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Towards a More Paschal Christianity: Ecumenism and Kenotic Dimensions of Ecclesiology

Wacław Hryniwicz

Πολύφωνός γε ὁ σωτὴρ καὶ
πολύτροπος εἰς ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίαν
(Clement of Alexandria, Protreptikos I,8,3)

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 proceed. Many ecumenically-minded people have become tired and discouraged. The majority of the 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 labour and hope, *labor et spes*. Ecumenical *gaudium and spes*, joy and hope – to allude to the first words of the well known constitution of the second Vatican Council – happen from time to time, but the enormous task of reconciliation remains still to be accomplished. The very fact of different dialogues going on is a blessed and joyful event. The dialogue gives joy and raises hope. Still we cannot see many decisive results. For this reason I prefer to speak about an ecumenical labour and hope.

The 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 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 Christians faith. Our Christianity has to become more paschal. The paschal mystery of Christ is the very core of the Christian message of hope. The drama of the Cross is a drama of human freedom. The freedom of men 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.

Are we able to discern some main features of a more paschal Christianity? How to understand its paschal dimension in relation to the unity of the Church? In the following reflections I will try to outline a vision of the Church more sensitive to the kenotic and paschal ethos of Christianity.

1. In search of a paschal paradigm

Christian Churches undergo today a serious crisis as they face, on one side, a growing secularization of society and, on the other, new types of religiosity and spirituality inspired often by non-Christian traditions. There also appear strong doubts about the institutional dimension of the faith and, at the same time, about institutional religiosity as such.

Modern critics of religion have involuntarily contributed to the purification of the Christian faith. Today we perhaps better realise the necessity of a deeper interpretation of Christianity and of its universalism. Friedrich Nietzsche reproached the Christians that on their faces one could not see the joy and the new quality of being redeemed: “Erlöster müssten mir seine Jünger aussehen!”¹ He proclaimed the “death of God” thus provocatively naming a deep experience of many people living in modern times. It

¹ F. Nietzsche. Also sprach Zarathustra II, Von den Priestern; III, Vom Gesicht und Räthsel; Vom Geist der Schere, in: *idem*, Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, hg. von Giorgio Colli / Mazzino Montinari. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967ff.

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 to understand the challenge of contemporary experience of God's silence. Mystics speak about "the dark nights" of the spirit on the road towards God. It is a very powerful symbol which could be applied not only to an individual human life, but also to the history of the divided Church. There are indeed periods of time when God seems to absent Himself, to recede from human perception and to keep silence in face of various historical dramas and tragedies. This experience can be understood as a collective night of the spirit. It comes close to the description of the time, which in Nietzsche's terminology was an epoch of the death of God, an era of nihilism.

It is easier for us to understand the basic intuition hidden in this kind of interpretation. The 20th century has brought an unusual amount of destruction and suffering. But at the same time it was also a time of human solidarity and better understanding of the unity of humankind, a time of ecumenism of the heart. Many of those who were plunged into 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.

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. The silence of Holy Saturday on the surface of the earth covers the event of Christ's encounter with the fallen humanity – His presence in the anthropological depth of human hearts. This is the lowest point, if one may say so, of the divine *kenosis*: God in the hell created by human sins, trying to attract and to transform sick human freedom. The divine *kenosis* is no annihilation, but transformation, the beginning of Christ's resurrection, of His ἀνάστασις.

The silence of Holy Saturday may serve as a paradigmatic symbol for every situation of human hopelessness. However, the lesson of the mystics should not be forgotten. In spite of the state of forsakenness they remain confident that God speaks also in the darkness, in all personal and historical situations of crisis. God's silence constitutes an integral part of His divine pedagogy. God himself accompanies people through

difficult experience of hopelessness, division and disunity. He gives a chance to grow, to purify our concepts, images and representations of Him. He remains close to every human being. Both personal and historical dark nights of His silence may become a difficult lesson of inner freedom and courageous confidence in His unfailing love.

All this could also be applied to the life of the divided Church of Christ struggling for reconciliation and unity. My long studies in Christian paschal theology make me to believe that through painful lessons of disunity, through the experience of labour and of the cross, God leads us to the joy of the resurrection, to better days of the reconciled diversity among Christians.

2. The divine *kenosis* and human freedom

God does not order. He invites to a relationship of reciprocity. To leave the space of freedom, He limits His own omnipotence. In a sense, not ceasing to be all-powerful, He can become all-powerless. This is the biblical theme of Christ's *kenosis*. God in Christ "emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave" (Phil 2:7). This is an unusual intuition which evokes God not in a language of perfection and fullness, but preferring the category of emptiness. Here the words of St. Clement of Alexandria chosen as motto of this paper come true: "The Saviour is polyphonic and acting in many ways for the salvation of men" – πολύφωνος καὶ πολύτροπος².

There is a clear mystic touch in this approach. The fullness implies richness, abundance and power. Emptiness and void express the mystery of love. God transcends Himself towards humanity in an inverted movement. He becomes, so to speak, the humble and self-effacing God. This is not God in all His fullness and might who would crush and overwhelm a human being, but God who "emptied Himself" and thus is able to expect our free answer. The truly paschal God! Remaining incomprehensible, He leaves thus a free space for human freedom. His silence has a very profound meaning.

The work of redemption was carried out by Jesus in humility, weakness, love and dedication. The liberating love of God is 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.

² Clement of Alexandria, protr, I,8,3 (SC 2, p. 62).

Christ's *kenosis* has a permanent significance for the whole Christian existence, for particular Churches, individuals and for the work of reconciliation as such. *Kenosis* understood as disinterestedness, self-limitation and confidence judges our Churches, our separation, our ecclesiastical egoisms, our self-centredness and self-satisfaction. The entire kenotic and paschal logic has been revealed in Christ's words: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn. 12:24). Christ himself was first this "grain of wheat". This is a paradox of Christian identity and Christian life.

Ecumenism educates all of us to discover an open, fuller and wiser identity. 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 I belong". To remember who *we* are is not enough. One has to ask above all: "whose are we?" Both christology and soteriology teach us that we belong to Christ, the Suffering Servant who "emptied himself" (έσυντον ἐκένωσεν). The salvation and transfiguration of the world can be achieved at this price. What God dares is amazing. The figure of the kenotic Servant has a deep ecclesiological significance. Christ's *kenosis* is an imperative for his Church.

A special duty of theologians is to ask what their own Church can and should do, to renounce all that diminishes her credibility, ecumenical honesty and the possibility of reconciliation. The most difficult task is to convert the Churches to one another in compassion and forgiveness. A real breakthrough is needed – a kenotic act of renouncing everything which does not serve the work of reconciliation.

3. A sense of urgency: return to *kenosis*

The conversion of the Churches to Christ and mutually to one another includes also the readiness to correct one's own self-understanding, to give up everything which diminishes the willingness to be reconciled. Christ's *kenosis* is the model, criterion and example of such an attitude. The biblical concept of *kenosis* should have concrete ecclesiological implications.

Metropolitan Stylianos (Harkianakis) of Australia spoke some time ago about an inclination of the Roman Catholic Church to the pride of power (Hochmut der Macht) and of the Orthodox Church to the pride of

the truth (Hochmut der Wahrheit)³. The distinction between these two temptations has been made not without reason. It helps to understand that this dangerous inclination has to be constantly overcome in the Church. If Christ emptied and humbled himself to save human beings, this fact has to determine the kenotic foundations of ecclesiology and the whole style of the life of the Church. The kenotic soteriology opposes to the haughtiness of power and truth – humility of service and searching for truth. Any kind of domination is alien to the spirit of the Gospel.

During his last 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 by John Paul II. In his presence the Patriarch was speaking also about the primacy. He stressed the need for humility and repentance which can make us wiser and to save our fidelity to Christ, who “emptied Himself” for the salvation of the world. And the Patriarch ended his homily with these thought provoking words:

”... it is only when the priority of the kenotic ethos prevails convincingly in the historical Church, that we will then not only re-establish easily the so much desired unity in the faith, but at the same time we will become worthy to experience what the divine revelation has promised to those who love the Lord, i.e. ‘a new heaven and a new earth’”⁴.

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’...”⁵.

One has to read very attentively such texts to see the importance of the kenotic ethos in the ecclesiological thinking of the Patriarch. They show the necessity of this ethos for the re-establishment of Christian unity.

³ 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-Perčević, ed. Alfred Stirnemann, Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1987, pp. 350–364, here 361 f.

⁴ Visite officielle du Patriarche œcuménique à l’Eglise de Rome..., in: Episkepsis, no. 520 (31. 7. 1995), p.15: “...c'est seulement quand le primat de l'ethos kénotique prévaudra d'une manière convaincante dans l'Eglise historique, que non seulement nous rétabliront alors facilement l'unité tant désirée dans la foi, mais que nous nous rendrons dans le même temps dignes d'éprouver ce que la révélation de Dieu a promis à ceux qui aiment le Seigneur, à savoir, ‘une terre nouvelle et un ciel nouveau’”.

⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

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 between local Churches. The question of prestige, jurisdiction and authority constantly undermines the communion of the Churches. In the light of the Gospel it is indeed a scandalous question: “A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded the greatest. And he said to them: ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves ... But I am among you as one who serves (ώς ὁ διακονῶν)’” (Lk. 22:24–27).

The evil spirit of this early dispute among the disciples of Christ, presented by the Evangelist in the context of the Last Supper 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 the doctrine and change of structures can be retarded or thwarted indefinitely. A realistic hope for unity evokes a sense of urgency and responsibility. The former archbishop of San Francisco, John R. Quinn, wrote not long ago the following words which portray a sincere passion for truth, honesty and concern for Christian unity:

”We cannot hold unity hostage until there is a perfect pope in a perfect Church. Christian unity will require sacrifice. But it cannot mean that all the sacrifices must be made by those who want full communion with the Catholic Church while the Catholic Church herself makes no significant sacrifices. Of the individual Christian the Scripture says, ‘You have been bought at a price’ (1 Cor. 6:20). Similarly, we all have to face the fact that unity among Christians will be bought at a price. All will have to sacrifice. If we are serious about the goal of unity, we must be serious about the cost of unity”.⁶

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 *parhèsia*. Without courageous vision, a kenotic ecclesiology will remain purely declarative phraseology.

⁶ 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.

4. In the captivity of doctrines

Let me recall the very beginnings of the official theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman-Catholic Church. It was on May 29, 1980, at the Patriarchal Monastery of Saint John the Theologian at Patmos. In his inaugural address, metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon (S.Hacis) 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 enchain. Yet, in essence, we too have come as exiles and prisoners.

Let me make myself clear: We also have come as exiles, not because of the ruler of this world, but banished by the lost peace between the Churches of the East and of the West, and as prisoners not of the emperor but of our own errors ... We too have come together as brethren alienated from one another, not in a geographical sense nor by imperial order but alienated in spirit and by human errors ..." ⁷

Those were very courageous and sincere words. In fact, we are all, till now, prisoners of our own errors, alienated from one another in spirit. I would be inclined to say even more: we are above all prisoners of our doctrines, denominational differences and divergences. It means that there exists a sort of ecclesiological captivity of doctrine.

I do not hesitate to think that during the past centuries Christianity was becoming more and more doctrinaire. The care for integrity, coherence and identity of doctrine overshadowed so often its appropriateness and the most vital purpose of religion as such. Unending conflicts and controversies over salvation and truth, appropriated exclusively by the Churches are the most dramatic evidence of this.

In my own country, a bishop of the Evangelical-Reformed Church, Zdzisław Tranda, has put forward a very challenging interpretation of the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30–37). Usually one sees in it just a warning against the lack of sensitivity to the situation of a human being in need. Bishop Tranda draws attention to the Old Testament regulations which forbade the priests to approach the dead body for fear of a ritual impurity. "None of them shall defile himself for the dead among his

⁷ The text of this address was distributed to all the members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

people" (Lev. 21:1; cf. Num. 5:2–3); "they shall not defile themselves by going near to a dead person ...; after he is defiled, he shall count for himself seven days, and then he shall be clean" (Ezek. 44:25–26). Only a ritually clean man could enter the temple and perform his duties there. Let us suppose that the priest and the levite mentioned in the parable were going to the temple in Jerusalem. A wounded man lying by the roadside could seem to be already dead. To approach him meant to be defiled and not to be able to perform respective functions in the temple. A ritual purification should then last for seven days.

One can reasonably assume that when the priest and the levite were passing by and saw the wounded man, they were not motivated by callousness, soullessness or sheer fear. They could experience a profound conflict of conscience. According to the Mosaic Law they were not allowed to approach the man and to help him. Could they easily risk the act of mercy? What about their duties in the temple then?

For this reason it is not so much the priest and the levite who should be blamed but rather the religious system which has exposed them to the dilemma whether not to help and be able to serve, or to help and not to be ready for the temple service. They were connected with this religious system, with its doctrine and regulations. Because of this they took such a decision and not the other one. They were, so to speak, prisoners and slaves of this system. Mercy was shown by the good Samaritan, a schismatic and heretic.

The meaning of Jesus's parable is therefore more profound than it could seem at first sight. It shows His opposition to the captivity of doctrine and numerous regulations. This way we touch a very delicate and important issue. It is not enough to repeat doctrinal formulations and in this way to justify one's behaviour towards people, especially those in need, "the least of these" (Mt. 25:40.45), who have their own difficulties and anxieties. A rigid sticking to the 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?"⁸

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 say in this context a few words about Daniel Oswald Rufeisen (1922–1998), a Jewish Carmelite who lived in Haifa. During the nazi occupation in Poland, as a young Jew he managed to survive, thanks to the help of courageous Catholic nuns. He decided to become a Christian, was ordained 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 became too intellectual within the Greek-Latin world. Our task today is to restore what has been lost in the universal Church, which during the past centuries was undergoing a process of "dehebraization", hellenization and latinization.

Fr. Daniel criticised a doctrinal type of Christianity in which the faith had been submitted to the logic of doctrines⁹. He appealed for another type of religiosity and another model of Christianity. Without Israel there is no true catholicity of the Church. The faith should be understood above all as confidence in God, always faithful to His promises. Man has to cling to Him and in this way to know Him. The early 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 the secondary ones, which should not be imposed on all believers (cf. Acts 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" (Rom. 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.

⁸ Z. Tranda, W niewoli doktryny (In the Captivity of Doctrine), in: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 4–5, 1997, p. 17.

⁹ Cf. *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: *Więź* 42, 1999, no 7, pp. 60–65.

The risen Christ ordered his disciples to “stay in the city” of Jerusalem (Lk. 24:49). These words could be understood, in a certain sense, as a commandment given to them not to move away from the Jewish roots. Our search for deeper foundations of unity among Christians has to take into consideration the very origins of Christendom and its semitic background prior to the first division between Jews and Christians. The Hebrew Bible, as Gabriel Josipovici stressed some time ago, is characterised by its open character, richness of views, often contradictory ones. The reader himself has to reconcile them or simply to live with them¹⁰. This openness and variety of religious perspectives is one of the main features of judaism.

5. The need for doctrinal rectifications

As I 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 speaks willingly, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, about the necessity to confess guilts concerning wrong attitudes of the past, contradicting the Gospel of Christ. Pope John Paul II writes regrettably 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 certain centuries, to intolerance and even the use of violence in the service of truth” (no. 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 were claiming a monopoly of the truth and of being the unique, necessary and only means of salvation. We need today to rethink profoundly the prevailing theologies used by the Church to justify even the right to invade, conquer other peoples and destroy their “pagan” religions. Thus for many centuries Christian theology was a powerful ideological support for the Western colonialism. It understood the mission of the Church as the salvation of the “infidels” by converting them to the Church even with the help of the colonial conquerors.

¹⁰ Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.

Raising such issues is an expression of faith and loyalty to the Church. They must be answered, clearly and quietly. All the present-day efforts related to a necessary “purification” and conversion of the Church remain till now on the level of ethics. They do not touch ecclesiastical doctrine as such. It is clear that an ethically orientated self-criticism is a very important step, but for ecumenism it is not sufficient. Ecclesiastical doctrines also need correction and rectification. This belongs to the ecumenical *desiderata* and remains an important task of ecumenical hermeneutics. As long as self-criticism and self-purification are limited only to the ethical area, they will remain partial and insufficient, without decisive influence on ecumenism. The debate about the ministry of Peter and the primacy of the pope has already shown it quite clearly. There exists a constant tension between the normative beginnings and all what 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, no. 11). The very idea of hierarchy of truths is one of the most challenging concepts for ecumenism.

In 1990 the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches published an important study document entitled: The Notion of “Hierarchy of Truths”: An Ecumenical Interpretation¹¹. It touches also on the question of the hierarchy of the councils:

“One sees several kinds of ‘hierarchies’ in relation to the authority of the church councils and to their contents. Most Christian traditions give special priority to the seven ecumenical councils of the early church. Some see also a ‘hierarchy’ among these seven councils, inasmuch as those which have formulated the doctrine of the mystery of Christ and of the Spirit within the communion of the Holy Trinity should as such hold a pre-eminent position in comparison with other councils” (no. 12).

This is a very cautious statement which leaves open the whole question of the “ecumenicity” of Western councils of the second millennium. What value do they have? What is their rank in comparison with the seven councils of the first millennium?

The problem is not a new one. It comes more and more often under consideration among theologians of different denominations. It may become one of the most decisive ones for the future of ecumenism. The first step was

¹¹ 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), Geneval: WCC, 1990, pp. 16–24.

made already by pope Paul VI. In his letter to cardinal J. Willebrands (October 5, 1974) he termed the second council of Lyons as “the sixth of the general synods held in the West”¹², avoiding thus to call it “ecumenical”. It was a very significant precedent. One can see in it a clear sign for ecumenism.

The distinction introduced by Paul VI urges to further ecumenical investigations. The reconciliation of the Churches requires such an ecumenical re-lecture 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 recognised 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 VIII¹³. Only after the schism this recognition was withdrawn for the benefit of the Ignatian synod (869–870) which until today is considered in the Catholic Church as an ecumenical council. It would be a great encouragement for ecumenism, especially for the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, if the Photian Synod were recognised 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 1980es was the admission that the unity of the basic faith can exist in a diversity of traditions, customs and practices. The principle of a sound pluralism was found precisely in the decisions of the Photian Synod. It determined that each See would retain the ancient usages of its tradition¹⁴. 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 a legitimate diversity.

¹² AAS 66, 1974, pp. 620–625.

¹³ 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 Binnen*, *Le Concile de Constantinople de 879–880*, in: *Contacts* 33, 1981, pp. 6–40, 211–234; 34, 1982, pp. 47–61; *W. Hryniwicz*, *Focjański Synod*, in: *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, vol. V, Lublin 1989, col. 353–356.

¹⁴ *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.

This challenge is a vital part of the kenotic vision of a more paschal ecclesiology. The fear of losing prestige and authority continues to paralyse unduly our ecclesiological thinking. Christ's *kenosis* becomes at present perhaps the greatest challenge to all of us.

6. 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 the Christian unity, metropolitan George (Khodr) of Mount-Lebanon has briefly outlined not long ago a kenotic way of dealing with this painful issue. He writes:

"There exists a doctrinal hypertrophy to which the West has set out in a solitary or unilateral way. I see no other way to reduce it, than to draw the line between the seven ecumenical councils and the councils which succeeded them here and there. During the second millennium the Church has not been reunited. Let it be reunited now on the basis of the ancient unique foundation. The unity resides in the encounter and the communion of the Churches among them, and not in the fusion which annihilates a part...".¹⁵

This issue of ecumenical councils in the life of the Church awaits a thorough examination. The Church does not have all the answers ready-made. She must continuously search for truth, as the primitive Church struggled during the first Jerusalem council (Acts 15) over the burning doctrinal and disciplinary issue of the Mosaic Law. 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 have been perhaps different.

Ecumenism requires new forms of exercising the papal primacy, open to the new situation, more credible and more acceptable. Those new forms in which the Petrine ministry can be exercised have the chance to be found only, when the past and current forms are evaluated in a real dialogue as inadequate and in need of a thorough reform. This requires vision, courage and, above all, self-limitation. When the early Church was able to abandon the requirements of the Mosaic Law in relation to the gentiles, this demanded surely an admirable amount of courage. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, the Apostles ventured that historical decision, in spite of the intense opposition to it.

¹⁵ *Métropole Georges (Khodr), Vers Rome ou avec Rome?*, in: Service Orthodoxe de Presse, no. 193, décembre 1994, pp. 30–32, here 32.

Our situation today as regards the primacy seems to be comparable to the situation in the primitive Church. Will the Roman Catholic Church find enough courage and vision to face a major change? I personally hope that it 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 one has to speak in biblical terms about the true *kenosis*, self-limitation and self-renouncement.

Kenosis means here concretely the structural reform of the papacy. The lesson of history should not be forgotten. A purely moral reform would not be sufficient to bring about a real change. Since the Middle Ages the situation of the Latin Church cried out for this sort of change. Yet a general wish for reform turned out to be ineffective. Many reform-minded people were not able to change the structures themselves. In a way they were prisoners of the doctrine, of the system and of their own inadequate vision. The moments of 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 patriarchat de Rome étendu dans l’ensemble du monde)¹⁶. Many papal actions and decisions apparently primatial belong in fact to the power of the pope as Latin patriarch, and concern only those within his patriarchal jurisdiction. Theoretically speaking, the West could surely have developed more patriarchates. In that case the ecclesiastical picture would be more balanced in relation to the East. The East has its own patriarchs. I am fully aware of the difficulties of other Christians, when the pope is regarded as a supreme head and immediate pastor. The West developed through the centuries according to the logic of ecclesiastical centralism and has remained the one huge Western patriarchate.

To consider the pope as the patriarch of the West seems until today “a too much neglected reality”¹⁷. One could however imagine a new structure of the reconciled Church in the form of a concrete collegiality of patriarchates both already existing (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Anti-

¹⁶ Yves Congar, *Diversités et communion. Dossier historique et conclusion théologique*, Paris: Cerf, 1982, p. 9.

¹⁷ Y. Congar, *Le pape, patriarche d’Occident. Approche d’une réalité trop négligée*, in: *idem*, *Eglise et papauté*, Paris: Cerf, 1994, pp. 11–30 [reprinted from: *Istina*, 28, 1983, pp. 374–390].

och, Jerusalem, Moscow, Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia), and those which should still be established, e.g. Canterbury, in Africa, North and Latin America, Australia, Asia or some more. Is this only a utopian vision? It is surely not when one thinks in the light of ecclesiology of the ancient Church.

Perhaps in the future the 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 autonomy of local and regional Churches, give up the claim for the immediate jurisdiction over those Churches and understand the primacy as a real *diakonia* for the unity of the Sister Churches. For the time being it rather seems to be only a dream or a song of the future... Nothing indicates that it could be realized before long.

On the threshold of the third millennium such thoughts are nevertheless justifiable. A kenotic type of ecclesiology requires courage and theological imagination. Have we enough of both of them? Be that as it may, we have already now the possibility to restore patiently theological balance to ecclesiology, through dialogue and sincere desire to learn from and with each other in the atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence. New insights are possible. An example of this can be the recent document "The Gift of Authority" agreed upon by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.

A common exploration of the way in which the ancient Church managed to maintain her unity can bring some encouraging insights and new impulses. On the other hand, however, this should not be considered as panacea able to solve all our problems. One has to be realistic. We live today in different circumstances. Ancient structures cannot simply and automatically be re-created as such. Faithfulness to the past must take into account the present situation. One can only hope that growing patiently in ecumenical *koinonia* the Churches will be able to discover the 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 *subsidiū* which means support or help. So far other Christians do not believe that synodality, collegiality and subsidiarity are being practised in the Catholic Church in a sufficient and effective way. In his encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* (no. 87) pope John Paul II himself declared unambiguously: "We must take every care to meet the legitimate desires and expectations of our Christian brethren, coming to know their way of thinking and their sensibilities."

7. How to overcome the hermeneutics of suspicion?

The meagre 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 an experience of a true encounter, a new thinking and a new mentality. A true encounter influences the very way of understanding, broadens horizons and becomes a learning process. In this way the process of reception launched by dialogues may contribute to a new shape of ecumenical spirituality which takes into account the whole of Christian experience. It is a spirituality of the whole (καθ' ὅλον), frequently demanding a correction of our confessional way of thinking.

The dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches has contributed in the last years significantly to broaden the very understanding of the expression “Sister Churches”, used so far only in relation to the Orthodox Church. In mutual relationship between the Catholics and Lutherans this expression has become almost a self-explanatory concept.

The clarification and reinterpretation of doctrines is surely necessary, but it cannot be done hastily on the way of pure relativism and liberalism. The first step would be to cease to suspect that the others live in the state of permanent errors and distortions of the Christian faith. One can only support those who stress today the urgent need to develop a positive hermeneutics of confidence and trust which paves the way for a mutual recognition. Who acknowledges the 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. Hermeneutics of suspicion is easily inclined to judge that the others do not live in truth. It leads to the doctrinal fundamentalism and exclusivism in understanding truth and salvation. Hermeneutics of confidence on the contrary dares to affirm that other Churches are Sister Churches, in spite of various differences.

The division in the Church has something tragic in it, especially when it causes mutual alienation, distrust, conflict, hostility and hatred. But it remains only at the surface of Church life, and is concerned primarily with canonical and institutional dimensions of Christian existence without reaching the inner ontological depths of mystery of the Church. The divided Church still remains the only Church of the risen Lord in the history of humanity. Human sins have no power to destroy 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" (*πνεῦμα ἡγεμονικόν*) will never be at our command.

The late Father Jerzy Klinger (+1976), a Polish Orthodox theologian, often pointed to the extra-discursive and non-intellectual character of our personal contact with the truth of Christ. In his study devoted to the problem of intercommunion he asked:

"But are the ideas of the members of the Orthodox Church always sufficiently informed? How much ignorance can hide in the individual consciousness of every man! But this will not prevent him from having access to the sacraments, because the Church makes up for the deficiencies of an individual conscience. Could not the Church, understood in a broader sense, make up for the deficiencies of entire communities...?"¹⁸

According to this, the entire Church can make up for the insufficiencies and defects of our communities. Personally I would rather say that it is Christ himself who does it in his divine freedom and goodness. In the same study Fr. Klinger referred also to the Holy Spirit and to the miracle of unity that already exists:

"If we honour the Holy Spirit..., the eucharistic *epiklesis* should bring us out of the narrow limits of the static language of our liturgy, show us the real presence of Christ wherever He is to be found... Then, in the fire of the real presence of Christ all excommunications between the Churches melt away wherever they still exist."¹⁹

There is one possible benefit of the present ecumenical crisis: it forces us to reconsider seriously the very foundations of the dialogue. If it is to be a meaningful dialogue, it should reconsider the ecclesiological roots of the crisis and rediscover the living sense of the Holy Spirit acting in all Sister Churches. With this sort of approach it would be much easier to overcome the separation of the existing denominational Churches without

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Ibid., 111, 114.

willing to suppress them. The only realistic way to visible unity of the Churches leads through the mutual recognition of Sister Churches.

This concerns also the issues of evangelization. Ecumenism and evangelization are closely linked. They cannot be treated as alternatives. A competitive kind of evangelization which has no real concern for reconciliation among Christians is simply dishonest and false. With our proclamation of the Gospel we are not allowed to export our division and rivalries. Evangelization should serve all God's people, who are not simply 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" (*προτρεπτικὴ γὰρ ἡ πᾶσα θεοσέβεια*), i.e. it gives confidence and encouragement²⁰. One has to give up an exaggerated tendency towards Church-making. Evangelization should be understood within a broader perspective, that of the Kingdom of God. His Kingdom is the ultimate horizon of evangelization. Such an approach can help to overcome the mentality of proselytism and competition.

8. Ecumenical aporetics and paschal spirituality of hope

Difficult situations are a constant feature of human existence. They determine the dramatic or even tragic character of human life. In this context one has to speak about Christian "aporetics", expressed in a dialectical way by St. Paul in two words difficult to translate: *ἀπορούμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐξαπορούμενοι* (2 Cor. 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 characterises in this way his own missionary situation. He does not think it is only short and a transitional one (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8). His words show an essential element of Christian existence as such, a dialectical coexistence of helplessness and courage to hold on, which could be applied to ecumenism as well.

Ancient stoics used to see *aporia* in all questions. For this reason they were called aporetics. *Aporia* means an apparently insurmountable diffi-

²⁰ Clement of Alexandria, paed. I,1,3 (SC 70, p.110).

culty or contradiction. The Apostle did not hesitate to apply this term to himself (ἀπορούμενοι). Christians everywhere know difficult situations from their own experience. In this sense they really are ἀπορούμενοι. On the other hand they trust in God, believe in the power of Christ and His Spirit. They know that Christendom is not only religion of the Cross, but also religion of the Resurrection, hope, courage and joy. The experience of difficulties and dark sides of existence may lead to pessimistic feelings. Ecumenism is no exception in this respect. Christians know that there will be here on earth no total victory over helplessness. This consciousness bewares them of a naive and false optimism which overshadows all bitter realities of life. Ecumenical aporetics is an integral part of the kenotic dimension of ecclesiology.

Only God can solve the final aporetics of our existence. For this reason pessimism has to cede to difficult paschal optimism. Paschal spirituality is a spirituality of hope. It looks not only at the crucified Jesus, but also at the risen Christ who is the only source of our hope and confidence.

The difficult ecumenical process of reconciliation and mutual forgiveness cannot be accomplished without an ethos of compassion. We are too severe on our judgements. We think too readily of differences in our understanding of the one faith. Of course, one should not underestimate the importance of doctrinal dialogues. But far more difficult to handle are 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 institutionalised 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 the faith in another Church.

Today we are more aware that the ecumenism of the mind is not enough. We need also the ecumenism of the heart, and that is not possible without 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”.²¹ Nobody is lost for God and his Kingdom. A truly paschal hope does not forget about the tomorrow of God’s Reign which has no limits.

Who reads the witness of mystics, will find in it the negation of all fundamentalism and spiritual parochialism. He will discover their mercy and compassion embracing everyone and everything. Mystics can

²¹ Cf. Synopsis quattuor evangeliorum, ed. K. Aland, Stuttgart, 1985, p. 248.

descend into the tragic depths of human nature but do not abandon a hope that “all shall be well”, as Julian of Norwich wrote in the 14th century²². That is why hope for the salvation of all is so close and dear to them. Thanks to this they are the best allies of genuine universalism²³.

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

The soteriological universalism of hope requires a new mentality and a new pedagogy. Christendom contains in itself a vast and creative potential which has so far not been fully discovered and appreciated. It does not matter that our roads towards the Infinite are different. He himself remains the greatest hope for every one. This awareness is the great liberation for ecumenism and universalism. Christianity of the future will find more eschatological optimism in understanding the final destiny of humanity. It will become a more paschal Christianity of hope – of a truly universal hope which brings joy and confidence.

In our Churches there is still too much tactic and diplomacy which overshadow the kenotic ethos of Christianity. This tactic manifests itself in paralysing caution, in passing things in silence, in waiting and delaying. Perhaps it is motivated, behind all appearances, by fear that one has to recognise the fundamental identity of the faith and life of other Churches. Who understands his or her own identity in opposition to the others, will always hesitate to acknowledge and to accept their full Christian identity.

I am no pessimist. One century of ecumenism cannot heal what many centuries of mutual alienation have separated. I believe that it is possi-

²² Julian of Norwich, *Showings*. Translated from the critical text with an introduction by E. College OSA / J. Wals SJ, Mahwah NJ, 1978, p. 149 [The Short Text, chapter XIII].

²³ Cf. W. Hryniwicz, *Dramat nadziei zbawienia* (The Drama of the Hope of Salvation), Warsaw, 1996, pp. 149–170.

ble to overcome at least the greater historical schisms among the Churches. The controversial differences can be dealt with, through a patient and persistent dialogue, in such a way that they lose their dividing character. The example of the common Catholic-Lutheran declaration on the doctrine of justification signed recently in Augsburg is an encouraging sign of hope. God himself will not cease to urge us to be more courageous – πολύφωνος καὶ πολύτροπος ὁ σωτήρ.

The future destiny of the ecumenical dialogue depends on our readiness to proceed on the way of the kenotic ethos of the Christian message. We have been shaped by the history of confessional divisions. The time has come to think more in terms of the future. The roots of our confessionalism are to be found in the past. But as long as we remain prisoners of the past, there will be no real advance towards reconciliation. Our ecclesiologies are under judgement of eschatology. The memory of the future (*memoria futuri*) is therefore an indispensable dimension of a more paschal Christianity. Knowing our human weakness and sinfulness we have to invoke the Holy Spirit in a truly ecumenical *epiklesis*. On the threshold of the third millennium we may do it in a similar way as St. Symeon the New Theologian did it at the turn of the second millennium: Ἐλθὲ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ἐλθὲ ἡ οἰώνιος ζωή … (Come, true Light, come, eternal Life …)²⁴. In the last resort it is He who renews and changes the face of the world. I am inclined to think that Christendom is still rather ahead of us than behind us, still very young, increasing slowly in wisdom, learning how to cherish unity in diversity...

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²⁴ Oratio mystica, PG 120, 507–510; SC 156, pp. 150–155.