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Rediscovering Christian Culture and Spirituality in the Fluid Reality of Europe

Abstract: This article points to the plight of man in the 21st century and his intimidating spiritual and axiological confusion. The 2020 COVID pandemic, the 2022 war in Ukraine and high economic inflation have exposed the lack of stable ethical values and lasting references for Europe. On the one hand, many EU citizens live today in uncertainty and fear, falling in line with populist slogans, and on the other hand, strong xenophobic and fundamentalist currents have emerged in the Catholic Church. Europe is arguably not so much in need of a return to over-institutionalized Christianity, but rather of a search for new forms and systems that would express the ideas of Jesus of Nazareth in innovative ways. Postmodernity with its characteristic elements, i.e., pluralization, mercantilization and rapid change, seem to be completely incompatible with the conventionally accepted Christian understanding of God, the concept of man and the world around him. Therefore, this is a great challenge to all Christian theologians.

Keywords: Christianity, spirituality, culture, liquid modernity, Europe, postmodernism

1. Liquid Reality According to Z. Bauman and J. Habermas

Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017) is counted among the founders of the concept of postmodernism. He is the author of many theses with which it is difficult to agree. Nevertheless, his description of the current world as a liquid reality (*liquid modernity*) seems accurate.¹ His voice is reinforced by the attitude of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (born 1929), regarded as the main representative of the Frankfurt School, who proclaims that “we

¹ See Bauman, *Płynna nowoczesność*.

see change as an order in itself” (*Wir betrachten den Wechsel als Ordnung an sich*).²

Well, it is precisely in such a space, where basic points of reference are missing – where human beings get lost, as they do not have time to reflect and acquire the right attitude towards too fast changes – that there seems to be an increased need for reflection on human existence and its references. The modern world described as change of changes (*der Wechsel der Änderungen*) is not conducive to leading a morally upright life. This can be seen especially in young people, who are unable to shape their personalities and adapt to current social needs. Participation of the young in online communities pushes them to create multiple network identities, used in different situations. The phenomenon, which can be called the existence of multiple identities, makes it very difficult for a person to realize his own identity and understand himself and his personality, which is a cause of frustration, uncertainty and confusion. The need, therefore, is for greater embedding of human identity in cultural and religious contexts.

The modern European world seems to be a great praise of inconsistency and incoherence.³ On May 31, 2003, Habermas published the article “The post-war re-birth of Europe,” which at the time aroused much excitement and commentary.⁴ Signed additionally by French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), the appeal of the German philosopher – the founder the theory of communicative rationality and originator of the philosophy of deconstruction – was to become a great elite discourse on European identity. The authors stated unequivocally that an urgent need was emerging to develop a sense of community for the citizens and nationals of the Old Continent. The past years since then, have brought additional elements – such as the war in Iraq, the increased influx of emigration, the aging of native Europeans, COVID, the armed conflict in Ukraine, massive energy problems, the threat of Islamic terrorists – all of which make the concern for the condition of Europe

² See Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.

³ See Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*.

⁴ Cf. Habermas – Derrida, “Nach dem Krieg.”

all the greater. In this article, he repeats many thoughts from his two-volume work, where he laid out the theory of communicative action.⁵

Habermas explores the question to what extent modernity is able to justify itself on reasonable grounds. For this purpose, it is necessary to find a principle that is inherent in modernity itself, that proves modernity to be reasonable, that, moreover, has the same stabilizing effect on society as religion did in pre-modernity. On this basis, he is concerned with establishing a European identity that breaks with the Europe of defense ministers and competitiveness, and resolutely absorbs the legacy of occidental rationality.

In six points,⁶ Habermas presents the main features of the mentality of Western Europeans as they became dominant after World War II. In this rather abstract and idealistic – and certainly unrealistic – analyses of the Frankfurt school thinker, the Socratic-Platonic “concern for the soul” (*epimeleia tès psychés*) is that which he sees as the foundation on which the European spiritual world rests.⁷

It is impossible here to raise questions to the representatives of such a reflection about the presence and impact of Christianity for two thousand years on a global scale. It is also impossible not to negate such shallow thinking and clearly oppose going back to pre-Christian times, when we owe so much to the teachings

⁵ See Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*.

⁶ Cf. Habermas – Derrida, “Nach dem Krieg,” 3. The six points Habermas mentions above are: 1. Eine besondere Fähigkeit, Unterschiede zu kommunizieren, Gegensätze zu institutionalisieren, Spannungen zu stabilisieren; 2. Eine weit vorangeschrittene Säkularisierung, die zu einer scharfen Trennung von Religion und Politik führte; 3. Ein relatives großes Vertrauen in die Organisationsleistungen und Steuerungskapazitäten des Staates und eine relative Skepsis gegenüber der Leistungsfähigkeit des Marktes; 4. Kein ungebrochener Optimismus gegenüber technischen Fortschritten; 5. Präferenzen für die Sicherheitsgarantien des Wohlfahrtsstaates und für solidarische Regelungen; 6. Der Wunsch nach einer multilateralen und rechtlich geregelten internationalen Ordnung und die damit verbundene Hoffnung auf eine effektive Weltinnenpolitik im Rahmen reformierter Vereinter Nationen.

⁷ The issue of restoring Europe’s soul is also taken up by Martin Cajthalm from the Department of Philosophy and Patrology Palacky University Olomouc, whose philosophical essay analyzes the postulates of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka. See Cajthalm, “Europa als Sorge.”

of Jesus of Nazareth! The postulations of Christian theologians also reinforce the thoughts of some Jewish thinkers calling for a turn toward greater spirituality. Let his remarks revise this “pseudo-trope” of today’s coryphaei of the new left.

In his factual essay *Jezus ośmieszony* (Jesus ridiculed) Leszek Kołakowski soberly notes concerning Jesus:

That His moral teachings, an abusive and unheard-of challenge to the world, have taken over this world – nominally, it’s true, but more than nominally – is incomprehensible. That a new universe emerged from the weak, ornamentless hands of a Galilean Jew is incomprehensible if we try to put His era into perspective. The root of this transformation – the Christian world has always agreed on this point – is love.⁸

And further, the above-cited philosopher – with Polish roots, but working in Great Britain – concludes:

We need it more than the early Christians did, that in essence, it was the fact that we forgot Jesus and, as a result, his most well-known commandment, that got us where we are now – often despairing, perpetually apprehensive, devoid of signs.⁹

Although it is difficult at the beginning of the 21st century to define Europe as a Christian continent, bearing in mind especially the event and ideas of the Enlightenment and the resulting French Revolution, as well as subjecting the current situation to a sober analysis, it is still a space saturated with contents of Judeo-Christian revelation. While it is true that recent popes, especially St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI or Francis, have made quite a few efforts to revive the religious consciousness of the Old Continent’s inhabitants, it seems that they were not entirely successful ventures. Postmodernity and its characteristic elements, i.e. pluralization, individualization, mercantilization and aestheticization, seem to be completely

⁸ Kołakowski, *Jezus ośmieszony*, 105–106.

⁹ Kołakowski, *Jezus ośmieszony*, 23.

incompatible with the currently conventionally accepted Christian understanding of God, the concept of man and the world around him.¹⁰

A good connoisseur of postmodern philosophy on the Polish ground, Stanisław Kowalczyk (born 1932), systematizing it, notes that the plurality of interpretations of postmodernity even dictates that several of its currents should be singled out. Therefore, one should speak of French postmodernity (J.-F. Lyotard, J. Derrida, M. Foucault), American (R. Rorty), German (W. Welsch), Italian (G. Vattimo) and Polish (Z. Bauman). In light of the ideological and worldview criterion, it can be ruled that the overwhelming majority of representatives of postmodernity declaratively advocate naturalism and atheism.¹¹ The Polish representative of the post-Marxist current in the bosom of postmodernity, Zygmunt Bauman, enumerates the following elements characteristic of this philosophy: institutionalized pluralism, diversity, randomness and ambivalence.¹² Any attempt at dialogue seems to be essential today. After all, dialogue is a space not only for meetings, but also for the exchange of views and one's own enrichment of one's narrow vision of the world.

2. Departure from the Christian Heritage

Will the new Europe of the early 21st century emerging before us – marked by a pluralistic and illogical culture, a science that does not seek the truth, a political democracy that unfortunately has little in common with the assumptions of the democracy of the Greek polis, a lack of ethics and spiritual emptiness – have the power to provide answers to the many vexing questions not only to the inhabitants who have inhabited it for centuries, but also to the many emigrants, and ultimately to the entire world, which looks at the Old Continent with so much interest and waits for hints and patterns in which

¹⁰ Cf. Bokwa, *Teologia w warunkach nowoczesności*, 209–228.

¹¹ Cf. Kowalczyk, *Idee filozoficzne postmodernizmu*, 9–11.

¹² Cf. Bauman, “Sociologiczna teoria postmoderny,” 7; see more: Bauman, *Kultura w płynnej nowoczesności*.

direction to go? But is there any theological hope and mathematical rationality in this praise of inconsistency and illogic?

It is worth mentioning here the still inspiring exhortation of the Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, or the still noteworthy speech of the Pope Benedict XVI Germany before the French elites. Against the backdrop of fading hope on European soil, the Pope from Poland aptly remarked in 2003:

I would like to mention in a particular way *the loss of Europe's Christian memory and heritage*, accompanied by a kind of practical agnosticism and religious indifference whereby many Europeans give the impression of living without spiritual roots and somewhat like heirs who have squandered a patrimony entrusted to them by history. It is no real surprise, then, that there are efforts to create a vision of Europe which ignore its religious heritage, and in particular, its profound Christian soul, asserting the rights of the peoples who make up Europe without grafting those rights on to the trunk which is enlivened by the sap of Christianity.¹³

It seems that this warning of the Polish pope has unfortunately found its fulfillment. This process of secularisation and secularism has accelerated considerably since the beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, it is necessary to return to the transcendental inspirations contained in the Judeo-Christian revelation.¹⁴

Reading Jean Ladrière (1921–2007), let us now repeat an interesting question: Is the Christian faith a foreign body in modern culture, to which it bears witness and, in a certain sense, against which it bears witness, starting from a total difference, or does it utter the fundamental sense of what is going on in that culture in the mystery it proclaims? In his book *Science, the World and Faith*, the Professor from the Catholic University of Louvain sketches out the difficult relationship between the scientific world and Christian faith, with no easy answers at all. The process of purifying the image

¹³ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 7.

¹⁴ Cf. Napiórkowski, *Secularised City*.

of the European world offered by faith seems to be complete today. For now the greater capabilities of science (science / nature) and their increasing competence were revealed. The old synthesis of the Christian world has been decisively bid farewell. Faith became superfluous in terms of explaining the surrounding world in its macro- and microcosm. Consequently, there was a rigorous distinction of orders. Methodological tools and research fields were strictly defined. Epistemological criticism has shown that the meaning of claims depends on the methods used. Hence, there should be no conflict between science and faith, since the two realities belong to different planes of cognition. Consequently, a certain inconsistency, a lack of continuity in experience, was taken for granted. It seems that many worlds have been created side by side, between which an artificial separation is maintained.¹⁵

Professor of theology at the Catholic University of Lyon, Dominican Christian Duquoc, describes the situation of modern Europe as a void, while Italian philosopher Marcello Pera speaks of the “yawning of the West.” Polish theologian Professor Ignacy Bokwa goes further in his analysis, as he notes that the collapse of communist systems has exposed the unexpected ideological emptiness of Western democracies. Their individualistic interpretation of freedom may be a greater threat to Christians than the arrogant and less subtle power of the communist regimes that are retiring from history.¹⁶

Western Europe, increasingly satiated, powerful and full of hubris, is revealing its poverty, weakness and hunger day by day. Overloaded with material things, but increasingly devoid of spirituality and transcendental beauty. As early as 1950, German philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote that the time of the night of the world is a time of poverty; the world has become so poor that it cannot recognize the absence of God as a lack.¹⁷ The most serious problem of modern Europe is its irreligiousness. The people of this part of the world have stopped searching for God. This lack of seeking God (*quaerere Deum*) results in almost all areas. It is impossible to construct

¹⁵ Cf. Ladrière, *Nauka, świat i wiara*, 18–35.

¹⁶ Cf. Bokwa, *Teologia w warunkach nowoczesności*, 254–255.

¹⁷ See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*.

an economy, practice politics, conduct scientific research, create works of art, humanly live and love without omitting moral values and addressing transcendental issues. Progress is an extremely important and necessary matter, as it opens up new perspectives, with technology making human life easier and science explaining many mysteries of nature and the surrounding world. But it is man and woman who carry the mystery of transcendence, love and truth, which transcends all dimensions of time and space.

There is not much exaggeration in the parabola comparing the West to a sinking ship, where everyone disregards leakage and works diligently to make its steering more and more comfortable, where only current problems are discussed. But isn't true health achieved when we are able to discover the real disease? These two sentences above are from an essay, published in 1983, entitled "On the meaning of 'God's death,'" and came from the pen of the well-known Italian philosopher Emanuele Severino (1929–2020). Today they become even more relevant. We don't care much about the real problems of our existence, society or the Church, and we waste time on marginal issues. "In order to cure illness," continues the Brescia-based philosopher, "one must have the courage to look it in the face, to see its seriousness, and not resort to the help of illusory means, placebos or fancy safeguards."¹⁸

According to Joseph Ratzinger, the crisis of ideology in Europe after the collapse of the communist system has its consequences in the following three areas: in the crisis of science, in references to the world of spiritual and ethical values, and in the search for a new religion. It is difficult to supplement this great German theologian of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, but the description of Europe's current condition should undoubtedly be expanded to include increasing corruption in the economic field, lack of accountability in the world of politics and the media, rising levels of fear in societies (people are most simply afraid to say what they think), resulting from media manipulation and psychological terrorism, "political correctness," intimidating demographic indicators, massive

¹⁸ Severino, *A Cesare e a Dio*.

destruction of the natural human environment and the seriously growing threat of war.

To quote Cardinal Ratzinger's warning:

A society that in its public structure is built according to the principles of agnosticism and materialism, while it leaves everything else below the threshold of what is public, cannot survive.¹⁹

3. Rediscovering Christian Anthropology

Can the substitute forms of religiosity that are being introduced in place of Christianity to any extent meet this basic human need for transcendent references? Can the intensifying atheism, which is currently taking on imperious and attacking forms, be a new religion? But one must also ask: can the spreading fundamentalist and integrist forms within the center of the Christian Churches be, in the long run, the right solution for the lost man of the 21st century?

In the document of the Second Vatican Council, namely the *Gaudium et spes* constitution, we find a call for a respectful attitude toward non-believers, but also a call to seek God. We read:

Above all the Church knows that her message is in harmony with the most secret desires of the human heart when she champions the dignity of the human vocation, restoring hope to those who have already despaired of anything higher than their present lot. Far from diminishing man, her message brings to his development light, life and freedom. Apart from this message nothing will avail to fill up the heart of man: "Thou hast made us for Thyself," O Lord, "and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."²⁰

In his address to representatives of French culture in 2008 Benedict XVI outlined the roots of European culture, which, although they are supported by Greek philosophy and Roman law, are above

¹⁹ Ratzinger, *Wendezeit für Europa?*, 123.

²⁰ Vaticanum II, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 21.

all indelibly fixed deeply in Christian revelation. The essential element of this revelation is God's self-revelation and human response to it. Hence,

it was not their [Christian monks'] intention to create a culture nor even to preserve a culture from the past. Their motivation was much more basic. Their goal was: *quaerere Deum*. Amid the confusion of the times, in which nothing seemed permanent, they wanted to do the essential – to make an effort to find what was perennially valid and lasting, life itself. They were searching for God. They wanted to go from the inessential to the essential, to the only truly important and reliable thing there is.²¹

Expanding on these statements, it can be argued that the biggest problem of today's post-modern society in Europe is the disappearance of the search for God, and thus the issue of theodicy. Moreover, it should be added that an even more important issue is an anthropological one. There can be no religiosity that does not respect the basic premises, derived from the construction of human existence. As various branches of research – archaeology, ethnography, cultural studies, psychology or theology – teach us, man by his very nature is already a religious being, that is, he is not an infinite being, but is open to the infinite. The autonomy of secularism today has become a pragmatic ideology that denies the existence and action of God in the world and erodes religiosity. Therefore, it must be rejected on both theological and anthropological grounds.²²

It is not quite clear how to treat the results of various opinion polls, where, on the one hand, lot of the inhabitants of our continent say that they do not ask themselves questions of a religious nature, and on the other hand, studies by the Institute of Geography of the Jagiellonian University show increased pilgrimage traffic, especially to the Marian shrines of Europe or to St. James in Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Migration based on religious motives has played and continues to play an important role in

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Address to Representatives*.

²² Cf. Hanvey, *The Challenge and Hope*, 10.

the migration processes of many countries. Wanderings to sacred places have existed almost from the beginning of human history. Pilgrimages in addition to their value in the religious sphere, were also an important element in the development of the geographic horizon of societies. They have also always been one of the main factors in the creation of a broad religious culture.²³

On the one hand, the once-obvious God has become a foreign and distant God, while on the other, there is a growing demand for icons, hung on walls in super modern lofts. On the one hand, we see people attending Sunday Eucharist in Italy, Portugal, Greece, Malta or Poland, while on the other, it is not uncommon for church buildings in the Netherlands to be auctioned off or converted into rooms for asylum seekers in Germany.

The mystery of man and his attainment of his proper fulfillment cannot take place without reference to Christ.²⁴ The depiction of man that we find in the pages of the Old and New Testaments first presents his unique place in the entire work of creation. The Bible does not treat man like all other living beings, does not put him on a par with inanimate or animate matter. God brings human beings into existence as male and female. The description of the creation of the first humans is expressed in descriptive language, appropriate to the degree of civilisation for the authors of Genesis. It should not be interpreted in a literal sense, since the primary purpose of this account is to convey the truth that God is the creator, that He calls from nothingness into being (*ex nihil sui subiecti*) and that man is created in the image and likeness of God. And furthermore, that God, driven by love, created man for man's sake.

4. Towards New Christian Spirituality and Culture

One of the outstanding physicists of the 20th century, Richard Feynman (1918–1988), felt the need for poetry. He described the mystery of human creation as “an atom having consciousness.” In his work he was inspired by Pascal and his famous comparison of man as

²³ Cf. Jackowski – Soljan, “Millenium,” 9–10.

²⁴ Cf. Vaticanum II, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22.

a “thinking reed.” Man, according to this founder of quantum electrodynamics and winner of the 1965 Nobel Prize in Physics for his independent creation of relativistic electrodynamics, is “an atom in the universe” and at the same time “a universe of atoms,” a true microcosm at the intersection of infinity and eternity. Even a careful look at the human brain instills awe: under the vault of our small skull is a galaxy of hundreds of billions of neurons, as numerous as the stars of the Milky Way, and the number of synapses connecting them reaches the order of millions of billions. Feynman used to speak of man as “matter endowed with curiosity”: and this term means precisely man’s ability to transcend himself while at the same time throwing bridges to what surpasses us and is on the other side. Contrary to any reductionism that tries to reduce the human being to a mere arrangement of cells or neurons, we always feel that there is a spark of eternity and infinity in us, perhaps only unnecessarily silenced today?²⁵

Europe’s problems cannot be reduced to climate change, ethical issues or the drastic population decline, which is also linked to the aging of its population.²⁶ The situation in post-modern societies in the European Union is not only the result of people leaving (or being led away from) the Church, but is also the consequence of a certain turning away of the Church from a lost people. Hence the call for change must be applied to all Europeans, both Christians and other people.

The simply incredible changes that have taken place and are still taking place in the Church and in theology in the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century are indeed difficult to describe. They go as much for their content as for their far-reaching effects. Reaching back into the history of Christianity to achieve a more balanced and objectified opinion, and citing such events as the Council of Chalcedon in 451 or the Council of Trent in 1545–1563, it is still fair to say that the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) radically changed the Church and its relationship to the outside world. It resulted in a powerful flowering of theological sciences.

²⁵ Cf. Feynman, *Pan raczy żartować*, 352.

²⁶ Cf. Keenan, “The World at Risk,” 132–149.

With an increased emphasis on spirituality and culture, many Christian thinkers have made considerable efforts and developed a number of new directions within systematic theology. The current situation can certainly awaken doubt in many believers, and fear and confusion in people who declare themselves indifferent religious. In the Gospels, Jesus described his followers as a small flock rather than as a powerful and strong congregation: “Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom” (Matt 12:32).

In 1969, nearly half a century ago, at the end of his radio lectures at Radio Hesse, seeing the Church only from a European perspective J. Ratzinger prophesied that out of today’s crisis will emerge a Church that will lose much. It will become few in number and will have to start anew, more or less from the beginning. It will no longer be able to live in the buildings it built in times of affluence. As the number of its faithful decreases, it will also lose most of its social privileges. It will start anew with small groups, with movements and with a minority that will put the faith at the center of experience again. It will be a more spiritual Church that will not ascribe to itself a political mandate, flirting once with the Left and once with the Right. It will be poor and become a Church of the poor. Then people will see this small flock of believers as something completely new: they will discover it as hope for them, the answer they have always secretly sought.

Christianity is becoming less of a European religion and more of a truly global religion. Its ties with Europe, although representing a very significant and unquestionable stage in its development, have loosened considerably since the second half of the twentieth century. One of the elements attesting to the global face of Christianity is precisely the flourishing of the aforementioned non-European theologies. There seems to be a significant shift of the Church and thus of theology beyond the Old Continent. Unfortunately, there are still many Christians, but also theologians in the Western world of the 21st century, who treat Christianity in Latin America, Asia or Africa as a secondary phenomenon, the fruit of the colonial and missionary activities of Europeans or, in part, Americans. The last fifty years have revealed a remarkably dynamic development of indigenous faith in Christ in Asia, Africa or Latin America,

helped indeed by the powerful growth of the newly baptised, but also by the indigenous forms of various theologies attempting to pronounce the Gospel in their own culture and tradition.

New theological concepts are currently experiencing their verification, deepening or rejection. However, all of them are manifestations and attempts to bring these magnificent and immense spiritual goods – contained in the Church and offered by Jesus Christ – closer to modern man and all humanity of all times and latitudes.

Most of the new currents in theology of the 20th and 21st centuries are related to the discovery of new (or renewed) sites of theological knowledge: liturgy, revelation, history, person, nation, society, freedom, liberation, ecumenism, dialogue, process, eschatology, hope, experience, aesthetics, ecology, culture, beauty, feminism, freedom, and represent an attempt to develop new methods, such as the transcendentalist Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner or narrative in George Lindbeck and Hans W. Frei. Christians submit their vision of the Church not only as a communion for themselves, but also as a communion with the world. The Church is communion and becomes it ever more so through the Eucharist, which is communion by its very nature. An ecclesiology of communion is nowadays at the heart of the doctrine of the Church, which already was presented at the Vatican Council as a new element and at the same time rooted in the beginnings of Christianity.²⁷

These deeds of theology, which do not cease to be practiced within the Church, are a clear departure from institutional ecclesiology, from a closed and speculative system, in order to be closer to modern man with his questions and difficulties. This is naturally a long process, since a bolted fortress cannot be quickly abandoned. This does not go for revolutionary changes, but for evolutionary ones that involve a hermeneutic of continuity. Nevertheless, the growing cultivation of contextual theology raises high hopes for meeting the challenges of difficult times.

The current situation can certainly awaken doubt both in many hearts of Christians and people declaring themselves indifferently

²⁷ Cf. Bujak, “The Teaching of Pope Francis,” 148.

religious. In the Gospels, Jesus described his followers as a small flock rather than as a powerful and strong congregation. The Master of Nazareth was clearly encouraging us to be more concerned about lasting and timeless goods, not just temporal and transient ones. Jesus brought with him not only the offer of a new fellowship with God, but also moral principles. However, his ethical requirements are much higher than just the commandments of the Decalogue. The Church as the Ark of the New Covenant has its roots and continuity in the Old Testament, as there are many parallels between Noah's ark and the Decalogue of Moses and the Sermon on the Mount Beatitudes.²⁸

The Church of the Triune God invariably proclaims one and the same truth: He calls man to be conformed to Christ. The Lutherans speak of justification, the Orthodox Christians of divinization, and the Catholics of holiness. How are we to understand this? Let us refer to the insights of the most brilliant theologian of all time, namely St. Paul of Tarsus, who calls us not so much to keep the Decalogue, but to let ourselves be led by the Spirit of God. The Law does not bring salvation, but exposes sin. Following Jesus is not keeping the commandments, but living in the Spirit. "Having life from the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25).

Christian morality is not reduced to the law, for it is not the law that brings freedom and redemption, but it is the spiritual gifts that come only from Christ and are freely given to us, not earned by us. The Apostle teaches: "Now the righteousness of God, independent of the Law, attested by the Law and the Prophets, has become manifest. This is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Rom 3:21–22).

Christ proposed a new model of life – a model of life in the Spirit, so different from Judaism. "Those who have sinned in the Law will be judged by the Law" (Rom 2:12). A Christian does not review his life in the light of God's and the Church's commandments, because these only show him where the sin is. They judge him and declare him a sinner. "You have not received the spirit of bondage," Paul teaches the Christians in Rome, "to be plunged into fear

²⁸ Cf. Adamczewski, "Noah's Ark."

again” (Rom 8:15). Unfortunately, Christianity is still stuck in the vapours of Judaism, and the followers of Christ are immersed in the Old Testament mentality, expecting that the law, i.e., keeping the commandments will bring them salvation.

Moreover, it should be remembered that the principle of *ecclesia semper reformanda* refers not only to institutional changes. It is not just about reforms in the Roman Curia or our parish. This *principium* already known in the early Church contains a much deeper content. It goes to changes in the thinking and heart of man. *Ecclesia semper reformanda* means bringing the believer closer to Christ. Reform of the Church in the most proper and correct sense is the internal reformation of the Christian. Only then do we have the development of the Church.

5. “Culture saved my Nation”

Postmodern talk about God must decisively leave the tabernacles of speculative, theoretical theology to become closer to modern man. There also needs to be a more decisive departure from institutional ecclesiology, with which the Church has officially bid farewell through the event and work of the Second Vatican Council, but is still stuck in its iron grip. Demands should also be made to the cultural world. For there can be no culture without reference to transcendence, if it wishes to help man in his emergence from existential anguish and anxiety. Man will not find answers to his questions in his world alone. He must transcend the macrocosm around him and his inner microcosm. The opportunity may be precisely the culture, rooted in the Judeo-Christian Revelation. For such, and not other, culture is a carrier of transcendental values, without which man cannot live. Each of us needs beauty, goodness and truth. It is no accident that Jesus assured us: “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

Finally, let us refer to the ever-present testimony given by John Paul II in his Paris speech at the UNESCO building. The Pope from Krakow said on June 2, 1980:

I am the son of a Nation which has lived the greatest experience of history, which its neighbours have condemned to death several times, but which has survived and remained itself. It has kept its identity, and it has kept, in spite of partitions and foreign occupations, its national sovereignty, not by relying on the resources of physical power, but solely *by relying on its culture*.²⁹

After all, we recently experienced the bestiality of German fascism and the cruelty of Soviet communism, only to fall back into the totalitarianism of atheist pseudo-democracy. No ideologies and utopias can change the reality about man, about the nation, about the Christian roots of Europe. A nation enlivened by culture, aware of its history, creativity and common values, can develop fully to reach the heights of human personality development.

For John Paul II, culture is the basic building block of a nation's identity. In his book *Pamięć i tożsamość* (*Memory and Identity*), he points to the objective basis for the existence of every nation, not limiting himself to the Poles. He states that a nation exists "from culture" and "for culture." The culture of a nation is therefore such a value that cannot be overestimated. And concern for culture is concern for the very core, concern for the very heart of the nation. In the most difficult moments for a nation, as Polish history shows, culture can prove to be a powerful force, leading from despair to hope, from the grave to resurrection.³⁰

It therefore seems that modern Europe is not so much in need of a return to over-institutionalized Christianity, but of developing new cultural forms and systems that would more accurately and in innovative ways express the spiritual ideas of Jesus of Nazareth to the man of the Internet age. Searching for these new ways, we should not reduce the Church to its mere sociological dimension. Having a theandric nature, the Church is both divine and human. It is the sacrament of the Holy Spirit, and God's Spirit blows where it wills.³¹ Moreover, we should not forget the universality

²⁹ John Paul II, Speech to the UNESCO, no. 14.

³⁰ John Paul II, *Pamięć i tożsamość*, 87.

³¹ Cf. Napiórkowski, *The Divine-Human Communion*, 201–239.

of the Church and narrow it down only to the territory of Europe, but rather explore the riches of spirituality which the Spirit evokes in various cultures.³²

Therefore, new forms of Christian culture and spirituality – while maintaining the sacramental nature of the Church – should move away from rituals and rites that do not appeal to modern people. In fact, we should move towards greater poverty and humility. This means abandoning costumes and titles, such as “Excellency” or “Eminence,” which carry no spirituality. Building an authentic community of sisters and brothers means first and foremost greater involvement of the lay faithful, especially allowing women to carry out ecclesiastical functions, as well as election of bishops by local Churches.

Spirituality comes from the Latin word *spiritus* – spirit. In Christianity, the word refers to God’s Holy Spirit and His influence. Therefore, authentic spiritual life is a life given and guided by the Holy Spirit. Since a Christian receives the Holy Spirit first of all during baptism and confirmation, hence Christian spirituality is always and necessarily connected with the sacraments and the Church. The call for new forms of spirituality should therefore involve not only living personal sacramental life in the space of one’s parish, but also taking responsibility for the local Church, and thus for the entire universal Church.

Odkrywanie na nowo chrześcijańskiej kultury i duchowości w płynnej rzeczywistości Europy

Abstrakt: Niniejszy artykuł wskazuje na trudną sytuację człowieka w XXI wieku i jego poważne zagubienie duchowe i aksjologiczne. Pandemia COVID w 2020 r., wojna na Ukrainie w 2022 r. oraz wysoka inflacja gospodarcza obnażyły brak stabilnych wartości etycznych i trwałych odniesień dla tej części świata. Z jednej strony wielu obywateli Unii Europejskiej żyje dziś w niepewności i strachu, ulegając demagogicznym hasłom, a z drugiej w Kościele katolickim pojawiły się silne prądy populistyczne i fundamentalistyczne. Wydaje się, że współczesna Europa potrzebuje nie tyle powrotu do nadmiernie zinstytucjonalizowanych form chrześcijaństwa, co poszukiwania nowych form i systemów, które trafniej wyrażałyby idee Jezusa z Nazaretu człowiekowi epoki Internetu. Ponowoczesność, ze swoimi formami pluralizacji, merkantylizacji i szybkich zmian, nie trzyma się już ani konwencjonalnego chrześcijańskiego obrazu Boga, ani wypływającej

³² Cf. Hanciles, *Migration and the Making*, 461.

z niego koncepcji człowieka czy natury. Dlatego jest to wielkie wyzwanie dla wszystkich teologów chrześcijańskich.

Słowa kluczowe: chrześcijaństwo, duchowość, kultura, płynna nowoczesność, Europa, postmodernizm

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