tearful prayer continually even 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

²³ See A. Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, Düsseldorf 1970, pp. 167-208. Polemical arguments of this author are directed mainly against the idea of the “cosmic Christ” of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God.’²⁴

KENOSIS AND EPICLESIS OF ALL CREATURES

The New Testament theology of creation is strictly connected with faith in the resurrection of Christ and with the experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit as a creative power in the new world. Thanks to this the truth of creation can be understood in the eschatological perspective of soteriology and pneumatology. The resurrection of Christ is a new creation which initiates the all-embracing process of transfiguration and eschatological renovation of the world. Belief in the resurrection is at the same time an expression of faith in the goodness of creation and of its ultimate fulfillment. Thus the event of Christ’s resurrection has repercussions in the future and is the source not only of hope for universal resurrection but also for transfiguration of the whole world. In other words, eschatological creation has its origin in the resurrection of Christ and in the activity of his Spirit. It is the active presence of the Holy Spirit as a life-giving power of the resurrection. The light of a new creation already invisibly illumines the history of humankind and of all creation. It is perceived only by those who confidently believe in the God who raised Jesus from the dead by the creative power of his Spirit.

The groaning and suffering of all creation reveal its enslavement and seem to be reversals of all that happened in the resurrection of Christ. But nature is not a closed circle, deprived of any openness to its ultimate transformation in a new heaven and a new earth. The resurrection of Christ opened the world to the transfiguring action of the Holy Spirit and to a new future. The openness of nature consists in its invisible groaning and longing for liberation from decay and for a fuller form of existence. The eager expectation of nature is somehow an extension and distant reflection of the longing and hope of human beings themselves.

We must emphasize, however, that human destiny will always remain different from that of other creatures. What is common to all creation is **the kenotic state of enslavement and the waiting for liberation**. In this respect humanity exists in full solidarity with the rest of creation. We human beings suffer together with nature and hope for liberation. It is worth mentioning here what the Second Vatican Council teaches in its Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* with special reference to the Holy Spirit:

We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity. Nor do we know how all things will

²⁴ See *Homily 71*, in *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, translated by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Mass. 1984, pp. 344-345.

be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away. But we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart. (...)

While charity and its fruits endure, all that creation (cf. Rm 8:19-21) which God made on man's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity. (...)

For after we have obeyed the Lord, and *in His Spirit* nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise, we will find them again, but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured (par. 39; italics mine, W.H.).

The conciliar reference to St. Paul's text and to the Holy Spirit is a stimulus for further reflections on the **kenosis and epiclesis of all creatures**. The Apostle does not interpret the death, frustration and vanity of the present shape of nature in metaphysical terms. He uses messianic, soteriological and eschatological categories. The One who subjected creation to frustration and vanity did it in the hope that one day it will be liberated from its bondage to decay and decomposition. As we read in another translation: "It was not for any fault on the part of creation that it was made unable to attain its purpose, it was made so by God; but creation still retains the hope of being freed, like us, from the slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God" (Rm 8:20; JB).

The promise of liberation is, therefore, an announcement of the common future of humankind and the non-human world. God's Spirit enables us to experience even now the gift of freedom and regeneration as "the first-fruits" in an initial way. All creation enduring in the state of kenosis and epiclesis invokes the Holy Spirit, who renews the face of the earth. This is its real ontological cry in expectation of final deliverance from the present condition of common groaning and suffering. The divine work of ultimate transfiguration embraces all created beings: humans, animals, plants, soil, water and air. Liberation from decay is expected by land and ocean, cultivated fields and deserts, forests and meadows, mountains and valleys. I believe that each of these realities has its own name from God. Each of them, in its kenotic condition, becomes a cosmic epiclesis, an invocation of God's Spirit, the Divine Deliverer from present pains. I do not think that speaking in this way abuses liturgical terminology. All cosmic reality, as mentioned earlier, is in some sense a sacramental reality.

In reflecting on the cosmic text of the apostle Paul about all creation in the state of kenosis, I have tried to emphasize its pneumatological dimension. **God's Spirit intercedes not only for people**

but also for all creatures in their groaning and longing for deliverance.

This intercession of the Spirit is accomplished “with groans that words cannot express” (*stanagmoīs alalētois*; Rm 8:26). The Holy Spirit takes into his own groaning everything that cries out for deliverance in human selves and also that lies hidden in the mute groaning of all nature.

A very typical expression of this intuition is found in Orthodox Russian spirituality, especially in *Candid Narratives of a Pilgrim to His Spiritual Father*, written in the 19th century and published in English under the title *The Way of a Pilgrim*.²⁵ Therein appear some explicit references to St. Paul’s text with commentary on the hidden meaning of the Word of God and interior prayer.

I began to see the meaning of such sayings as – “The inner secret man of the heart,”²⁶ “true prayer worships in the spirit,” “the kingdom is within us,” “*the intercession of the Holy Spirit with groanings that cannot be uttered*” (italics mine, W.H.)..., “the betrothal of the Spirit to our hearts,” “the cry from the depths of the heart,” “Abba, Father” (...). And when with all this in mind I prayed with my heart, everything around me seemed delightful and marvelous. The trees, the grass, the birds, the earth, the air, the light seemed to be telling me that they existed for man’s sake, that they witnessed to the love of God for man, that everything proved the love of God for man, that all things prayed to God and sang His praise. Then it was that I came to understand what *The Philokalia* calls “the knowledge of the speech of all creatures,” and I saw the means by which converse could be held with God’s creatures.²⁷

Equally characteristic is another passage in the narrative:

Well, it says in the New Testament that man and all creation “are subject to vanity, not willingly,” and sigh with effort and desire to enter into the liberty of the children of God. The mysterious sighing of creation, the innate aspiration of every soul towards God, that is exactly what interior prayer is. There is no need to learn it, it is innate in every one of us!²⁸

²⁵ *The Way of a Pilgrim*. Translated from the Russian by R.M French. Introduction by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, London, SPCK 1974 (first published in English 1930).

²⁶ Cf. 1 Pt 3:4.

²⁷ *The Way of a Pilgrim*, pp. 31-32 (Narrative 2).

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

In the English version the last sentence was inaccurately translated because the reference to all creation had been ignored and omitted. The Russian text simply says that **interior prayer**, *vnutrennaja molitva*, “is in all [of us] and **in everything**” (*ona est’ vo vsekh i vo vsem*).²⁹

THE COSMOS AS PRISONER-KING ON THE ICON OF PENTECOST

The Son and the Holy Spirit have forever united their life and their mission with the created world. The descent of the Spirit means the accomplishment of the work of incarnation in the world and humankind. In Pentecost he descends with his gifts upon all humanity and all nature.³⁰ This manifests the truly cosmic dimension of this event.

In consequence, the action of the Holy Spirit reveals itself in the material elements of the cosmos which are permeated with his transforming energy. At the beginning of creation, as the Bible says, God’s Spirit “was hovering over the waters” (Gn 1:2). According to Boulgakov, water signifies here some pre-original element or substance of the world (*pervoveščestvo mira*), primitive chaos transformed into an ordered cosmic reality.³¹ Similarly, at the baptism of Jesus, as witnessed in eastern liturgy, the Holy Spirit rested on him and sanctified the waters of the river Jordan and by his descent gave new significance to all material reality in the world.

That is also why, in the sacraments of the church, the transformation and sanctification of such material elements as bread, vine, water and oil occur. They become transmitters of spiritual gifts to the incarnate spirit of human beings. It is the Holy Spirit who is – especially in eastern tradition – each time invoked in the epiclesis of the praying church to descend and to change the natural significance of those material elements. Therefore, we have good reason even to speak about a “religious materialism” which unites matter with spirit into a striking synthesis. These two dimensions of reality do not exclude each other. They exist in direct and close relationship with God’s Spirit and his creative energy.³²

The transfiguring power of the Spirit should be understood in light of his creative energy acting in all creation. His descent during Pentecost is accomplished *in* the world. Let us not concentrate our attention on what seems to be only fiery tongues resting on the heads of apostles gathered in one room in Jerusalem! His action is not limited to this. The Holy Spirit descends through invisible fire also upon all of nature.

²⁹ *Otkrovennye rasskazy strannika dukhovnomu svoemu otcu*, 4th edition, Paris 1973, p. 57.

³⁰ Boulgakov (*Utešitel’*, p.315) says that the Spirit descends “na vsekh i na vse”, “na vse čelovečestvo i na vsiu prirodu”, “na vsiu tvar”.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 389.

³² On his relationship see some inspiring reflections of Boulgakov, *ibidem*, pp. 390-395.

This insight is confirmed by the **eastern icons of Pentecost** in the representation of the mysterious figure called “Cosmos”, shown as a prisoner but dressed as a king. Paul Evdokimov explains that this figure, personalized by an old man full of years after the fall, symbolizes the universe held captive by the Prince of this world (*l’univers captive du Prince de ce monde*).³³ The icon shows the contrast between two coexistent worlds: one can already see above “the new earth”. This is a vision of the Cosmos penetrated by the divine transfiguring fire to which the old king aspires. The Holy Spirit begins to work in order to liberate and to transform the prisoner (the universe!) at the bottom of the icon.

Liturgically during the solemnity of Pentecost, we find this same idea symbolically expressed in the decoration of churches with plants and flowers, not to mention in the praying hands of people who expect a beneficent transformation in union with all nature.

TO HEAR THE CRY OF THE EARTH

The enslavement of nature is its **voiceless cry amidst suffering**, close to the cry of humans. Solidarity in expectation is solidarity in suffering, which is also something that concerns the Creator. God’s Spirit takes part in the suffering of his creatures. He himself sustains the hope, longing and waiting of all creation by his own “groanings that words cannot express”. We have a clear parallel between “groaning and suffering birth-pains” of all creation (cf. Rm 8:22) and those “unutterable groanings” of the Spirit interceding for us (Rm 8:26).

The Spirit co-suffers with suffering creatures, and at the same time he is himself the greatest promise of their ultimate transfiguration: “When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (Ps 104:30). The evangelical reformed theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, is right when he says: “The messianic time brings not only the pouring out of gifts of the Spirit on people, but also the awakening of the Spirit (*Erweckung des Geistes*) in all the enslaved creatures”.³⁴ The future of creation is inseparable from the presence of God’s Spirit in all creatures.

The ecumenical document, *Mission and Evangelism* (already referred to), explains that God’s mission already begins with the very act of creation and continues to re-create by the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit (par. 19, 103). The life of creation and God’s life are interrelated and strictly connected. Therefore we have to move beyond a narrowly human centered approach towards our mission with the creation and development of spiritualities that are respectful of the earth. In reality human greed pollutes our planet and endlessly exploits its resources.

³³ P. Evdokimov, *L’art de l’icône. Théologie de la beauté*, Paris 1970, p. 289.

³⁴ Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung*, p. 82. Spacing by the Author.

³⁵ See chapter *The Cry of the Spirit in the Church* in this book.

We hear **the cry of the earth** as we listen to the cries of the poor and we know that from its beginning the earth has cried out to God over humanity's injustice (Genesis 4:10) (par. 19; boldface is mine, W.H.).

The document emphasizes that all creation is included in the reconciled unity towards which we are all called (cf. 2 Co 5:18-19). God's mission is to all life. So we look for the Spirit of unity to heal, reconcile and renew all creation. The God of life loves, cares for nature, and protects it. The earth will not be discarded while humans alone are saved. God's love does not promise human salvation separate from the renewal of all creation. Christians believe that "both the earth and our bodies have to be transformed through the Spirit's grace" (par. 20; cf. also 105). Humanity alone cannot be saved while the rest of creation perishes. The Bible gives clear witness to God's promise that heaven and earth will be made new (cf. Is 11:1-9; 25:6-10; 66:22; Rv 21:1-4).

Humans are only participants in God's mission for all creation. An individualistic spirituality often leads us to a false understanding of our relationship with nature. This is why we need **a new conversion**, a real *metánoia*, and **a new humility** that respects the needs of all life on earth (par. 22-23). We should be grateful beneficiaries of the natural world and, in communion with all of creation, praise its Creator.

This is an important aspect of our spiritual connection with creation. The rescue of nature cannot come without humility in our everyday attitudes. The mission of God's Spirit in creation constantly reminds us that the created world is not a passive object of human action. We are not masters of the earth but are responsible to care for the integrity of creation. This responsibility implies that unlimited greed and consumerism, which lead to the continuous destruction of nature, must end. Through repentance and a new attitude towards nature we allow the discrete, transformative action of God's Spirit to renew the face of the earth.

In this regard the prophetic voice of the Church must not be silent, especially in times like ours that cry out and demand that her voice be clearly heard. May the Spirit empower the Church in her mission of proclaiming the good news to all humanity and creation today!

THE ENERGIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE WHOLE OF CREATION

The New Testament speaks not only about the cosmic role of Christ: "For from him and through him and to him are all things" (Rm 11:36); "all things were created by him and for him; (...) in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17; NIV). It speaks also about the Spirit's active presence in the entire world. Christian teaching on the destinies of all creation is based on the paschal mystery of Christ and on the experience of

the Spirit's presence. Christ's resurrection already contains in a hidden way the mystery of the future lot of all creation. Since his resurrection there has also begun the process of the messianic preparation of the world of nature to its glorious transfiguration in the Kingdom of God. This *praeparatio messianica* takes place by the energy of the Holy Spirit which permeates all things and leads to their final perfection, and thus becomes the *praeparatio eschatologica*.

The action of the Holy Spirit is always related to that of the Son and the Father, although it retains at the same time its specific character. God the Father creates through the power of the Spirit, who completes everything that the Father does through the Son, makes it perfect and brings it to its end.³⁶ The liberating activity of Christ is accompanied by a **vivifying and renewing power of the Spirit**. His energies, often referred to in the eastern tradition, are **energies of the new creation**, manifested already in the resurrection of Christ. They embrace also the entire non-human world. The eschatological goal of creation is inseparably connected with the action of the Holy Spirit. The beauty of the earth is a manifestation of his presence.

This vision is particularly dear to eastern Christianity.³⁷ **Through the Spirit's active presence all creatures arrive at their fulfillment** – they *teleioũsthai*, that is to say: **they receive their perfection** – says Basil the Great in his treatise on the Holy Spirit.³⁸ The energies of the Spirit are present in all creation, immanently acting in the cosmos. Such an energetic vision of created reality has its roots in the Bible (cf. Ps 104:29-30; Ws 11:24-12:1). The Holy Spirit has been “poured down” on all creation (cf. Jl 2:28-32; Ac 2:16-20). Thanks to his presence and action, the great cosmic community of all creatures comes into being in their mutual relations.

The divine ontology is such that each created being exists in relation to other beings. The creative activity of the Spirit sustains all things in existence, renews and perfects them in such a way that they also manifest in themselves a certain self-transcendence and openness to ultimate fulfillment. All that exists and lives manifests the life-giving presence of the Spirit who is the source of life for all living creatures. For this reason the Spirit takes part in their fate and suffering.

Jürgen Moltmann does not hesitate to speak about “the cosmic Spirit” (*der kosmische Geist*) as the principle of evolution and all creativeness in the sphere of matter and life.³⁹ The Spirit creates new possibilities for the development of organisms and inspires indirectly, through natural causes and accidents, their interaction and interpenetration.

³⁶ See Origen, *De principiis* I,3,8. PG 11,155.

³⁷ See N. Nissiotis, *La christologie pneumatologique de la nature et ses conséquences pour l'écologie et l'humanisme integral*, in *Unterwegs zur Einheit*, Freiburg i. Br. 1980, pp. 435-454.

³⁸ St Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Sancto* XVI, 38. SC 17bis, p. 378.

³⁹ Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung*, pp. 32-33, 111-112.

At the same time this unifying and diversifying action of the Spirit in creation finds its expression both in preserving in creatures their identities and in enabling them to self-transcend in the direction of a common eschatological future. We see in this phenomenon a basic openness of the created world to its final fulfillment.

Is this only pure generalization and speculation? Certainly not, if we see its roots in the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit known by faith. It is an experience of his creative and regenerating power in the history of “a new creation” initiated in Christ (cf. 2 Co 5:17; Jn 3:5). It is also an experience of communion which surpasses all differences and boundaries (cf. Ga 3:28; Ac 4:31-35) without infringing upon the dignity of particular human persons and their spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Co 12). This experience of the Holy Spirit in the community of believers anticipates the future of a new creation and the final regeneration of the cosmos in glory.

This kind of transfer of certain statements from the human sphere to the world of nature seems justified because all creatures form the great unity of God’s creation. The richer and more complex throws light on the simpler. As a bodily-spiritual being, the human person unites in itself the whole of creation. It is a micro-cosmos and thus not only an image of God (*imago Dei*) but also an image of the world (*imago mundi*). Human vocation and destination thus also explain the destiny of the non-human world. Christianity confesses its faith in the resurrection of human body, thus emphasizing the unity of the history of all creation and its participation in the life of God who is the final goal of the universe. The Creator actively cooperates with his Spirit in the drama of universal salvation.

Although material reality is different from spiritual reality, the former was created to make possible the existence of humans’ conscious personal life. The human person is a bodily-spiritual being. We can say with Karl Rahner that the material world is “a corporeity of the spirit, an extended human body” (*die Leibhaftigkeit des Geistes, der erweiterte Leib des Menschen*).⁴⁰ For this reason its lot is connected with the destiny of humanity.

The history of creation itself contains a real promise of the forthcoming transfiguration. We can find in every creature some traces of transcendence which open it to future fulfillment. The ultimate sense of nature does not consist in it being only a stage prop in the drama of God and humanity. As I said earlier, all creation is oriented towards its final transformation. Christian hope, which has its roots in Jewish tradition of the Old Testament, shows us an image of the eschatological community of all creatures in God. Jakob Boehme calls it a “symphony of all things”.⁴¹

⁴⁰ K. Rahner, *Das Christentum und der “neue Mensch”*, in id., *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd V, Einsiedeln-Zürich-Köln 1962, pp. 159-179, here 173.

⁴¹ See E. Benz, *Der Mensch und die Sympathie aller Dinge am Ende der Zeiten (nach Jakob Boehme und seiner Schule)*, “Eranos-Jahrbuch” 24 (1955) 133-197.

In conclusion we can say that Christian teaching about nature is shaped not only in a Christological, but also in a Pneumatological perspective. This approach allows us to overcome a purely mechanistic vision of the cosmos that inevitably contributes to an aggressive and devastating policy towards nature and leads finally to its enslavement and suffering.

THE KENOSIS OF GOD'S SPIRIT IN THE COSMOS

The New Testament speaks in a discrete and warning way about the ability of the Spirit to be affected by suffering: "Never try to suppress the Spirit" (1 Th 5:19; JB) or "do not put out the Spirit's fire" (NIV), and "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ep 4:30). This means then that he can be suppressed and grieved. Being the creative power of love, the Spirit can therefore "groan" together with enslaved creatures in a way that could never be put into words (cf. Rm 8:26).

The Jewish tradition defines God's dwelling in creation, especially in the chosen nation, as *Shekinah*. Accordingly God suffers and wanders together with his people and shares with them their destinies in an alien land.⁴² The concept of *Shekinah* can also be applied to the destinies of all creation. Dwelling in them through the transcendent and, at the same time, the immanent presence of his Spirit, God can co-suffer with suffering creatures.⁴³

A new creation is secretly being shaped in the history of the Spirit's co-suffering with creatures. Suffering is never the last word of God. Those who believe in God the Creator can also hope for deliverance and transfiguration of the cosmos. They do not wait for the annihilation of the world but for its transformation into a new heaven and a new earth. In light of Christian eschatology, if the Creator calls something into being, he will also eventually renew and transfigure it by the power of his Spirit. Therefore we hope for **the ultimate cosmic Pentecost**, when the Spirit will shape the new face of the world of universal resurrection. His action does not annihilate, but makes a cosmos out of chaos, purifies it and transforms it.

The power of the Holy Spirit, however, cannot fully manifest itself in the temporary history of the world as long as **the kenosis of the Spirit still lasts in all creation**. There is a deep meaning in thinking about the cosmos in kenotic and pneumatological terms. As we saw in chapter IV of this book, Orthodox theologians often refer to the idea of the personal kenosis of the Holy Spirit in the whole economy of salvation and in the

⁴² See F. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern des Erlösung*, 4. Ausg., Den Haag 1976, pp. 424-428, 448-449.

⁴³ This insight often returns in reflections of Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung*, pp. 25, 108, 113-114, 218.

history of the created world.⁴⁴ Through his Spirit God dwells in the created world, and this is inseparable from self-limitation, kenosis and suffering.

Such reflections are by no means an expression of pantheism. God's Spirit is present in the world and penetrates into the depth of created beings but preserves his distinctiveness and transcendence. We face here a paradox of the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God in creation.

CAN WE SPEAK ABOUT THE REDEMPTION OF THE COSMOS?

The Old Testament already expresses the idea of solidarity between animate nature and humans (cf. Gn 1-3; Ps 8; 104; Sg 1-3). God concludes a covenant not only with Noah himself but also "with every living creature (...) – the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark (...) – every living creature on earth" (Gn 9:10; cf also 9:15). According to the prophesy of Hosea, God will make a covenant "with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground" (Ho 2:18). The prophets show eschatological salvation in its cosmic dimensions. The image of lasting peace among animals has special significance.

The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord (Is 65:25; cf. a more detailed description in Is 11:6-9).

The Slav Book of Henoch (58,6) speaks in a way proper to the apocrypha that, on the Last Day, the souls of animals will accuse people of their bad conduct towards inferior beings. By their mere existence animals praise God (cf. Jb 39-41). In the New Testament animals become great symbols of new supernatural realities: the lamb (Jn 1:29), the dove (Mt 3:16), and "living creatures" before the throne of God (Ap 4:7-9; 5:11.14; 7:11 et al.).

In sum, biblical witnesses transmit a belief in the unity of all creation in its differentiation and plurality of forms of existence. Precisely this unity gives hope for the ultimate transfiguration of the whole world. Indeed it is difficult to imagine a new earth without flowers, animals and birds. The Russian writer and thinker, Vasily V. Rosanov, feelingly

⁴⁴ See S. Bulgakov, *Nevesta Agnca. O bogočlovečestve*, část' 3, Paris 1945; offset ed. Westmead 1971, pp. 425-428, 431, 451, 525; id. *Utešitel'*, pp. 253-262, 395-401; V. Lossky, *Théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, Paris 1960, p. 165.

expresses this intuition: “For if wherever are flowers, then – beyond grave. Heavenly roses! Heavenly roses!”⁴⁵

The question of the future of God’s creation is difficult in many respects. But those who perceive a mysterious solidarity of the destiny of humankind with that of the whole world will certainly be reluctant to separate the salvation of human beings from that of the rest of creation. Matter, cosmos and life are realities inseparable from human persons. The relationship between God and humans finds its extension in all created realities which will participate in the final transformation and salvation of humanity.

To close our eyes on the universal dimension of Christ’s bodily resurrection and the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the world would be a sort of cosmological docetism. Redemption is not accomplished only in the sphere of the human spirit. To “spiritualize” would mean to deny the revelation that speaks also about “the redemption of our bodies” (Rm 8:23), of their transformation into “a spiritual body”, *sōma pneumatikón* (1 Co 15:44), similar to Christ’s “glorious body”, *tò soma tēs dóxēs autoũ* (Ph 3:21). The glorification and transfiguration of Christ’s human nature – a real particle of humanity and the world – is at the same time the beginning of a “new creation” (*kainē ktísis*, 2 Co 5:17) which will renew everything.

Humankind is indeed a primary and direct goal of redemption but not an exclusive one. To a certain degree the mystery of redemption also embraces the material world. Many theologians affirm that this presupposes the existence of some connection between the fall of humans and the cosmos in which a disintegrating change occurred.⁴⁶ Through the redemptive work of Christ, God wants to bring everything (*tà pànta*) together and, thus, to restore peace and inner harmony in the world. Thanks to this also in nature, all disharmony and any hostile relationship between various creatures will one day cease. All things will be reconciled through Christ and for him as head of the new creation (cf. Ep 1:10; Col 1:20).⁴⁷

This is perhaps one of the most forgotten chapters of Christian soteriology. The very concept of a “cosmic redemption” is justified because

⁴⁵ *Apokalipsis našego vremena*, in W. W. Rosanov, *Izbrannoje*, München 1970, p. 507.

⁴⁶ According to other theologians the subjection of the non-human world to the enslavement of frustration and decay means simply that God himself intended a natural, although transitory state of things. We should therefore not connect this situation with the human fall or any other event. See A.M. Dubarle, *Le gémissement des creatures*, « *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* » 38 (1954) 445-465, esp. 456,458.

⁴⁷ See S. Lyonnet, *Redemptio “cosmica” secundum Rom. 8,19-23*, “*Verbum Domini*” 44 (1966) 225-242; id., *Die biblische Grundlagen*, in *Die Kirche in der Welt von heute. Untersuchungen und Kommentare zur Pastoralkonstitution “Gaudium et spes” des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*, Salzburg 1967, 77-84, 93-94.

it is a consequence of the redemption of the human body as a really small part of the material cosmos. In other words, redemption reaches the cosmos indirectly, through human beings. In a strict sense it is directly related to humans, but, because of our connections with the universe, it exerts its influence also on the material world. The very word “redemption” should be understood in this case as analogous to the redemption of humanity.

It is not enough to be guided in a theology of the cosmos only by strict reasoning and textual analysis, which will always remain incomplete and controversial. What we need is **a certain dose of religious intuition and wisdom** as well. They enable us to look ahead to the future of the universe, but at the same time to avoid dangers in the game of pure imagination. In many respects we depend on the scarce images and symbols provided by Scripture and Christian tradition in their various trends as developed over the course of centuries. These are, however, images full of life, arousing our hope that the whole creation, in its initial openness, will become the homeland of resurrected humanity, a cosmic sanctuary of the presence of the Creator and the glory of the risen Christ.

The resurrection of the human body also implies the transformation of all creation. Not-yet-transfigured nature shares in the destiny of the non-redeemed human body, which forms its living part and parcel. The biblical description of the beginning of creation speaks first about the creation of nature and then about that of human beings. This sequence is reversed in the history of a new creation, which begins with the redemption of humans and ends with the liberation of nature. In this way, the Passover of humanity leads in consequence to the transfiguring **Passover of all creation**.

We could reasonably accept the hypothesis that those who have crossed the threshold of death and resurrection to the new life experience already the eschatological beauty of the transfigured world. They are in a situation similar to the Apostles on Mount Tabor, who in the middle of this world had a perception of the mystery of the final transfiguration. We do not know the way of this radical transformation for all creation. It takes place through the Spirit of **God’s creative intervention which corresponds somehow to his initial presence in the work of creation when he “was hovering over the waters”** (Gn 1:2).

Under the influence of St. Augustine in the West, the sense of the cosmic extent of redemption began to disappear. In contradistinction to other church Fathers, he denied the solidarity of humans with the cosmos in sin and redemption. On the one hand, in fear of manicheism, he was silent about the cosmic dimension of redemption, but on the other hand he admitted that, after the resurrection of bodies, the eternal City of God (*civitas Dei*) would also embrace the material world.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ See T.E. Clark, *ST. Augustine and Cosmic Redemption*, “Theological Studies” 19 (1958) 133-164.

NATURA SPIRAT RESURRECTIONEM

Surrendering to the wide spread spiritualizing influences of Greek philosophy, many church Fathers paid more attention to the immortality of the soul than to the resurrection of the body and the ultimate transfiguration of the cosmos. Some of them left no doubt, however, that non-human creatures will also take part in the glory of the transfigured world. All creation will be liberated from corruption and transformed into a new reality.⁴⁹

Many church Fathers praised the cosmic dimensions of Christ's cross and resurrection. In an early Christian hymn the redemptive blood of Christ purifies the whole world, earth, waters, stars: *Terra, pontus, astra, mundus / Quo lavantur flumine!*⁵⁰ Very characteristic in this respect is the witness of Pseudo-Chrysostom, who alluded also to **the role of the Holy Spirit in the cosmic mystery of the cross**. In his view, when dying on the cross Jesus gave up his spirit, he at the same time transmitted the Holy Spirit to all creatures as well. Thus the cross became the new universal Tree of Life:

This tree which extends as far as heaven, rises from earth to heaven. The immortal plant, it ascends at the center of heaven and earth, supports the earth inhabited by people, unites the whole cosmos, contains in itself the whole richness of human nature. Hammered by invisible nails of the Spirit, in order not to vacillate in his adjustment to the divine, touching heaven through the top of his head, strengthening the earth by his feet and (...) embracing the whole atmosphere by his incommensurable hands, he [Jesus] was whole everywhere and in all things. (...) The great Jesus gave up his spirit crying: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit".⁵¹ Then, going away upwards, this divine Spirit restored life and strength to all things which trembled, and the universe regained its balance, as if the crucifixion and passion of God permeated all things.⁵²

⁴⁹ See for example Origen, *De principiis* I,6,4; 7,5; III,6,5; id., *Contra Celsum*, IV,11-13; Irenaeus, *Adv. haereses* V,35,2; 36,1. SCh 153, 442-456; Basil the Great, *In Psalmum 44,2*. PG 29,389.

⁵⁰ Venantius Fortunatus, *Pange lingua, gloriosi praelium certaminis*. PL 88, 88.

⁵¹ Let us note that the Greek text has in this context the definite article *tò pneûma* (Lk 23:46). Dying Jesus *parédōken tò pneûma* (Jn 19:30). The definite article suggests that we have to do here with a person.

⁵² Pseudo-Chrysostom [Pseudo-Hyppolitus?], *Hom. 6 in Pascha*, 5. PG 59, 745-746.

In his turn St. Ambrose of Milan wrote: “The creatures of the world will rejoice, those which now groan and suffer birth-pains together, because they were subjected to vanity, as long as the redemption of every body would not be complete”⁵³ In another truly hymnal text he glorifies the resurrection of Christ as a beginning of the resurrection of the whole cosmos:

The world is risen in Him,
heaven is risen in Him,
earth is risen in Him.
For there will be
a new heaven and a new earth.⁵⁴

All that happened to the body of Christ is a prototype, cause and anticipation of what is to occur in the whole cosmos. His glorious body is a model of the new creation. Thanks to the physical solidarity with Christ’s body, the material universe takes part in his victory as well. His resurrection has become the common good of the universe. Using liturgical language we can say that the risen Christ, as the initiator of the anaphora of the whole cosmos, is the precursor of all creatures. His resurrection reveals the “first-fruits” of liberation and glorification which will at once affect the whole cosmos. No wonder that some church Fathers see in the day of resurrection “the eighth day of creation” – an eschatological image of the coming age, the expected eternal day without sequence.⁵⁵

In sharp contrast to this optimistic view, a medieval gloomy verdict predicted that in the transfigured new world there would be place only for humans with their bodies and for minerals, but not for plants and animals.⁵⁶ Not all subsequent thinkers shared this view. According to Johannes Scotus Eriugena (c. 815–c. 877), an Irish theologian, neoplatonist philosopher, and poet, the souls (!) of animals will also participate in God’s universal gift of salvation. He believed that all people and all beings, including animals, reflect attributes of God, towards whom all are capable of progressing and to which all things ultimately must return.⁵⁷ Nicholas of Cues (Cusanus)

⁵³ »Gaudebit creatura mundi, quae nunc congemiscit et parturit, quia vanitati etiam illa creatura subiecta est, donec (...) totius corporis redemptio completur...». Ambrose, *De Elia et ieiunio* 21, 80. PL 14, 726.

⁵⁴ “Resurrexit in eo mundus, resurrexit in eo coelum, resurrexit in eo terra. Erit enim coelum novum et terra nova”. Ambrose, *De excessu fratris* 2,102. CSEL 73, 305.

⁵⁵ Cf. Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Santo* 27, 66. SCh 17bis, 484; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio 41 in Pentecosten*, 2. PG 36, 432; Gregory of Nyssa, *In Psalmos tr.* II,5. PG 44,505.

⁵⁶ See Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.* d. 48 q. 2 a. 5; *Contra Gentes* IV 97; *De potentia* 5,9; *Comp. theol.* 170.

⁵⁷ J. Scotus Eriugena, *De divisione naturae (Perí phýseōn)* 3,39.

taught that all creatures endowed with sense organs would enjoy life in the new world.⁵⁸ Some mystics and saints, especially sensitive to the world of nature and full of compassion for the suffering of non-human creatures, were also convinced that they would be eschatologically transformed.

The Polish Orthodox theologian and iconographer, Jerzy Nowosielski (1923-2011), a man very sensitive to the drama of nature (which, in addition, is pitilessly harmed by people), sincerely believed that animals are suffering angels, participating in Christ's kenosis and in the work of salvation.⁵⁹

Jewish and Christian traditions contributed in large measure to the fact that the sense of guilt concerning the world of animals had disappeared in the consciousness of people. Grave injuries have been inflicted on them and innumerable atrocities committed. Animals are not insensitive automatons unable to suffer. Many bad habits still have to be overcome in this respect. Orthodox theologians remind us of our long neglected duty.⁶⁰

According to Walter Künneth (1901-1997), a German Protestant theologian, *natura spirat resurrectionem*, nature breathes resurrection.⁶¹ Of course, non-human nature is not called to eternal happiness in the same degree as humans are because it lacks consciousness and freedom. A stone will never become a rational being called to the freedom of the children of God. Nevertheless, the resurrection of Christ is a promise of transfiguration for every being and every creature. As Eugen Walter wrote long ago: "Christ's resurrected body is a promise for every stone, for every flower, for every molecule and atom".⁶² Through his resurrection Christ has shown most clearly that he does not disregard nor reject the world whose every tiny part has been glorified in his body, but remains forever connected to it in order to bring everything to participation in his own glory.

Therefore, only in connection with humankind and its ultimate destiny will the material world acquire a new significance. Thanks to solidarity with the glorified body of Christ, the material cosmos has also

⁵⁸ Nicolaus Cusanus, *Docta ignorantia* 3,8.

⁵⁹ Z. Podgórzec, *Wokół ikony. Rozmowy z Jerzym Nowosielskim (Around Icon: Talks with Jerzy Nowosielski)*, Warszawa 1985, p. 56, 103-104. –On suffering of animals see also some critical remarks of Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, *Religion: If there is no God... On God, the Devil, Sin and other Worries of the so-called Philosophy of Religion*, Glasgow 1982, pp. 54-58.

⁶⁰ See T. Goritcheva, *Les animaux dans la pensée orthodoxe*, « Contacts » 41 (1989) No. 145, 24-35; O. Clément, *Les animaux dans la pensée orthodoxe*, ibidem, 35-44.

⁶¹ W. Künneth, *Theologie der Auferstehung*, 2.Aufl. München 1934, p. 158, 164-165.

⁶² E. Walter, *Christus und der Kosmos. Von der Zusammenfassung des Alls in Christus. Eine grossartige Auslegung von Eph 1,10*, Stuttgart 1948, p. 43: "Der Auferstandene Leib Christi ist eine Verheissung für jeden Stein, für jede Blume, für jedes Molekul und Atom".

been included in the history of salvation. The resurrection of Christ is a beginning of the new creation and a model for its definitive fulfillment in the forthcoming world. God's creative action and his divine "yes" towards the whole cosmos have been revealed in it. Thanks to Christ's resurrection, nature already bears in itself a mark of eschatological promise. In it the whole cosmos appears as a penultimate and temporary reality which tends towards ultimate transformation.

Not only humanity but also our planet Earth and the non-human world take part in Christ's resurrection. The history of humans cannot be separated from the rest of the world. We cannot live without air, water, earth and sun. Being part of the earth, we need it to be born, to live, to grow and to die. When the divine Logos became a human being, his incarnation was in a certain way also an acceptance and exaltation of the material world. Christ's humanity will be forever connected with the cosmos. But his body, assumed in the incarnation, has been fully transfigured in the resurrection. Only then, in his glorified body, has matter found its final and definitive perfection. Without ceasing to retain its own nature, matter has become a participant in the everlasting fullness of divine life. Only in this way is matter able to achieve its most sublime dignity.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE EARTH OUR MOTHER

Only from this perspective can we see the dominant significance of the resurrection of Christ and of Pentecost for the world of nature. The paschal mystery of Christ completed by Pentecost is inscribed into the deepest secrets of all created beings. All creation belongs to the order of the resurrection (*ordo resurrectionis*). This is the greatest promise of a new future. It extends far beyond the individual destinies of humans. It announces the great and admirable deeds of God (*magnalia Dei*) concerning all creation. For this reason we can speak about the hope of the whole cosmos. Although our planet Earth is not the cosmological center of the world, nevertheless in light of our present accessible knowledge and at least from a theological point of view, it appears to be the place where the most decisive soteriological event occurs.

A certain spiritualism, which developed over the course of centuries in the Christian mentality, cannot be reconciled with biblical cosmic promises. Christ's humanity, glorified in the resurrection and the descent of God's Spirit in Pentecost, achieves harmony between spiritual and material realities. The resurrection of humankind cannot be conceived of without the participation of nature in the final transformation of the world. If Christians can and should think optimistically about the universe, this optimism has its deepest roots in the mystery of creation as renewed by the creative and transfiguring energy of the Holy Spirit of God. "Beauty will save the world" – says Fyodor Dostoyevsky through his kenotic hero, prince

Myshkin, in his novel “The Idiot”.⁶³ It is divine goodness, wisdom and beauty, often identified with the Holy Spirit, that will eventually save the world.

It is no wonder that, in the eastern tradition of Christianity, beauty appears as a specific symbol of the Holy Spirit, and the Earth is called “the Great Mother” of humans. Staretz Zosima, in Dostoyevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, utters the following spiritual instruction:

Love to throw yourself on the earth and kiss it. Kiss the earth and love it with an unceasing, consuming love. Love all men, love everything. Seek that rupture and ecstasy. Water the earth with the tears of your joy and love those tears. Don’t be ashamed of that ecstasy, prize it, for it is a gift of God and a great one; it is not given to many but only to the elect.⁶⁴

Love the animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and joy untroubled. Do not trouble it, don’t harass them, don’t deprive them of their happiness, don’t work against God’s intent. Man, do not pride yourself on superiority to the animals; they are without sin, and you, with your greatness, defile the earth by your appearance on it, and leave the traces of your foulness after you – alas, it is true of almost every one of us!⁶⁵

An echo of these moving words can also be found in an inspired apostrophe to the Earth written at the threshold of the 20th century by the already quoted Russian Orthodox theologian, Sergius Bulgakov.

Great Mother, wet earth! In you we are born, on you we feed, we tread you with our feet, to you we return. Children of the earth, love your mother, kiss her tenderly, wash her with your tears, bedew her with sweat, imbibe with blood, fill her with your bones! For nothing in her is lost. She guards everything in herself, mute memory of the world, she gives life and fruit to everything. Who does not love the earth, does not feel her motherhood – is a slave and renegade, deplorable rebel against mother, degenerate child

⁶³ See A. Webster, *The Exemplary Kenotic Holiness of Prince Myshkin in Dostoyevsky’s “The Idiot”*, “St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly” 28 (1984) 189-216; J. Touraille, *La beauté sauvera le monde*, “Contacts” 32 (1980) No. 109, 5-15.

⁶⁴ F. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Translated by Constance Garnett, New York 1950, p. 387 (Part II, Book VI, Ch. III).

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 383.

of nonbeing. Mother earth! From you was born that body which had become the repository for the incarnate God. From you he has taken his immaculate body! In you he reposed for three days in the grave! Mother earth! Out of you grow cereals and vine-plants, whose fruits become the Body and Blood of Christ in the holiest of the sacraments. To you returns this holy body! You silently hide in herself the whole fullness and whole beauty of the creation.⁶⁶

We have no reason to shrink the universal dimension of Christian hope. The mystery of salvation has no limits. A new humanity, but with it all creation, will take part in God's kingdom of a new heaven and a new earth. Participation in the miracle of existence reveals the community of destinies of all creatures. God himself will be the ultimate fulfillment of all. We can speak about this only through approximations – thanks to the mediation of images, metaphors and comparisons. Where the language of direct statements fails, we still have presentiment, intuition and silence to penetrate into the depth of the mystery.

Christian hope, cosmic by character, is inseparable from love of the earth, the homeland of humankind and love of all creation. Through his Holy Spirit God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. All nature breathes the hope of resurrection through the creative power of the same Spirit who, at the beginning of creation as the Bible says, “was hovering over the waters”. This good beginning already announces discretely a good ending. God will then see that all he has made is very good indeed. His creative wisdom, revealed in the work of Christ and his Spirit, cannot fail. This hope teaches us a lesson in humility and sensitivity to the cry of all creation.

⁶⁶ S. Bulgakov, *Svet nevěčernyi: Sozercaniya i umozreniya*, Moskva 1917; offset ed. Westmead 1971, p. 188.

CHAPTER VIII

THE *PAROUSÍA* AS THE END OF THE KENOSIS OF THE SPIRIT

The ascension of Jesus marked the end of the kenotic condition of his humanity and of his self-resignation of the glory that is his by right. His humanity has been glorified and exalted in glory. The work of redemption achieved its final fulfillment in its temporal sphere through the descent of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that it attained its whole and ultimate fullness. There still remains something unfulfilled in spite of the Savior's exaltation. His existence in the glory of heaven is still linked to the world's temporal history, which extends from the Ascension and Pentecost to his second coming in glory (the *Parousía*). Jesus himself explains that he is going to prepare a place for us "in My Father's house" (Jn 14:2). According to the apostle Peter, "heaven must keep [Jesus] till the universal restoration" (Ac 3:21).

THE CRY OF THE WORLD ALREADY HEARD: EASTER AND PENTECOST AS THE BEGINNING OF THE UNIVERSAL TRANSFIGURATION

In Easter believers experience the joy of the transfiguration and glorification which have already taken place in Jesus' humanity. Through him the promise of universal transfiguration has occurred, not only of all humankind but also of the entire cosmos. Such a far-reaching hope is proclaimed in the Easter message.

Christians are persuaded that we owe this promise of ultimate transformation to the risen cosmic Christ – to his transcendent Omega Point of which Teilhard de Chardin spoke. The death and resurrection of Christ initiated an era of new creation in the world. In his infinite wisdom by his incarnate *Logos* and his divine *Pneuma/Ruah*, God as Creator and Savior will open to all his creatures a new future which no eye has yet seen and no ear has yet heard. This hidden future can now be discovered only in faith, hope and love.

The entire cosmic evolution is open to a new reality in which death will be definitively overcome. God wants to gather together in unity his scattered children (cf. Jn 11:52) in the new world. Easter and Pentecost constitute a real beginning of the transfiguration of the whole cosmos. **The cry of the world has already been heard.** The definitive divine answer is still expected. It will come unerringly, and we shall all be greatly surprised and astonished.

THIS WORLD IN ITS PRESENT FORM IS PASSING AWAY

The beginning of the new life in the forthcoming world of God presupposes the end of the world in which we now live. What does this mean? When God calls his creation and all his creatures into being, his work is indestructible and practically will not cease to exist. In reality the world will have an infinite duration, and only its form of existence will change. According to the apostolic witness, this form precisely is transient and finite: "For this world in its present form is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31; NIV). The transitory shape and finite image of the present world express the basic laws of life and of its temporary manifestations. In this sense we speak of the end of this world which is passing away. As any human life, so also this world will come to an end. The book of temporary existence has to end and will be closed.

The wisdom of Scripture speaks about the end while announcing "the last Day", "the Day of the Lord" or "the Day of God". These descriptions often appear in the Psalms, in the Prophets, in Jesus' own words and in the writings of the Apostles. They are linked with symbolic images of the universal conflagration of the world accompanied by an upsetting of balance among its elements.

An evolutionary transition to the ultimate transformation will be achieved by the proper energies of the world. The created world will be regenerated into a new existence by the creative omnipotence of God. In this sense some sort of continuity between the old and the new world exists, but at the same time the unusual newness caused by divine intervention surpasses all human possibilities. Here we stand in front of a striking paradox of continuity and discontinuity.

Some Orthodox theologians speak therefore about a certain synergy or synergism, i.e. about cooperation, concurrence and participation of the temporary world and human freedom with the renewing and transforming power of God.¹ In his transcendent action he does not destroy the original being of the world but renews and transforms it. This idea is expressed by the symbol of fire which melts and purifies but destroys only what is corrupted, transitory and unstable (cf. 2 Pt 3:10-11; Rv 21:1-2.24). Between the world of the coming age and the present one a profound, uninterrupted and truly ontological bond exists.

In reality the world does not end but is transfigured into a new heaven and a new earth. It is not a purely physical change but a metaphysical one. A new super-cosmic energy enters the existing world and transforms it. The physical world and its matter are not a closed reality, impermeable to the spiritual world. Because of creation the Spirit of God penetrates material reality, which remains open to spiritual reality and participates in it. In this sense the world is at the same time both material

¹ See S. Bulgakov, *Nevesta Agnca. O bogočelovečestve*, part III, Paris 1945, reprint by Gregg International, Westmead 1971, pp. 411-412, 414.

and spiritual and cannot be reduced to only material reality. This determines its openness and double structure, which are the exact opposite of self-sufficiency².

THE PAROUSÍA OF CHRIST AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Reflection on the *Parousía* cannot be limited to the person of Christ alone. It must extend also to the Holy Spirit. Like other events in the history of salvation, the *Parousía* is in fact the work of the entire divine Trinity. The second coming of Christ is its new revelation to the whole world. Sent by the Father anew into the world, Christ will come back together with the Holy Spirit, who “rests” on him (cf. Mt 3:16) both in eternity and in time as the personification of divine glory. This glory was manifested already by the descent of the Spirit during the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan, by his transfiguration on Mount Tabor in the presence of his chosen apostles, by his resurrection and ascension. But these were only anticipations of the coming of Christ and the Holy Spirit in glory. There is something else to be taken into account. The *Parousía* of the Son also implies the *Parousía* of the Holy Spirit.

Inspired by some thought-provoking considerations of Fr. S. Boulgakov, let us advance further in our reflections. Glory is the fullness of the Spirit’s activity. Jesus gave up the fullness of this glory during his kenotic condescension and self-limitation. It was also as if the Holy Spirit had withdrawn in a certain way from Jesus into his own kenosis and limited the fullness of his presence and action.

So there is the double mutual kenosis of two divine persons: the kenosis of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit. The descent of the Spirit during Pentecost was also a kenotic act. His activity had to be limited because the created world was not yet able to open itself in its temporality to the whole power of his presence. Because the Spirit descended into the world of time and space, its transforming energy was diminished. Cooperation with the freedom of created rational beings was subject to limitation on the part of the Spirit himself who, after Pentecost, is indeed present in the world but in a kenotic, diminished and limited way.

Nevertheless, “Pentecost is in its fruits the realizing itself and continuing Incarnation” (*soveršajuščeessya i prodolžajuščeessya v plodach svoikh voploščenie*).³ Yet the process of transfiguration of the world before the *Parousía* is only a beginning and an anticipation. The entire force of Pentecost will manifest itself in the *Parousía* of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Let us listen to what Boulgakov says about how it should be understood. Permit me to give a larger quotation:

² Ibidem, pp. 428-429.

³ Ibidem, p. 431.

The kenosis of the Spirit at his descent into the world consists in diminishing his gifts, in the limitedness of his action. The natural world preserves its immutability in existing as creature, in its condition of ambiguousness and non-fulfillment. The fullness of manifestation and transference for the Spirit, revelation in glory and glorification are still awaited. The glorious transformation is linked not with the new coming of the Spirit, because he already abides in the world, but with the fullness of his action. This fullness is transfiguration of the world in close relation with the *Parousía*, in order to make it a new heaven and a new earth, where Christ is coming. Although Scripture connects the second coming of Christ with universal fire, destruction of the world, after which will follow its transformation, it does not mean that there exists succession or coincidence in time of the two parallel events. It is one and the same consummation – the coming of Christ in Glory and the appearance of the Glory to the world manifest the action of the Holy Spirit. This “fire” (...) means that the world is passing over through its Pentecost. The tongues of fire become flames of the world’s conflagration which does not burn it but smelts. In that image we have a *hieroglyph of the cosmic Pentecost*. If *Parousía* is the second coming of Christ to the world in Glory, it is also a new revelation of the Holy Spirit, of the Divine Glory in Christ and in the world. This is not a new coming of the Spirit, because having come during Pentecost he does not leave the world, although he goes somehow into hiding in it for a certain time. The symbolical language of the Book of Revelation speaks about it showing the holy city of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven (...). “And the city did not need the sun or the moon for light, since it was lit by the radiant glory of God and the lamb was a lighted torch for it” (Rv 21:23).⁴

Therefore only the second coming of Christ in glory will end the kenosis of the Spirit that began in Pentecost. As “the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God” (1 P 4:14) he will reveal himself together with the fullness of Christ’s glory. Speaking in a less traditional language, I would say that it happens already when each of us dies. In fact the *Parousía* occurs for us at the moment of our death. It is not a far off event. Already now we must rejoice over and be glad of this fullness of glory, even among afflictions in the present moment, because we will “enjoy a much greater gladness when his glory is revealed” (1 P 4:13).

⁴ Ibidem, pp. 427-428. Italics and translation are mine, W.H.

The glory present in the *Parousía* is not limited only to the person of Christ but is also the glory of God's Spirit and in fact the glory of the whole Divine Trinity. It is the Father who sends his Son into the world again and makes, for the second time, a joint descent together with the Holy Spirit, in order that they may both perform the transfiguration of the world. The glory of heaven embraces all creation. In this way the work of salvation becomes complete. The world is ready to receive this gift.

The second coming is therefore also the *Parousía* of the Holy Spirit which began in Pentecost but achieves its fulfillment with the *Parousía* of Christ. We can say that Christ himself, full of glory, sends anew "the Spirit of glory" into the world to transform it by his creative power. The fullness of the divine glory of Christ is the glory of the Spirit as well. The *Parousía* reveals not only the power of the incarnation but also the power of Pentecost. The veil of kenosis no longer hides anymore the radiating divinity of the Holy Spirit and his eternal light. Everyone can experience his transforming power and glory. This glory is also the glory of Christ who enlightens all and enables to recognize it in the world and in themselves. Such is the fulfillment of the priestly prayer of Christ, who asked the Father to glorify him with that glory he had with the Father before the world came to existence (cf. J 17:5), i.e. with the fullness of the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

It is certainly true that theology has neglected to take into account this double character of the *Parousía*. The reason for this fact is that the Holy Spirit has no truly personal revelation in this world. In his divine discretion he vanishes, dissolves himself as it were in his transparency, hides himself in the glory of the Father and the Son. Only in the *Parousía* does he come with the glory and in the glory of the Son. Because of this hiddenness theologians were inclined to conceive of the glory only as an attribute of the Father and the Son, while it is, in effect, an essential mark of the deity as such. The glory of the Father manifests itself through the Son and the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also, as said earlier, "the Spirit of glory", although he has not revealed himself in the history of humankind as a concrete person. For this reason his glory still remains in hiding.

His Glory is a sign of the Kingdom coming in power and the **beauty** of the divine world. The Spirit is the author of the final transfiguration. His presence reveals the Kingdom of glory and manifests its transforming power. It is the Spirit who completes the revelation of the divine Trinity. In this context I often quote the alternative version of the Lord's prayer addressed to the Father: "Let Thy Holy Spirit come down upon us and cleanse us", instead of "Thy Kingdom come". This request concerns directly the descent of the Spirit. With the second coming of Christ the activity of the Spirit finds no limitation anymore. In his person he is synonymous with the Kingdom in all its power, beauty and glory. The transfiguration of the world in glory is the revelation of the ultimate beauty of the universe. The Book of Revelation speaks about the holy city of Jerusalem coming down from heaven, shining in all brilliance "with the

glory of God” (Rv 21:11). This glory is shining radiance, harmony and beauty. Although Revelation symbolically describes the City of God as built with earthly materials, they have all acquired, in their transparence, an unusual beauty comparable to gold and the most precious stones (cf. Rv 21:18-21).

GOD’S SPIRIT WILL BRING HUMAN CULTURE INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Since I have just evoked the Book of Revelation, I would like to recall its striking description of the new Jerusalem: “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. (...) The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it” (Rv 21:24.26; NIV). This means that people do not enter it with empty hands. What then will the nations bring into the Kingdom of God? What is meant by those treasures and splendors, that glory and honor?

I have been convinced by something another well known Russian Orthodox theologian, Paul Evdokimov (died 1970), wrote on this subject. Reflecting on the action of the Holy Spirit in the end times, he draws attention to the emancipation of contemporary culture which is today so often secular and atheistic. Why is this so? According to him, we must blame an extreme and radical asceticism currently present in Christianity, which takes its inspiration from and is based on the biblical text: “You must not love this passing world or anything that is in the world” (1 Jn 2:15).⁵

Those who follow this orientation try to convince us that everything called human culture and creativity will sooner or later be doomed to destruction in everlasting flames of fire.⁶ For this reason modern culture opposes such apocalyptic verdicts on its ultimate fate. We can well understand its aversion to gloomy announcements of its death and to Christian eschatology in general. Contemporary culture wants to remain a durable and permanent value in human history.

“Hyper-eschatologism”, as Evdokimov calls such current thinking, makes an illegitimate leap over history into the end of the world and by doing so implies eschatological negation or negativism. This approach deprives human history of all value and in fact distorts and impoverishes the truth about the incarnation of Christ. It disincarnates history itself. This is certainly not the atmosphere and spirit of the Gospel. We can see in such

⁵ P. Evdokimov, *Prawosławie*. Przełożył ks. Translated by Fr. Jerzy Klinger, Warszawa 1964, pp. 343-344.

⁶ About the eschatological asceticism and its negative appreciation of the meaning of human creativity see also N. Berdyaev, *Głoszę wolność. Wybór pism*. Wybór, wstęp i przekład H. Paprocki (*I Proclaim Freedom: Selected Writings*. Selection, introduction and translation H. Paprocki), Warszawa 1999, pp. 63-108.

views a distorted truth preached by false prophets, false words and false values.

We should keep in mind, as Evdokimov puts it, that “through history the Holy Spirit is active and in this way prepares the coming of the Kingdom of God”.⁷ The history of the Church starting with Pentecost is already the last great epoch of his creative and transforming activity (cf. Ac 2: 17-21). Every invocation of the Spirit thus becomes an eschatological epicleresis. That is why the Christian attitude is never an eschatological or ascetical negation. It is an **eschatological affirmation**.⁸

These are very strong words! We should understand them as a serious warning. It is true that today preachers and knights of the Apocalypse appear more and more frequently on earth. Christianity becomes entangled in Christian heresies, wrote Evdokimov, because Christians themselves are not able to manifest the triumphant presence of Life.⁹ In consequence, relations among people are broken and produce confusion in human minds. Can the voice of Christ still be heard? The world does not isolate itself and close in upon itself. But Christianity so often secludes itself and loses any influence on the course of human history. In such a situation others begin to rebuild the world and look for new syntheses of the destinies of humanity.

Wisdom which comes from the Spirit teaches another approach to life, human culture and creativity. As Christians we wait and hope for the ultimate fulfillment of humanity and its activity. Culture has no goal in itself and will not develop infinitely. It goes beyond the present limits of this world and surpasses itself. We can say that it has already become a symbol, icon and forerunner of transcendent reality. To discover this hidden dimension one has to reach deep into terrestrial reality and, as some Orthodox theologians would say, feel “the flame of things” in the material structure of the world.

What then is the future of different forms of human culture, creativity, art, science and music? Evdokimov was full of unwavering hope that they would achieve their final fulfillment in the Kingdom of God. Hope is an inclination of faith towards the future or faith itself looking forward to what is ahead of us – to what is forthcoming.

And now let us return to the witness of the Book of Revelation about “the glory and honor of the nations” which will be brought into the heavenly city of Jerusalem. What will they in fact bring into it if not everything that inspired the human spirit in the search for truth, beauty and

⁷ Evdokimov, *Prawosławie*, s. 343.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 344. On eschatological value of earthly human creativity see W. Hryniewicz, *Pascha Chrystusa w dziejach człowieka i wszechświata. Zarys chrześcijańskiej teologii paschalnej (The Passover of Christ in the History of Man and Cosmos: An Outline of Christian Paschal Theology)*, vol.3, Lublin 1991, pp. 211-251.

⁹ Evdokimov, *Prawosławie*, p. 345.

goodness? The Kingdom of God will embrace all permanent values which are the fruit of human genius and the human heart. All true culture has in itself something of transcendent truth. It does not allow us to feel at home only in the temporal world. It urges us to discover the Presence of a greater reality. As Jesus said once to Nathanael at the beginning of his public mission: “You will see greater things” (Jn 1:50). Let us quote Evdokimov again:

Culture is, in its essence, the search in history for what is not to be found in history, for what overflows it and leads beyond its boundaries. In this way culture becomes a forefinger and expression of the Kingdom of God by means of this world. (...) Culture becomes a sign, an arrow directed to the One who is to come. Together with the Bride and with the Spirit it says: “Come, Lord Jesus”.¹⁰

At this time creators and architects of culture perform, without even realizing it, a specific sort of liturgy. The presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit becomes real in this creativity, according to the measure of purity of the vessels that receive in themselves divine reality. “Like iconographs, by means of matter and light of this world, they are drafting signs through which becomes slowly visible a mysterious shape of the Kingdom”.¹¹

How different a voice is heard in these words! They oppose the view expressed by a radical ascetic negation of any durable value of culture and of all human creativity. There is no opposition here between culture and the ultimate goal of human existence. On the contrary, we are placed in front of an inspiring intuition that goes beyond the limits of the present world. This insight is not afraid to use the metaphoric and symbolic language so characteristic of biblical authors. Sometimes Evdokimov speaks like an inspired prophet:

The most pure and the most mysterious element of culture, the music, at its culminating point, disappears and leaves us before the Absolute (*à son point culminant, s'évanouit et nous laisse devant l'Absolu*). In Mozart's Mass or Requiem one hears the voice of Christ, and the elevation attains the liturgical value of his presence (*Dans la Messe ou le Requiem de Mozart, on entend la voix du Christ, et l'élévation atteint la valeur liturgique de sa présence*). (...) If every human being, created in the image of God, is his living icon, *the terrestrial culture is the icon of the Kingdom of heavens (la culture terrestre est l'icône du Royaume des cieux)*. At the moment of the great transition,

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 351,352.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 352.

the Holy Spirit, “the finger of God”, will touch this icon, and something of it will remain forever. In the everlasting liturgy of the forthcoming age, humans will sing the praise to their Lord by all the elements of culture, passed through fire of the ultimate purifications.¹²

THE BIBLICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE *PAROUSÍA* AS AN IMAGE OF HOPE

Thanks to its exegesis, newer theology strongly emphasizes the fact that Scripture does not unveil the future in the manner of clairvoyants. Figurative statements dealing with ultimate events are above all images of hope. An image is able to convey much more than bare concepts can. No wonder the Bible answers questions about the final form and shape of the future by means of images and not by strict notions and conceptions.

Let us not make light of what has been written in Orthodox theology about the *Parousía*. We should also remember, however, what modern exegesis and theology has to say about the figurative character of biblical statements. Not much can be said about cosmic destruction at the end of the world. Hope says that all creation will, in the end, achieve its purpose and destiny and become a “new creation”. God himself is the hope of all, the fulfilled future of humankind and the world of nature. Images related to the second coming of Christ in glory show participation in his glorious resurrection, the encounter with him and the lasting communion of life. God who raised him from the dead has the power to bring the world to its successful fulfillment.

In reality, the decisive end of the world occurs for every human being in his or her own death. I believe that the departure from this world will be for me the second coming of Christ. For all of us together it will happen at the very end of this world’s history. Only then will all humankind finally gather together in the Father’s house where, according to Jesus’ assurance, there are “many rooms” (Jn 14:2).

ESCHATOLOGICAL IMAGINATION INSPIRED BY HOPE

In the domain of eschatology imagination is often, although unjustly, identified with an uncontrolled and deceptive fantasy, whereas these are different concepts. Inspired by hope, Christian imagination is supported by the divine promise expressed in images of the revelation contained in Holy Scripture. In the very center of this promise is the event of the resurrection of Jesus. Hope carries in itself a lot of imaginative potential, a great power to deny all the dark and negative sides of our earthly existence. This ability of the human imagination to transcend

¹² P. Evdokimov, *L’art de l’icône. Théologie de la beauté*, Paris 1970, p. 65.

temporality allows us to liberate ourselves from what is at present our cause of misery, misfortune, pain and suffering. In gratitude we have a presentiment that reality will have a totally different face from the one we see now through sensory experience. Hope carries in itself a vision of the new forthcoming world, and for this reason it is an ally of the wise imagination whose role is more and more appreciated in Christian eschatology.¹³

Eschatological imagination, which has its roots in the Bible and in the history of salvation, is no mere speculation but one that is controlled and disciplined. It does not take place due to divine revelation alone. God's promise, as expressed in the teaching of Christ and in the witness of Scripture, stimulates human imagination, transforms it, extends it and makes it a transmitter of the revealed promise. In sum, we must embrace transformed imagination and be able to recognize in hope the promised transfiguration of all reality into "a new heaven and a new earth". Human life is directed to the coming of God's reign and is continuously invoked by believers in the Lord's Prayer.

Christian imagination reaches as far as the eschatological future of the Kingdom of God but does not allow us to identify it with the terrestrial reality of "the old order of things", *tà prōta* (Rv 21:4), which has not yet passed away. Expectation and hope hide in themselves a great truth and express it in an imaginable way. This is not a delusive and fictitious hope. Eschatological images point to a reality inaccessible as yet to our human perception, and for this reason they cannot be described literally.

Eschatology speaks about the new creation and transfiguration of this world, which in their newness transcend the present state of creation, but at the same time remain in continuity with it. We can speak about the transcendent newness of the forthcoming world only through images that surpass the literal limits of human words and concepts. These images cannot be read and understood literally because this would distort and impoverish the Christian message about the ultimate destinies of the world.

In spite of the strength of the imagination inspired by God's promises of the new world, Christian eschatology must remain a modest, apophatic eschatology, conscious of the limits of human perception of

¹³ Cf. R. Bauckham and T. Hart, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context*, Grand Rapids, MI 1999, esp. 82-85, 107-108; T. Hart, *Imagination for the Kingdom of God? Hope, Promise, and the Transformative Power of an Imagined Future*, in *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, Edinburgh 1999, 49-76; G. Green, *Imagining the Future*, in *The Future of God's Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology*, ed. by D. Fergusson and M. Sarot, Edinburgh 2000, 73-88; T.A. Hart, *The Glory of the Imagination and the Imagination of Glory*, in *Called to One Hope: Perspectives on Life to Come*, ed. by J. Colwell, Carlisle, UK 2000, 226-239.

transcendent reality.¹⁴ Such an eschatology is not afraid of the paradoxical character of its language. It is able to deny the adequacy of its affirmations, which are in a certain respect true, but cannot grasp the fullness of truth. Eschatological images will always remain only representations of what cannot be perceived and literally described. These images are a sure way to express a hope which is neither presumptuous nor inwardly empty. Hope has in itself the ability to represent reality which is not purely a human product of the imagination.¹⁵

Only the strength of faith, hope and love is able to anticipate the beauty of the world's ultimate future in God. The temporality of this world is already in fact an entanglement of many mysteries. It is quite possible that even an agnostic can have, in the depth of his heart, a feeling for the secret of human existence.

I am convinced that God's Spirit can raise great amazement in honest people who seek truth and goodness. Verification and still greater wonder wait for us in the Great Beyond. Now I can only echo the ancient prayer already mentioned: "Let Thy Spirit come down on us and cleanse us!"

¹⁴ Be reminded that in Greek *apophatikós* means negative, something that is expressed in negative terms.

¹⁵ Cf. K.L. Hughes, *The Crossing of Hope, or Apophatic Eschatology*, in *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. by M. Volf and W. Katerberg, Grand Rapids, MI 2004, pp. 105ff., 123.

EPILOGUE

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS KENOTIC GUIDE ON OUR PILGRIMAGE

Many people experience today in their spiritual lives the silence, absence and hiddenness of God, and perhaps all of us to some extent, in different moments. In a certain sense we all journey into the unknown as pilgrims of God. This should make us humble and modest. A kenotic theology can help us in our journey.

IT IS NOT EASY TO SPEAK ABOUT GOD

It seems that in the past both theologians and philosophers pretended to know too much about God. Today we have to find more space not only for God's silence but also for our own silence before the mystery of God. There are among believers, especially young Christians, many enthusiasts for whom everything seems to be clear and easy. They pretend to be enthusiasts for Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit, which is often manifested during large assemblies. However, this uncritical easiness and uncomplicated religious lightness can be deceptive and harmful, with harsh consequences that surface much later, especially in the difficult circumstances of life. Indeed, it is not easy to hear the calm voice of God amidst loud and joyful exclamations.

A superficial and shallow religiosity is not able to lead us into the depth of the Christian experience of God, "who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Tm 6:16; NIV). His hiddenness requires our respect for the great mystery of faith. It is not easy to speak about God. So many tragedies in the world seem to witness against his presence and goodness, including the earthly destiny of the crucified Jesus. So many sins in the church become, in the eyes of nonbelievers, serious arguments against faith. In fact faith and hope are precious gifts from God, but "we have this treasure in jars of clay" (2 Co 4:7).

Let us look not only at the dark side of world history. In the light of faith and hope we can also see in the world the active presence and good work of God's Spirit. Already at the beginning of creation he, according to the figurative language of the Book of Genesis, "was hovering over the waters" (Gn 1:2). I believe that the initial words: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gn 1:31) will prove in the end to be the successful fulfillment of this promising beginning, in spite of all the signs of its temporal failure. In the light of faith and hope we can also perceive the constant urging of the Spirit on believers for renewal and healing in the church. He speaks through silence. He reveals his presence in hiddenness and inconspicuous events without unnecessary ostentation.

Owing to modern atheism and criticism of religion, many traditional representations and superficial, naïve images of God have, to a large extent, been overcome. Faithfulness to the deposit of faith needs creative reinterpretation. We cannot repeat only old formulations. This would be merely a theology of repetition, a parody of the past. Tradition itself, well understood, is a creative act. It has nothing to do with an easy accommodation to the ephemeral fashion of the day. Christian faith must be interpreted in a credible way, in dialogue with the intellectual challenges of contemporary culture.

The kenotic and epicletic categories contained in the living currents of Christian tradition offer some fresh insights, as I have tried to show in this book. I hope it is now easier to recover an eschatological patience with God, whom we can all know only “in part” and “as in a mirror” (1 Co 13:9.12).¹

Mature faith is able to cope with God’s hiddenness, darkness and silence. Pope Francis says in his exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*: “Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power” (par. 276).

OUR FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE ARE IN THE WAITING

To be a pilgrim means to be on the road, in movement to our final destination. In this journey we need a reliable guide. Reflecting on kenosis I have often referred above all to Jesus Christ, who “emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave”. He said to his disciples: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6). So he is our Guide on the way of our Exodus into the unknown. We have to leave behind whatever we clung to, our present situation and our experience. Our truth is truth of the way and on the way. Let us not expect more than is possible for pilgrims.

Although Jesus assured us: “You know the way to the place where I am going” (Jn 14:4), our faith, hope and love, as T. S. Eliot, the great poet of kenosis, put it wisely in one of his poems, “**are all in the waiting**”.² Let us listen to what he said about himself:

I said to my soul, be still, and let the darkness come upon you

¹ Mirrors of those times, made of polished copper were unlike ours today.

² T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London 1963, p. 200.

Which shall be the darkness of God (...)
I said to my soul be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting...

Our situation is really one of waiting and patient attention. We are all journeying into an unknown future. Our darkness is "the darkness of God". If we have to wait, let us wait quietly with our waiting hope, love and faith. Love is between hope and faith. It keeps them together. "Love is patient, love is kind" (1 Co 13:4).

We have only a general idea and anticipation of the afterlife, but our final destiny is still unknown. Precisely here the Holy Spirit is the one who, according to Jesus' promise, "will teach you [i.e. us too] everything and remind you of all I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). His kenotic and acting presence will accompany all our human efforts to build a more humane and just world of tomorrow.

The *kenosis* of Christ and of the Holy Spirit has permanent significance for all Christian existence, for particular churches, individuals and for the work of reconciliation in the world. *Kenosis*, understood as disinterestedness, self-limitation and confidence, judges our churches, our divisions, our ecclesiastical egoisms, our self-centeredness and our self-satisfaction. The entire kenotic and paschal logic is revealed in the already quoted words of Jesus: "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). Jesus Christ himself is this first "grain of wheat". This is a great but difficult paradox of Christian identity and Christian life.

ECUMENISM AS A SCHOOL OF NEW THINKING AND THERAPY

Ecumenical dialogue did not exist 50 years ago in the Roman Catholic Church. It came into being with the Second Vatican Council. The Decree on Ecumenism (1964) opened a wide field of new thinking, learning from others, and sensitivity to other forms of Christianity. This happened "**by the grace of the Holy Spirit**".³ It was a **blessed opening of new horizons which generations of believers did not know previously**. Over the years, Catholics have become heirs to the ecumenical impulses of the Second Vatican Council, which opened a new era of life in the church. We have ceased to fear the other and the different and have begun to learn and to think together with other Christians, with people of other religions and with those, including atheists, who have other world views. Ecumenism has become a real school of a new way of thinking and living.

³ Introduction to the Decree and par. 4. Boldface is mine, W.H.

Today we are used to such words as “*oikoumene*”, “ecumenism” and “ecumenical dialogue”. They have become a normal part of our vocabulary. This does not mean, however, that the difficult work of reconciliation between Christians (ecumenism in the strict sense), different religions and philosophies of life (ecumenism in a broader sense) has become an everyday reality for everyone. Ecumenism is a real exchange of spiritual values by which people live. It is primarily a living interpenetration of human consciousness, an ecumenical *perichōresis*, an opening of a way into a deeper synthesis of thought and spirituality within Christianity, a greater reconciliation in its **diversity and multiplicity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit**.

I have devoted the largest portion of my life to ecumenism. These years have taught me that ecumenical openness educates us to discover a fuller and wiser identity in dialogue with people of different faiths and world views, with all persons of good will. The *Charta Oecumenica: Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe* (2001) says: “The plurality of religious and non-confessional beliefs and ways of life has become a feature of European culture. Eastern religions and new religious communities are spreading and also attracting the interest of many Christians. In addition, growing numbers of people reject the Christian faith, are indifferent to it or have other philosophies of life. We want to take seriously the critical questions of others, and try together to conduct fair discussions with them. (...) We commit ourselves (...) **to be open to dialogue with all persons of good will**, to pursue with them matters of common concern, and to bring a witness of our Christian faith to them” (par. 12).⁴

Continuing such efforts in dialogue is a moral obligation for all Christians. We are still victims of historical conflicts, confessionalism and 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 only who *we* are is not enough. One has to ask above all: “*Whose* are we?”, to *Whom* do we really belong?” Both christology and soteriology teach us that **we are followers of Jesus Christ and belong to him, the Suffering Servant who emptied and diminished himself for us humans and for our salvation**. The salvation and transfiguration of the world can be achieved at such a high price.

What God dares is amazing indeed! The figure of the kenotic Servant has deep ecclesiological significance. **Christ's *kenosis* is the irreplaceable imperative for his church**.

⁴ *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. 15-16. I quote these words with a feeling of gratitude to the drafting committee of this document, of which I was also a member. Boldface is mine, W.H.

The *Charta Oecumenica* states unambiguously: “We belong together in Christ, and this is of fundamental significance in the face of our differing theological and ethical positions. Rather than seeing our diversity as a gift which enriches us, however, we have allowed differences of opinion on doctrine, ethics and church law to lead to separations between churches, with special historical circumstances and different cultural backgrounds often playing a crucial role. In order to deepen ecumenical fellowship, endeavors to reach a consensus in faith must be continued at all costs. Only in this way can church communion be given a theological foundation. There is no alternative to dialogue. We commit ourselves (...) in the event of controversies, particularly when divisions threaten in questions of faith and ethics, to seek dialogue and discuss the issues together in the light of the Gospel” (par.6).⁵

WE ARE ALL DISCIPLES

The ecumenical road requires steadfast passion, sincere devotion, perseverance and an honesty that can be trusted. This is the way of new experiences, new perceptions of truth, new sensitivity, and above all a way which gives a sense of mutual belonging and great joy in discovering the variety of gifts of God's Spirit, working in all churches and communities. All churches and all believers today need to deepen their ecumenical spirituality, which is sensitive to the Spirit of God, open to otherness and diversity.

Ecumenism has taught me, in a few words: to overcome division within myself, to open myself to others, and to gratefully acknowledge their otherness. Keeping in touch with the great traditions of Christianity, I have discovered spiritual riches in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God does not like to repeat himself! This would be boring! It would deny his continuing creativity! Other Christians inspire me to better appreciate the wisdom of the Gospel and to search for new possibilities in interpreting even controversial issues.

Trust and hope for reconciliation are not just a matter of human intellect, but also of the wisdom of the heart. Ecumenism of the mind must go hand in hand with ecumenism of the heart. In mutual trust, understanding and benevolence we learn to perceive the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in others. Churches which differ from ours are also churches of God, churches of Christ and the Holy Spirit. In his own person Christ is the most central Truth of our common faith.

I believe that a new era of Christianity will come, full of opportunity and rich in ecumenical hope. As some agreed statements say, Christianity has become “**a learning community of churches**”. We all share the common status of being disciples of Christ. The mystery of God is equally incomprehensible to us all. It surpasses the ability of our human

⁵ Ibidem, pp. 11-12.

intellect. Each definition imposes limits but does not give us a living perception of the mystery. In the face of the Incomprehensible, we are all only disciples.

That's why I appeal so often **to set a high value on the very idea of discipleship** so often mentioned in ecumenical documents. Whoever has a deep sense of the limited cognitive abilities and insufficiencies of human effort, will find it easier to respect differences in the realization and expression of a faith outside his or her own confessional community. We all depend on mutual help in correcting one-sided doctrines. The opposite of a profound truth may be another profound truth that is better expressed, confessed and lived by others. Thanks to others we can more authentically be ourselves. We all have own history with God.

Ecumenism today requires a new style of being, or rather, **of becoming a Christian**. It broadens horizons and liberates us from a narrow confessionalism by the mere fact that it gives access to other spiritual worlds. Being a Christian today means learning the difficult art of accepting others in their otherness. It applies not only to our way of thinking but above all to our everyday Christian life. This important dimension of the new evangelization is often unappreciated.

GLOBAL UNITY AND DIVERSITY

From a religious point of view, today's world is marked by a plurality of faiths and truths. This fact is a serious challenge to Christian identity, which stresses the central role of Christ and the Holy Spirit. We owe to the Spirit the variety of historical experiences of God's presence and gifts in the history of humankind. Today we are more and more conscious that **all human truth is open to ultimate, eschatological fulfillment**.

Sociologists help us to understand that there does not exist and will not simply exist the one universal truth evident and acceptable to all. This vision is not a dictatorship of relativism. In matters of religion we have to recognize multiple claims of universality and the existence of a plurality of points of central reference. Every universality also has its particular character and contains only part of all truth. As Christians we should not be afraid of such an affirmation. Why? Because even God's incarnation, as the central mystery of the Christian faith, means a universality which is at the same time particular.

We live at the extraordinary moment of history in which humanity becomes more and more conscious of its global unity and diversity. This is a positive challenge for all Christians. How shall we shape our future? In fact, however, the present Catholic Church seems not to favor plurality as a viable ecclesiological model. One often forgets the fact that two thirds of today's humanity lives in Asia, where Christianity will probably remain a minority as it tries to adapt itself to the concrete context in which it lives.

Our times require new forms of religiosity, new experiences and multiple Christian identities. At stake is a **plurality consonant with the**

logic of Catholic universality. In this sense, as the sociologist of religion José Casanova suggests, the church has to be “*glocal*” in a much larger measure than before, i.e. global and local at the same time, not as the centralistic church universal. European Christians should not forget that they inhabit only a small Eurasian province, which was the center of the world for only about four hundred years.⁶

THE CRY FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

A particularly urgent cry of humanity today is the appeal for justice and peace. It found powerful expression on Saturday, September 7, 2013, in St. Peter’s Square in Rome. In the face of the imminent danger of international military intervention in a Syria plunged into domestic war, Pope Francis invited all people of good will to come and pray for peace.

This was indeed a cry to God, asking him to put an end to atrocities and bloodshed. “Violence and war never are the way of peace” – said the Pope in his meditation. The assembly was about one hundred thousand people. They listened to his urgent appeal: “Let the rattle of arms cease”! War is always “a disaster for humanity.” Peace is always possible – he said. It begins in every human person. We must leave aside our particular interests, which narrow our hearts, to overcome indifference towards others. Everyone must be “guardian of his brother”.

Pope Francis’ words express the same concern as the motto of the 10th Plenary Assembly of the World Council of Churches, which took place in Busan, South Korea (October 30 to November 8, 2013). Its prayerful and truly epicletic motto is: “God of life, show us the way to justice and peace.”

It is difficult to imagine how the face of the world will be renewed in justice and peace (in the broad sense of these words) without the help and transforming action of the Holy Spirit. The wisdom of the Hebrew Bible said it long ago: “When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (Ps 104:30 NIV).

In order for these words to become reality, **we all have to invoke the Holy Spirit in continuous epiclesis** and to follow his inspirations. “**Never try to suppress the Spirit** or treat the gift of prophesy with contempt” (1 Th 5:19-20). This warning should also not be overlooked or neglected today.

Times have changed but certain truths and challenges remain the same for every generation. The cry for justice and peace is a cry of suffering, innocent and poor people. They deserve a better life but have to suffer injustice, misery and all the consequences of war, enmity, hatred and poverty. Their cries reach up to heaven. **The silent cry of those who suffer**

⁶ Cf. *Nicht nur Jerusalem und Athen, sondern auch Benares*. Der Innsbrucker Pastoraltheologe Christian E. Baur sprach mit dem amerikanischen Religionssoziologen José Casanova..., “Christ in der Gegenwart” 64 (2012) Nr. 38, pp. 421-422, here 421.

and need help is also the greatest challenge to all of us today. As Christians we believe that we encounter God in Jesus, who described himself as the only way to God (cf. Jn 14:6). But according to him, this happens concretely when we do good to those who are in need and try to put an end to their suffering (cf. Mt 25:40).

Let us be attentive to the cry of people in desperate situations. Pope Francis wrote in the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*: “If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life” (par. 49).

KENOSIS IMPLIES EPICLESIS

The idea of *kenosis* applied to the Holy Spirit may be difficult to accept and understand. If we feel obliged to be patient with God (a topic dealt with in chapter III of this book), **let us also be patient with his Spirit who on his part is infinitely patient with us.** His cry has so often been overlooked and neglected. The history of Christianity and humanity as a whole bears eloquent witness to this.

What should unite all Christian denominations today is a feeling of spiritual immaturity in living up to the Gospel. All churches should invoke the Holy Spirit in a truly ecumenical epiclesis to come down into areas of inner poverty among the whole community of believers and among all people on earth. Our mere invocation of the Spirit is already an admission of our insufficiency. Our feeling of spiritual indigence is intensified when our churches become more and more aware of their need for purification and renewal.

We need each other. Division and lack of mutual exchange of spiritual gifts make all of us poorer. They disrupt the living exchange of charismata proper to particular churches. We easily become prisoners of our own concepts, faults and mistakes. The genuine beauty of Christian identity is not achieved by confessional demarcation and isolation, but by mutual exchange of spiritual goods in the process of giving to others and receiving from them.

A church that is aware of its own spiritual shortcomings can become more sensitive and more open to others. It is better able then to serve the cause of reconciliation among people. We all rely equally on God in our human weakness. It is our common destiny. Admitting this is an important part of the human culture of honesty. Otherwise, we easily fall into the trap of our own self-confidence. Nothing hinders efforts towards reconciliation more than our feeling of self-complacency and of possessing the fullness of truth. In this respect, ecumenism, in its strict and broader senses, can and should be salutary therapy also for our own faith and for the work of the new evangelization.

Truly paschal “Christianology” teaches that Christ’s cross was not God’s ultimate defeat and failure. The most kenotic Good Friday was followed not only by the silence of Holy Saturday but also by the joyful Day of Resurrection. This has important consequences not only for evangelization but also for our spiritual lives, as Pope Francis emphasizes in his exhortation. We should remember his words:

Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards! (par. 3)

There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. (...) I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress (6).

“Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!” (10).

Christ’s resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain. May we never remain on the sidelines of this march of living hope! (278).

True Christian faith is inseparable from tragic moments, pain and uncertainty. To believe means to be on the road, to experience times of weakness, crisis and the silence of God as well. In this sense **our faith will always be a wounded one**. It is also wounded rather frequently by the church itself with its resistance to new insights, its stubbornness and its lack of understanding of the signs of the times.

The risen Christ shows his wounds to his disciples. This fact testifies that we too must have courage to recognize our wounds and scars and not to hide them timidly behind different poses, masks and embellishments. Jesus said to Thomas: “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe” (J 20:27; NIV). Jesus’ wounds are the wounds of our world and of our churches. **Let us not be ashamed of the wounds of our faith!** This is our real and true faith. To confess our weaknesses is a courageous human act. Only those conscious of the vulnerability of their own faith can understand human doubts and touch the wounds of today’s world with humility, patience and tenderness. For this reason kenotic christology, pneumatology

and ecclesiology are the most effective medicines against any sort of fundamentalism.

A special duty of theologians is to ask what their own churches can and should do, to renounce in a truly kenotic act all that diminishes their credibility, ecumenical honesty, openness to dialogue and the possibility of reconciliation. The most difficult task is to convert churches to one another in mutual understanding, compassion and forgiveness. A real breakthrough is needed – a kenotic courage to renounce everything which does not serve the work of reconciliation, justice and peace among people of different denominations, religions and worldviews.

I have tried to delineate in this book a kenotic theology with some main features. Its guiding principle should be to help us regain a fresh look at our urgent tasks both in the church and in the world. **The kenotic vision of the church requires at the same time the continuing invocation of the Holy Spirit.** This necessity of invoking the Spirit of God results from our human situation as marked by indifference, guilt, hatred, aggression, divisions and spiritual impoverishment.

Kenotic hope sustains us in the midst of our present difficulties and especially when we think we have lost all hope. It gives us energy and enables us to survive. Hope for a transfigured existence requires of us an imagination that refuses to accept the status quo as the only way to live. Both hope and imagination defend us against despairing. They remind us that the Holy Spirit is on our side as “another *Paraklētos*”, the divine Comforter, Counselor and Defender. In the world no human cry is alien to him. Even in silence he responds to every cry.

Kenosis implies epiclesis. The Spirit is indeed the unceasing cry of the world. *Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches* (Rv 2-3). He truly is our kenotic guide on our pilgrimage to a new world.

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A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Waclaw Hryniewicz, O.M.I., was born on July 23, 1936 in Łomazy near Biala Podlaska (Eastern Poland); 1960 ordained priest in the Congregation of Oblate Fathers; 1966 doctor's degree in dogmatic theology at the Catholic University of Lublin (CUL), dissertation: *Soteriological Significance of the Resurrection of Christ in the Teaching of Contemporary Catholic Theologians*; 1968-1970 scientific research in Louvain, Paris, London and Rome; 1974 post-graduate promotion ("Habilitation") on the basis of a study on *The Role of Tradition in Theological Interpretation*. One of the founders of the Ecumenical Institute at CUL, since 1983 head of the Department of Orthodox Theology at this Institute; 1980-2005 member of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church; since 1988 member of the European Society for Ecumenical Research "Societas Oecumenica"; 1997-2005 director of the Ecumenical Institute at CUL; member of the advisory board of "Eastern Churches Journal" (Fairfax, Virginia, USA). 1998-2000 he was a member of the drafting committee preparing the text of the *Charta Oecumenica: Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe*, officially signed by the Presidents of the Conference of European Churches (KEK) and of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) in Strasbourg on April 22, 2001.

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He was made a doctor honoris causa by the Christian Theological Academy (ChAT) in Warsaw, 2009 and by the Theological Faculty of the University of Opole, October 2014.

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THE COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY

PURPOSE

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

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