

Man And Redemption*

The subject of this study has been formulated widely as the author's aim is to present mutual relations between the work of Redemption and man and his entire activity, and thus not only to indicate the impact of Redemption on the existential situation and man's possibilities of action, but also to emphasize the role of man's activity and its conditioning both in the work of Redemption itself and in the way it is understood. Presenting the relationship between Redemption and concrete human life and activity, this study will also shed some light on the problem of the relationship between Redemption and culture. Culture is, in fact, inseparable from the life and activity of every human being. Every man, as Pope John Paul II reminded, lives a truly human life thanks to the culture in which he expresses himself and finds his objectivization¹.

Various factors influencing the way of understanding and presenting the mystery of Redemption and the multiple connections between the work of Redemption and human life and activity will be demonstrated here based on the *Redemptor hominis* encyclical. It is the fullest and most official expression of the teaching of Pope John Paul II so far and undoubtedly sets out, to some extent, the direction of the Church's thoughts and activities for the near future. First, we will show the main points of support for the way in which the relationship between man and Redemption is understood in the Pope's teaching, then the essential features characterizing the encyclical work of Redemption in relation to man, and finally the conclusions of the Pope's teaching for the contemporary way of teaching the main message of the Treaty on Redemption.

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¹ Cf. Speech of His Holiness Pope John Paul II during a visit to the office of the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), June 2, 1980, 7-8.

Foundations of Teaching of John Paul II

As points of reference for the Pope's arguments about man and Redemption, one must mention the sociological and pastoral analysis of the concrete situation of modern man as well as the abundant use of the inspired scriptures of Saint Paul and Saint John and the Conciliar Constitutions *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, not only in terms of the content of the doctrine of Redemption but also with regard to the form of its formulation. The Pope at the beginning of the encyclical recalls the historical situation in which today the Church performs its saving mission, while deeply analyzing the contemporary situation of the redeemed man after presenting the mystery of Redemption, by restoring man's proper dignity and meaning of life, and before indicating specific tasks of the Church towards redeemed humanity. The Pope demonstrates that contemporary man feels increasingly more threatened despite attempts to secure himself a happy future on earth. These attempts are manifested, according to the Holy Father, in the material progress achieved in particular by the development of technology and the formulation and adoption of various declarations of human rights. Meanwhile, counting only on the development of technology and striving for material progress itself gave birth to a consumer civilization, whose basic criterion of success was a continuous increase of material goods, and in which man felt threatened by the products of his own work, became a slave to the processes of production and consumption; in the case of which the motto "to have more" and not "to be more" has become leading idea of his life. Apart from focusing on the problem of the accumulation of material goods, it should be also emphasized that the natural environment of man is becoming increasingly more polluted and the disproportion between the areas of luxury and areas of poverty is increasingly more increasing. Confining oneself to counting merely on the human rights declarations enacted and approved by various countries is also no guarantee. In many countries, we only have the acceptance of the "letter" of these declarations and not the implementation of their "spirit." Different totalitarian systems in the name of such or other ideologies actually limit human rights, especially the rights of freedom and this also happening in the domain of religion.² Thus, modern attempts to build a happy future of man in purely mundane dimensions has led to new dangers: new forms of alienation and new forms of enslavement. Assessing the contemporary situation of humanity in the light of the Scriptures, the Holy Father states that the enormous

² Cf. Encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (RH) 15-17.

progress in the mastering of the world by man reveals at the same time a multiple “submission to vanity”. The world of a new era, of the achievements of science and technology is at the same time a world that “groans and sighs” because it still “eagerly awaits the appearance of the sons of God.”³ Hence, in the Pope’s teaching, there is a great need for the Church’s salvific mission in the modern world, the need to include people in Christ’s salvific work, show them the necessity of Redemption for the true liberation of man and for restoring the right meaning and dignity to his action and his culture.

The doctrine of man and the Redemption itself is developed by the Holy Father on the basis of biblical texts, especially those of St. Paul and John, and the Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council. He often refers to the Gospel of Love by Saint John in his Encyclical, especially by quoting the text that “God so loved the world that he gave it his Only-begotten Son...”⁴ and stating that the Word Incarnate is the cause of creation and that Redemption undertaken by Jesus on the cross is a prominent event in human history⁵. Even more often, the Letters of Saint Paul are quoted, including in deep and beautiful arguments about God’s love which constitutes legitimacy of human existence⁶ and about Redemption in cosmic dimensions, about bringing everything to unity in Christ⁷. It can be said that the very manner of writing about the Redemption of man using the very personal style of teaching, the depth of reflection and also the ardent heart, concrete, existential approach, addressing almost directly each individual is something completely different from the older, more formal, abstract and purely objective, almost essentialist teachings of the Magisterium of the Church; rather, it seems very similar in its nature to the letters of Saint John or Paul, or of the original apostolic writings in general⁸.

The Pope also often refers to the main ideas expressed in the statements formulated in the two Council Constitutions on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*⁹. He states that the Council has expressed in many places the Church’s concern for making human life on earth worthy of man in every

³ Cf. Rom 8. The Pope quotes the statements of Saint Paul’s Letter to Rom 8:19-22.

⁴ J 3:16. Cf. RH 1.8.10.22. Cf. also R. Rogowski, *Chrystus i człowiek. Refleksje nad teologiczną antropologią “Redemptor hominis”*, HD 48 (1979), 169.

⁵ Cf. J. Chmiel, *Biblijne podstawy encykliki Jana Pawła II w “Redemptor hominis”*, in: *Redemptor hominis. Text and commentary*, Kraków 1980, 73.

⁶ Cf., among others, RH 9. Cf. also R. Rogowski, art. cit., 170.

⁷ Cf. J. Chmiel, art. cit., 73.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 72.

⁹ The first Constitution is quoted by him 17 times and the second 16 times.

respect, to make it increasingly more human¹⁰. To justify this, the Pope quotes a significant statement from *Gaudium et Spes* that man is “the only creature on earth whose existence God wanted just for himself”¹¹. Following the teaching of the Council, the Pope also emphasizes repeatedly the idea of the communion of Christ with man. At the same time, he develops the meaning of the significant statement of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* that “the Son of God, through his Incarnation, has somehow united himself with every human being.”¹² He argues that Christ is somehow united with every human being without exception, even if man does not realize it. The Pope thus takes over and develops in his teaching about Redemption a method of presenting theological issues – developed at the Council – not as they appear in themselves, in their essence, but in terms of their salvific function, their meaning for every human being, their impact on human life and action, for all human culture.

Features that characterize the work of Redemption in relation to man

After a deeper analysis of the doctrine of man and Redemption presented in the *Redemptor Hominis* encyclical, we can probably say that Redemption, in the Pope’s view, is a work of divine and human love, inscribed in a concrete story and covering the whole of human existence. Very clearly and comprehensively, the Pope presents Redemption as a work of love. At the same time, he seems to combine in one harmonious synthesis the Eastern and Western concepts of Redemption, expressly disregarding a legal-social view of Redemption, which adopted its classic form in the Satisfaction theory of atonement of Anselm of Canterbury. He regards Redemption as God’s initiative, the result of which is granting man the priceless gift of forgiveness and divination and as a collaboration of man with God’s grace leading to full humanization, or as an action of a Father’s and forgiving love of God, which grants man anew the grace of divine filiation and as an expression of a living, sacrificial human love that gives him ultimate dignity and meaning to the whole of human life. The Pope emphasizes that the work of the Redemption is the expression and fruit of love

¹⁰ The Pope refers to GS 91.38. Cf. RH 13.

¹¹ GS 24. Cf. RH 13. Cf. also S. Grzybek, *Kerygmaticzne wartości encykliki Jana Pawła II “Redemptor hominis”*, in: *Redemptor hominis. Text and commentary*, 67; M. Jaworski, *Anthropology for God*, *ibid.*, 13; Rev. R. Rogowski, *art. cit.*, 170-171.

¹² GS 22. Cf. RH 13. Cf. also R. Rogowski, *art. cit.*, 172.

as an attitude and action that is something most appropriate for each person and that creates a real community bond between people. On the one hand, God's fatherly love is manifested here, striving to bestow man with the grace of being a child of God, and on the other human love that is the answer to God's love and which grants the whole life of man ultimate dignity and meaning¹³. Divine and human love has found a concrete personal expression in Christ, our Redeemer. It is by his very example that on the one hand, God's saving action towards all people was revealed in the most complete and effective way, and on the other, the highest ideal of the saved man. In this way, according to the Pope's arguments, the very mystery of Christ turns out to be the best justification and guarantor of human dignity, freedom and development.

The Pope then presents the mystery of Redemption as a historical work¹⁴. He presents the great drama of the Redemption of mankind, as a multi-dimensional work of the Father's love of God towards people, manifested and implemented over the centuries in the form of historical events. God's love for man was manifested immediately with the act of creation, by granting man the grace of being a child of God, yet it was then rejected by the breaking of the first covenant in paradise by Adam and further covenants known from Old Testament history and it was only recently accepted anew on behalf of humanity in the human heart of the Son of God, boundlessly subjected to the Will of the Father in the mystery of the Cross¹⁵. The whole work of the Redemption is a gradual realization of the divine plans for the salvation of mankind through the whole of history, from creation and the original fall to its renewal in Christ. It is the renewal of the act of creation, which was announced in the Old Testament and realized in Christ, the restoration of goodness originally attributed to him and violated by the disorder of sin, especially the restoration of the dignity of the image of God – which was depraved by sin – in man himself¹⁶. Overcoming the sinful state of man, his weakness and moral misery was accomplished through the Incarnation and

¹³ Cf., among others, W. Hryniewicz, *Obcować z głębią Odkupienia. Z rozważań nad soteriologią encykliki Redemptor hominis*, Znak 31 (1979), 1255; A. Zuberbier, *Pierwsza encyklika Jana Pawła II*, AK 94 (1980), 33.

¹⁴ Cf., among others, M. Jaworski, art. cit., 135; C. Niezgoda, *Refleksje nad "starym" i "nowym" w encyklice "Redemptor hominis"*, HD 49 (1980), 7.

¹⁵ Cf. RH 9. Cf. also W. Łydka, *Nauka o Odkupieniu w encyklice "Redemptor hominis"*, KFD 45 (1979), 283-284; Cz. Rychlicki, *Człowiek współczesny wobec tajemnicy Odkupienia*, in: *Redemptor hominis. Text and commentary*, 147-148; S. Włodarczyk, *Odkupiciel człowieka Jezus Chrystus ośrodkiem wszechświata i historii*, *ibid.*, 120-121.

¹⁶ Cf. RH 8. Cf. also W. Łydka, art. cit., 282-283; B. Sikorski, *Odkupienie jako nowe stworzenie*, in: *Redemptor hominis. Text and commentary*, 106-109.

sacrifice of the Son of God. The Holy Father reminds us that “Christ, the new Adam (...) fully reveals man to man himself,” reaffirms him and shows him his proper dignity¹⁷. Christ as the incarnate Son of God, living in a specific time and place, among particular nations and its culture and is the cause and origin of the salvation of every man, and at the same time an existential and personal model of the entire realization of a renewed humanity. At the same time, the Pope emphasizes not only the Incarnation and sacrifice of Christ crucified, but the entire life of Christ. Speaking of the unification of Christ with every human being through the Incarnation, following the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the Holy Father states that the Incarnated Son of God worked with human hands, he thought with the human mind, acted with human will, he loved with a human heart, born of the Virgin Mary, he truly became one of us, he was similar to us in all things except sin¹⁸. Christ’s whole life and every word appeals to many people, even non-believers. Not only the divinity – as the Pope writes – of Christ but also His humanity appeals to them, His faithfulness to the truth, His love for all, and finally His death on the cross, an amazing depth of suffering and devotion¹⁹.

Thus, the mystery of man’s Redemption finds its expression in the Pope’s teaching not in the form of a purely abstract truth, but as an event taking place through a particular story, especially through the concrete life and action of Jesus Christ; not only the Mystery of the Incarnation and the culminating events of the Passion and resurrection, but also the whole life of Christ, all his actions and words, behaviors and attitudes in various situations and conditions, have a salvific value for man, the value of the cause and pattern for the renewal of human life²⁰. The mystery of the Redemption is finally presented by the Pope as a work concerning all of humanity and all the dimensions of human existence. The Holy Father stresses very firmly that the Son of God – already through the Incarnation – is united in some way with every man without any exceptions²¹. Hence, every human being is covered by the mystery of Christ’s Redemption. Every man was from the beginning wanted by God for himself²².

¹⁷ Cf. RH 8.10. Cf. also M. Jaworski, art. cit., 131-134.

¹⁸ RH 8. Cf. GS 22.

¹⁹ Cf. RH 7.

²⁰ Cf. A. Nossol, *Chrystologia encykliki “Redemptor hominis”*, in: *Redemptor hominis. Text and commentary*, 97-103.

²¹ Cf. RH 13. Cf. also GS 22.

²² Cf. RH 13. Cf. also W. Łydka, art. cit., 288; S. Nowak, *Duchowość Odkupienia środkiem odnowy Kościoła według encykliki “Redemptor hominis”*, in: *Redemptor hominis. Text and commentary*, 167-168; A. Zuberbier, art. cit., 37.

Everyone is personally called by God by one's individual name, he is created as a picture of God and hence has been granted eternal dignity and inalienable rights. In the light of the mystery of the Redemption, therefore, there are no people or situations more or less important or privileged.

The Pope further explains that Redemption always concerns a concrete man, considered in his unique "existential" situation, in specific socio-historical conditions. Therefore, it is not about humanity in general, but about every individual, considered not in isolation from their socio-historical conditions, but in a concrete *hic et nunc*. Ultimately, the Holy Father finally emphasizes that Redemption concerns every person in their entirety, in his spiritual and physical structure, individual and social life, natural and supernatural plane, religious and secular activities, in temporality and in eternity. In this way, the Redemption of man is tantamount also to his authentic humanization. Thanks to Redemption, the gift of divinization, participation in God's life postulates a voluntary response of man, and enables this answer, making man able to effectively join the work of salvation, the work of restoring the highest dignity and full personal development to every human being. Considering both the possibility of becoming a child of God and enabling him to act freely and responsibly throughout life, we can define the salvation of man resulting from the Redemption as a "supernatural inner liberation, enabling man to undertake mature and responsible action in all areas of individual and social life, which is the space of human freedom."²³ The entire teaching of the Pope on Redemption prompts concern for full development and happiness, teaches respect for human dignity and freedom, justifies comprehensively the conviction of the special significance of human affairs and thus shows the deepest foundations of true and full humanism. The Pope also explicitly states that deep amazement over the value and dignity of man who in the mystery of Redemption has been reaffirmed and who has deserved such a powerful Redeemer, is called the Gospel and Christianity and constitutes the mission of the Church in the world²⁴.

The Holy Father is deeply concerned not only about the final deliverance and happiness of the redeemed man, but about all concrete human matters²⁵. He indicates the proper hierarchy of values, proclaiming the primacy of ethics over technology, the person over material things, spirit over matter. He emphasizes that man cannot give up himself or his place in the visible world, he

²³ Cf. J. Krucina, "Redemptor hominis" – inauguracyjna encyklika Jana Pawla II, ChS 12(1980)2, 18-20.

²⁴ Cf. RH 10. Cf. also S. Nowak, art. cit., 167; A. Zuberbier, art. cit., 33.

²⁵ Cf. RH 13.

cannot become a slave of things, economic relations, production or his own products; a materialist-oriented civilization imposes such a bondage upon man. He points out that the various instincts of interest, struggle and domination must be captured, directed and controlled by the deeper forces inherent in man, which constitute the true culture of nations. It is necessary to adopt, establish and deepen the sense of moral responsibility that must be undertaken by a human being²⁶. The Pope gives priority to what is spiritual and what in the life of humanity is expressed through religion and in turn through morality, affecting the whole of culture. He states that the deepest pursuit of the human spirit, which is expressed in searching for God and thus in seeking the full dimension of humanity, the full sense of human life, proceeds in one direction, though manifested in various ways²⁷. He also states that the basic task of the Catholic Church is to make human life more human, more worthy of human²⁸. The church is the guardian of the great treasure, which is humanity expressed in the eternal and creative anxiety of the spirit: in seeking truth, in need of good, in the hunger for freedom, in longing for beauty, the voice of conscience. Considering this treasure of humanity, deepened additionally by the grace of being sons in the Only-Begotten Son of God, the Church becomes able to serve man, that is to fulfill the task commissioned by Christ²⁹.

Conclusion

What conclusions of the Pope's doctrine are significant for our way of teaching the treaty on Redemption?

1) The lecture should include an analysis of the concrete existential situation of today's individual, our nation and all modern humanity. Awareness of the contemporary existential situation and contemporary conditions should be both a starting point in the considerations on the Redemption, their relevance and indispensability, as does political theology or liberation theology in their own way, and the basis which makes it possible that lectures on Redemption would demonstrate its significance for today's man and teach people effective concern for specific matters of existence of Others. When talking about the effects of Redemption, one should ask what is its significance today for human

²⁶ Cf. RH 16.

²⁷ Cf. RH 11.

²⁸ Cf. RH 13.

²⁹ Cf. RH 18.

existence, for example in the burning matter of human dignity and rights, or in the field of the Church's tasks in the world. Thus, both the starting point and effects of the Redemption should be presented in a concrete way, in relation to the current socio-historical situation, based on current experience.

2) All teaching on the Redemption should be based on biblical sources, obviously interpreted in light of the last Council and entire Christian Tradition. Referring – to a greater extent – to the content and statements presented in the Bible, may help to overcome the abstractness and the one-sidedness of traditional soteriological treatises, which consider Redemption only in terms of substitute compensation, the most perfect sacrifice and individualistic and ethical participation in the atonement and merits of Christ.

3) It is necessary to harmoniously combine – as the Pope does in his Encyclical – various aspects of the doctrine of the Redemption, often interpreted separately in earlier theological treatises. In the spirit of such a harmonious synthesis, it is necessary to demonstrate the relationship between the work of Redemption and the work of creation, between the Incarnation and the Passover of Christ, between man's Redemption and the Redemption of the whole world, between moral liberation from sin and social liberation from all forms of oppression, the concern for eternal salvation and for authentic humanism in earthy life.

4) Among many biblical categories that provide a closer view on the mystery of Redemption, it is especially important to present the category of love, not only in order to overcome the narrow, legal and social approach to Redemption in terms of satisfaction and merit, but above all because love is a preeminent category in the theory of Christian revelation, the attitude and action most appropriate for God and for every human being, and the source or bond of true and full communion between people and God.

5) One should teach about the Redemption using a concrete language, and not the abstract one. When analyzing the biblical texts it is necessary to explain that the revelation of the mystery of the Redemption took place gradually, within the framework of history, in the context of certain cultural categories, that people were redeemed from the situation of sin through concrete events, carried out by God throughout history, especially through life, death and resurrection of Christ.

The Christ who lived in a certain place and in a certain time carried out the Redemption by restoring the broken covenant of mankind with God, and today He allows us to enjoy the effects of the Redemption. Through meeting and uniting with Him in faith and love, confirmed and strengthened in the sacraments, each person regains the highest dignity and the possibility of full development. Thus, the teaching on Redemption using a concrete language

will be thus also tantamount to emphasizing the historical, Christocentric and personalist character of Redemption.

6) Finally, following the biblical approach, one should refrain from confining oneself to recognize the mystery of the Redemption in a purely objective and essentializing manner – which was common in earlier textbooks – from carrying out considerations about its essence in isolation from man and his situation, but instead one should try to recognize this mystery in terms of its role in human life and humanity, its significance for specific human history, its influence on human activity and human culture.