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WHEN THE CHURCH SEEKS THE WAYS OF RECONCILIATION **Some 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 stronger and more frequently. "If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rv 2:7). This cry is repeated seven times in the call addressed to the seven churches (see the chapters 2-3) in the Book of Revelation. How to perceive the urgency of this call of the Spirit in the world today? Many people ask a serious question: What is wrong with the Church? The critics of the present situation indicate such problems in the Roman Catholic Church as decentralization, more participation of women in her life and decision making bodies, more liberal approach to ethical issues or more democracy. All these views may be helpful and justified but remain somehow on the second plane.

The diagnosis seems to demand a more thorough theological and ecumenical approach. Each crisis is at the same time an opportunity and a chance to understand better the signs of the times.

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. The 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 the balance between stability and change, continuity and discontinuity. One tendency should not exclude and fight the other one as harmful and hostile.

It is in this way that the danger of traditionalism and fundamentalism could be avoided. Tradition is the way of the Church in the succeeding human generations. It is a dynamic process of continuous *aggiornamento*, both continuation and purification. If tradition loses its dynamism, then it buries itself and turns into a 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 the Tradition means to be always on the way, to be open, to encounter people and in them Jesus Christ himself, present in their life “to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20) as their Lord and Saviour. We are, all of us, only his disciples.

The Church fulfills her role when she does not concentrate too much 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. They have to be constantly improved and adapted to the needs of people. To show the way to God, the Church has to divert her attention from herself. If she in her preaching turns around her own concerns and interests, one cannot expect that this will be an attracting invitation to follow Jesus Christ portrayed in the Gospel as totally devoted to people, their liberation from evil and salvation in the reign of God.

In Search for Ways to Overcome Ecumenical Crisis

A historical change is now taking place in our life and thinking. The future of the Church depends very much on the way how the present tensions in Christian life will be dealt with. We stand in front of the necessity to take a difficult, truly epoch-making decision in which direction to go into the future. In the eyes of some people it is modernity which is the source of all misfortunes, and has brought 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 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 with the decision-making bodies. In many decisions one can simply find 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 simply develop 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 life of believers.

In fact the Church finds each time a 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 time disparity between the Church and the world. Such 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: basic appreciation of human progress, knowledge, democracy and independent value of terrestrial realities; recognition of human rights, freedom of religion and conscience. Besides the Council has acknowledged the main postulates of the Reformation (above all the central role of the Holy Scripture, vernacular language in the liturgy), and found a new relationship to other religions. The papal centralism has been balanced by reevaluation of bishops' ministry and the role of local churches.

The Council wanted to assist all people of our time, whether they believe in God, or do not explicitly recognize him¹. 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 programme 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 not all urgent questions were 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 the communion, obligatory celibacy of Latin clergy, human sexuality and birth-control, present custom of the appointment of 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.

¹ See *Gaudium et spes*, par. 91.

How Should We Respond to the Call of God's Spirit?

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 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). One has therefore to take seriously a 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; Jerusalem Bible, JB).

Very important thing in times of crisis is a living consciousness of eschatological orientation of Christian life and message, turned towards God "who is to come" (Rv 1:4.8). We await the everlasting fulfillment of the 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 the sense proportion between our temporal existence and the forthcoming world, and distinguish between what has a lasting value and what is passing away. There is, however, a widespread tendency to transfer the coming of Christ to a very distant future, while it is constantly occurring in death of each human being and in exchange of living generations. The eschatological newness is already present in the world. Defending ourselves against the present time, we prove of not being ready and willing 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 it happens in Jesus' parable of the ten bridesmaids. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Mt 25:13; New International Version, NIV).

People of our times are very sensitive to the question of human freedom. Our special task today is to reflect deeply on biblical themes of liberation and freedom. God the Father is shown in the Bible as Creator of all, as God of Exodus and liberation of all the enslaved human beings. In turn, the New Testament shows Jesus as the Saviour 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 Christian tradition was developed the concept of personhood, which became the ground of the modern notion of human rights.

Thereof 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. Through acts of service is manifested its real spiritual power, 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, aspiration for power had not been spared also to the Church². It does not mean, of course, that we should deny basic hierarchical structures of the Church, but these are no goal 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”. The conclusion: the Church and her structures are only means and instrument in the service of the salvation of people. In this respect, decentralization of church structures in the Roman Catholic Church and strengthening of regional bishops’ conferences in local churches is necessary and legitimate postulate today.

These are some introductory theological reflections on how to deal with the present tensions in the Church, so that she may become a real space of 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, bring joy, give the sense of fulfillment of life and broaden our cognitive horizons³. Very much depends on the quality of preaching and experiencing the Gospel of Christ. If it is presented in an 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 brought about through convincing words and deeds of the disciples of Christ who follow their Master.

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 island. 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.

² See www.zenit.org, 22 May, 2013.

³ See the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November, 2013) of pope Francis.

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 errors⁴.

Those were very courageous and sincere words. Personally, as a member of the Joint International Commission, I was very much impressed by them. 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 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 the logic or ideal of “pure doctrine”. Human life does not either. They have their own dialectics.

In my own country, Poland, a bishop of the Evangelical-Reformed Church, Zdzisław Tranda, has put forward a very challenging interpretation of Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37). Usually one sees in it just a warning against the lack of sensitivity to the situation of a human being in need. Bishop Tranda draws attention to the Old Testament regulations which forbade the priests to approach the dead body for fear of a ritual impurity. “None of them shall defile himself for the dead among his people” (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 to be able to perform respective functions in the temple. A ritual purification should then last for seven days.

⁴ “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”.

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 behavior 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?⁵

There is no need, I think, to comment on these words. Their relevance for the present-day ecumenical situation is clear.

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

The Need for Doctrinal Rectifications

As said earlier, Christianity has become too doctrinaire. It has run away from the doxological understanding of dogma in the ancient Church. Some 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 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 were claiming a monopoly of the truth and of being the unique, necessary and only means of salvation. We need today to rethink profoundly the prevailing theologies used by the Church to justify even the right to invade, conquer other peoples and destroy their “pagan” religions. Thus for many centuries Christian theology was a powerful ideological support for the Western colonialism. It understood the mission of the Church as the salvation of the “infidels” by converting them to the Church even with the help of the colonial conquerors.

Raising such issues is an expression of faith and loyalty to the Church. They must be answered, clearly and quietly. All the present-day efforts related to a necessary “purification” and conversion of the Church remain till now on the level of ethics. They do not touch ecclesiastical doctrine as such. It is clear that an ethically orientated self-criticism is a very important step, but for ecumenism it is not sufficient. Ecclesiastical doctrines also need correction and rectification.

This belongs to the ecumenical *desiderata* and remains an important task of ecumenical hermeneutics. As long as self-criticism and self-purification are limited only to the ethical area, they will remain partial and insufficient, without decisive influence on ecumenism. The debate about the ministry of Peter and the primacy of the pope has already shown 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*, par. 11). The very idea of hierarchy of truths is one of the most challenging concepts for ecumenism, whose

importance has been emphasized by pope Francis in the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*⁶.

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*⁷. 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 (par. 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 made already by pope Paul VI. In his letter to cardinal Johannes Willebrands (October 5, 1974) he termed the second council of Lyons as "the sixth of the general synods held in the West"⁸, 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 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 patri-

⁶ *Evangelii gaudium*, par. 246.

⁷ *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.

⁸ AAS 66, 1974, pp. 620–625.

arch Photius and pope John VIII⁹. Only after the schism this recognition was 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 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 tradition¹⁰. 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.

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.

An Urgent Need of the 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 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*

⁹ Cf. J.A. MEIJER, *A Successful Council of Union: A Theological Analysis of the Photian Synod of 879–880* (Analekta Vlatadon 23), Thessaloniki, 1975; A. VAN BUNNEN, *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.

¹⁰ *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 J. BORELLI AND J.H. ERICSON, Crestwood, NY – Washington, DC 1996.

Wahrheit)¹¹. 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 humility of service and 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 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“¹².

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»”¹³.

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.

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

¹¹ METROPOLITE 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 Okumenismus: 10 Pro-Oriente-Symposien, 1982–1985. Festschrift Theodor Piffel-Percevic*, ed. A. STIRNEMANN, Innsbruck 1987, pp. 350–364, here 361 f.

¹² *Visite officielle du Patriarche oecuménique à l'Église de Rome...*, “Episkepsis”, No. 520, 31. 07. 1995, p. 15: «...c'est seulement quand le primat de l'ethos 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 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’».

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 10

clarify the issues of primacy, synodality, authority and relations between local Churches. The question of prestige, jurisdiction and authority continuously 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 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 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 serious about the goal of unity, we must be serious about the cost of unity¹⁴.

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 *parrēsia*, i.e. openness, frankness, boldness, confidence. Without courageous vision, a 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.

¹⁴ J.R. QUINN, *The Exercise of the Primacy: Facing the Cost of Christian Unity*, “Commonweal” 123 (1996), No. 13, pp. 11–20, here 19.

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 briefly outlined 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 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 (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 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.

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

¹⁵ METROPOLITE GEORGES (KHODR), *Vers Rome ou avec Rome?*, “Service Orthodoxe de Presse“, No. 193, décembre 1994, pp. 30–32, here 32.

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

In 2006 pope Benedict XVI has 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. It was explained that the title “Patriarch of the West” was introduced in the East, in the ambit of the imperial ecclesiastical system of Justinian (527–565), alongside the

¹⁶ Y. 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, *Église et papauté*, Paris: Cerf 1994, pp. 11–30 [reprinted from: « Istina » 28, 1983, pp. 374–390].

four Eastern patriarchates: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. In Rome this title was not used¹⁸.

A Conversion of the Papacy

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.

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 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 document *The Gift of Authority* agreed upon by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission¹⁹.

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 *subsidium* which means support or help. So far other Christians do not believe that synodality, collegiality and subsidiarity are being practiced in the Catholic Church in a sufficient and ef-

¹⁸ 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 has become obsolete and practically unusable.

¹⁹ *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.

fective way. In his encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* (par. 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”.

The Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church still works 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 for 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 an interview accorded to a Jesuit periodical “La Civiltà Cattolica” 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 path²⁰.

²⁰ English translation: *A Big Hart Open to God*, “America Magazine” (2013) 30. Boldface is mine, W.H. – Unfortunately the Ravenna document has not been signed till now.

In the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* the Pope has gone much further and struck 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”²¹. 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 (par. 246).

The Hermeneutics of Confidence

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 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 (*kat’ hólón*), frequently demanding a correction of our confessional way of thinking.

²¹ Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995), 95; AAS 87 (1995), 977–978.

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 concept of the truth which is to be found above all in Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

Ecumenism is a matter of honesty and 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 linked 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 and of the Holy Spirit 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” (*Pneûma hegemonikón*) will never be at our command.

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 willing to suppress them. The only realistic way to visible unity of the Churches leads through the mutual recognition as Sister Churches. Pope Francis writes in his exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*:

We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face. Trusting others is an art and peace is an art (par. 244).

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 spirit-filled evangelization is one guided by the Holy Spirit...", says pope Francis in his exhortation (par. 261).

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 theosébeia*), i.e. it gives confidence and encouragement²². 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.

* * *

A long way still leads to the time of overcoming the greatest divisions in the Christian world. It depends so much on the quality of our being Christians, on our openness and 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 is your heart, there are also understanding and real change of thinking (*metánoia*).

Let us listen then 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 will continue and damage the credibility of Christian witness in the world.

I am not inclined to believe in the speedily approaching ecumenical Pentecost. But the fact is that the ecumenical dialogue has already opened new horizons in the history of Christianity. The dedication to ecumenism demands a deep change of heart and mind, magnanimity and persistent hope. Ecu-

²² CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Paedagogus*. I,1,3 (SChr 70, p. 110. Boldface is mine, W.H.

menical passion reaching into the depth of human heart opens it up for the dialogue with Others. One single life would not be not enough to accomplish this passion.

Kiedy Kościół szuka dróg pojednania. Kilka refleksji ekumenicznych

Streszczenie

Autor zwraca w artykule uwagę na siedmiokrotnie powtarzające się słowa z Księgi Apokalipsy (rozdz. 2–3): „Ten, kto ma uszy, niech usłyszy, co Duch mówi do Kościołów”. Słowa te nabierają szczególnego znaczenia w czasie, gdy wiele mówi się o kryzysie Kościoła i ekumenii oraz o ekumenicznej niecierpliwości. Kościół nie jest celem sam w sobie i dla siebie. Nie powinien zajmować się jedynie sobą, lecz swoje wysiłki skupiać na głoszeniu Ewangelii, Dobrej Nowiny, która jest wspólnym dobrem wszystkich chrześcijan i ludzi dobrej woli. Ewangelia daje radość i nadzieję, jak to podkreśla papież Franciszek w swojej adhortacji *Evangelii gaudium*. Skazani jesteśmy na szukanie dróg przewyciężenia kryzysu, który jest nie tylko wyzwaniem, ale również szansą na pełniejszą realizację mądrości Ewangelii. W tym poszukiwaniu nie należy obawiać się tematów trudnych, takich jak niebezpieczeństwo zniewolenia przez pewne doktryny, które domagają się reinterpretacji, korekty i niezbędnych uzupełnień. Autor podkreśla konieczność powrotu do „kenotycznego etosu”, czyli zdolności i odwagi do samoograniczenia i przewyciężenia tego, co stoi na przeszkodzie do pojednania. Dotyczy to zwłaszcza trudnej i kluczowej kwestii prymatu biskupa Rzymu. Papież Franciszek mówi wręcz o potrzebie „nawrócenia papieżstwa” (*una conversione del papato*). Przyszedł błogosławiony czas, aby hermeneutykę nieufności i podejrzliwości zastąpić hermeneutyką uczciwości i wzajemnego zaufania. Dialog ekumeniczny otworzył przed chrześcijaństwem nowe horyzonty. Trzeba odważnie kontynuować dotychczasowe wysiłki w celu nawrócenia Kościołów ku sobie i pojednania.

Keywords: Church, ecumenism, reconciliation, kenosis, primacy, hermeneutics.

Słowa kluczowe: Kościół, ekumenizm, pojednanie, kenoza, prymat, hermeneutyka.