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TOWARDS A PASCHAL CHRISTIANOLOGY

The Christian faith, lived and experienced through the centuries can assume a variety of “incarnations”, “inculturations” and interpretations. In this paper, my attention will be directed to a systematic reflection on the very foundations of Christian life and spirituality. This kind of reflection may be called Christianology. I am convinced that the future belongs to a truly paschal vision of Christianity and its spirituality of transfiguration. Such spirituality must take the Christian message of the resurrection of Christ more seriously into account. What ultimately counts is not refusal, abnegation, suffering, destruction or death, but transfiguration, a new life, a new reality. What we need is a paschal Christianology based on the central truths of the Christian faith. Our Christianity should become a more paschal one. Are we able to discern the main features of such spirituality? How to understand its paschal sources, especially in relation to anthropology?

To answer these questions, we must first take a fresh look at the spiritual challenge of our times, and meditate on the destiny of the human existence. In this way, I hope, one can revive the vision of a Christian more sensitive to the light of the Resurrection. It is not possible to outline all possible aspects of a paschal Christianology in this paper. The choice is inevitable. In this sense, my presentation will have a subjective character depending on a personal theological sensitiveness, predilection and predisposition.

I. SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE OF OUR TIMES

Many people suffer today from a loss of meaning in their lives. They are unable to tolerate feelings of loneliness and inner emptiness. Human life deprived of a positive orientation, is exposed to the danger of discouragement, indifference, nihilism, cynicism and despair. The rhythm of our life undergoes a constant acceleration. We live in a world of rapid urbanization, industrialization and the contamination of our natural environment. The psychological resistance of people has diminished considerably. Success, efficacy and profit dominate everyday life. Metaphysical questions are discarded or simply forgotten.

It is not enough to heal the manifestations of the disease. One has to look for the roots of the illness itself. Some describe this as an overgrowth of mobility, a "kinetic utopia" understood as "being-towards-movement" (*Sein-zur-Bewegung*)¹ It is, in fact, the continuous pressure to increase the ability to surpass the existing achievements and possibilities. Mobility demands a continuously accelerated rhythm of movement. Paradoxically, this pressure of success produces only more tiredness of life, disenchantment with progress, hopelessness and the feeling of approaching catastrophe. What was meant to be a blessing often reveals itself as a malediction.

In this situation, there resounds an appeal for a new rhythm of life, for appeasement, self-limitation and reflection. The "disease" of activity and mobility requires a proper antidote, a new way of living, tranquillity, self-control and the ability to journey to the inner self. Some speak of the need for "euro-taoism" i.e. seeking medication in spirituality of the Far East²

Such an appeal serves to further convince that we, as a society, truly need a new form of global spirituality which would better serve the instinct of survival, and deepen the feeling of responsibility for the destiny of the world. The greatest enemy of such spirituality is a thoughtless inability to perceive the deeper level of existence. Trees wither away and die, if they are deprived of water and sunlight. Human beings also diminish, in a spiritual sense, when touched by the sickness of inner disintegration. How can we discover anew the depths of spiritual life? How can we revive in ourselves the sense of wonder at the very gift of existence?

¹ Cf. P. Sloterdijk. *Eurotaoism*. Frankfurt/M. 1989.

² Ibidem.

1. *Paschal spirituality needs mystical experience*

The face of the world is shaped more and more by the process of secularization and indifference. Many things seem to indicate that we hasten away from the spiritual zeal of the past generations of Christians. One has to begin to long for the light, when the darkness lasts for too long. The spiritual need for the light may then become stronger than the experience of God's absence. Louis Dupré compares, not without reason, the situation of contemporary people with the dark night of the mystics: "Women and men of our time, although so much lost in religious matters are not wrong when they discover a certain kinship with those, who seem to be the most away from them. For this reason they approach for illumination rather mystics than moralists and theologians"³

Contemporary interest in mysticism is one of the signs of our times. Mysticism may serve today as a useful hermeneutic key for understanding our spiritual situation and our tasks in regard to the future. It is able to meet human needs for the deeper meaning of life. It can also become a meeting place of different religions and traditions. Mysticism opens the way to the renewal of Christianity at the present time, as it faces challenging ideas and the growing cultural pluralism of the world. One cannot deny the role of mysticism in the ecumenical dialogue among the Christians, in the dialogue with non-Christian religions, with new currents of spirituality and with secular culture of today's society.

Nowadays, many people feel a strong need for serenity and inner peace. Some look to the specialized methods of the inner concentration, which originated in India, especially in Buddhism. They sometimes succeed in regaining an inner harmony due to a transforming meditation. In this respect the Orthodox Church may also offer its own spiritual wisdom. The tradition of *hesychasm* dates back to the time of the undivided Church of the first millennium. The word ἡσυχία refers specifically to an inner peace and calm. Hesychasm knows ascetical practices similar to those known in Asia. They help to purify the human mind and, above all, unite the intellect with the heart, taking into account the rhythm of the human body. "Direct your mind to your heart and then pray" – advised hesychasts. An exchange of spiritual experience is possible in a fruitful dialogue with other traditions. Christian *hesychasts* speak about their experience of the inner light coming from the transfigured humanity of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

³ L. Dupré. *The Deeper Life: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism* (1981); Polish transl.: *Głębsze życie*. Kraków 1994 p.17.

Mystics have their own experience of God and the world. They have often been treated with suspicion and mistrust. In our present situation we need their witness, perhaps more than ever before. Christian Churches undergo a serious crisis as they face, on one side, a growing secularization of modern society and, on the other, the new types of religiosity and spirituality inspired often by non-Christian traditions. Generally, people look for a direct religious experience. If they do not find enough openness and readiness to understand their religious needs, they begin to look for new sources of inspiration. Where there is no dialogue, the Church slowly loses her credibility and becomes more and more a marginalized community of believers. The future of the Church will depend more and more on a personal decision and orientation of life.

In the age of modernity or post-modernity Christians have a very delicate and difficult task to accomplish: to help people to overcome the wide-spread feeling of absurdity and nothingness, showing humbly their faith that human existence has its transcendental meaning. This can be done most convincingly, I think, through our witness to the resurrection of Christ. He has opened to the world a new space of existence without death and corruption. The risen Christ, therefore, stands between every human being and nothingness. We believe that He has overcome death, sin and Gehenna forever.

2. The paschal gift of the divine therapy

Paschal spirituality requires a deeper understanding of salvation. The patristic tradition of the Eastern Church can offer, in this respect, some valuable insights. Sin is considered in itself as a “sickness of the spirit” Jesus was praying on the Cross: “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing” (Lc 23:34). Not to know one’s own actions is a sign of sickness, a symptom of being blind or deaf. For this reason Jesus is shown in patristic writings as the “Divine Healer”, restoring health. One can conclude that a sinner is a sick human being not knowing the dangerous nature of his existential state. Salvation (in Greek: σωτηρία), therefore, is the elimination of the cause of corruption – the process of coming back to the ontological health of the spirit: “It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick” (Lc 5:31). In the New Testament, the adjective σῶς means “healthy” When Jesus declares: “your faith has saved you”, the expression is the equivalent of saying: “your faith has cured you” (cf. Mc 10:52; Lc 17:19; 18:42).

In this perspective, one can better understand the purpose of the Church and of her sacraments. The Church could be described as “a place to revive”, i.e. to become healthy again or to come back into existence. The images of medical

treatment and of different medicines often recur in the patristic writings. St. Ignatius of Antioch refers to the Eucharist as “the remedy of immortality”, φάρμακον ἀθανασίας⁴ In this context, the very notion of salvation has nothing juridical in it. Rather, it has an ontological character, and means a new way of existence, an inner resurrection. The risen Lord is present in the dark of our infernal solitude and isolation caused by our sins.

Sin separates and isolates. Salvation creates a bond of communion. St. Macarius the Great’s (died 300) parable illustrates prisoners whose backs are chained to one another in such a way that they can never see their faces. This is an antithesis of salvation, an imaginative description of the inner disaggregation of the human being, desperately in need of the divine therapy. Human faces turned towards one another are a symbol of mutual responsibility and communion. Sin poisons human relationships, whereas salvation restores encounter and communion, overcoming an egoistic concentration on one’s own “small eternities of pleasure”, not allowing other human faces to be seen. To recover sensitivity to the existence and to the needs of other human persons means, at the same time, to retrieve the grace of the inner personal resurrection. Within Christian tradition, there is a very courageous idea that the process of inner cure will continue also after death for many people, in the expectation of the *Parousia*. Salvation is the gift of the divine therapy, which restores our humanity to its original vocation, so that God could, in the end, be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

In this context, we can already see that paschal spirituality means above all a therapeutic process of gradual transfiguration and transformation of human existence. It is both a personal and ecclesial spirituality, able to integrate and to enlighten the whole human being, both spirit and body. The reality of sin has now assumed more subtle, diffused forms of inner disintegration. Very often it is present in a culpable feeling of boredom, of *acedia* or in the temptation of nothingness and despair. To moralize in this situation would do no good. One must simply give witness to a better quality of life, not through a doloristic asceticism, but by a spirituality of paschal dedication and confidence. The risen Christ can reach the depths of human despair, radiating with calm, love and beauty.

⁴ Ignatius of Antioch. *Epistula ad Ephesios* 20, 2. SCh 10, 76.

II. TOWARDS A CHRISTIANITY MORE SENSITIVE TO THE RESURRECTION

A long tradition of Christian wisdom closely associates the vision of human being with the mystery of Christ. He is the best Interpreter of human destiny. St. Irenaeus wrote in the second century: "The Lord has entrusted man, his own good (*suum hominem*), to the Holy Spirit"⁵ Human being is a paschal being. An unceasing Passover takes place in the very depth of one's humanity. This is a very rewarding approach to Christian spirituality as well, not sufficiently taken into the account in our thinking. A vision of such a *homo paschalis* will inspire also our short outline of a paschal Christianology.

Today, man needs a special defence. An Orthodox theologian spoke immediately after the Second World War about the "heresy of inhumanity" and about the "crime of the offended humanity" (*crimen laesae humanitatis*)⁶ This means that humanity is threatened by the "dehumanization" The bright side of its history is so often overshadowed by the darkness of crime, sin, annihilation, suffering and absurdity. Whosoever reflects on this issue sees a striking paradox of the two possibilities of human life.

1. *The paschal law of life*

Christ is the first *Homo Paschalis*. It is his love and dedication "to the end" (Jn 13:1) which attracts human freedom. A human being bears in itself an ontological call to break the barriers of his or her own inner self. It is a call to "pass over", to broaden the inner space of freedom and to overcome the meaninglessness of a self-centered existence. Egoism and self-centeredness destroy human life. A human freedom is fulfilled in love, dedication and self-transcendence. Our existence, therefore, has a paschal structure. Its authenticity depends on a paschal order of self-transcendence. The Passover of Christ reflects the fundamental law of human existence, which I would refer to as a paschal law of life, or a paschal order of existence. This has been fully revealed by Christ's death and resurrection: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). Christ Himself was that very grain of wheat.

⁵ Irenaeus of Lyon. *Adversus haereses* III, 17, 3. SCh 211, 336.

⁶ Archim. Kiprian (Kern). *Tema o čeloveke i sovremennost'* "Pravoslavnaja Mysl'" 6:1948 p. 128.

The human being is a dialogical, ecstatic and relational one. To be truly human implies openness and relationship. There is, within us, a wonderful ability to transcend the closeness of our nature, to exist with others and for others. For this reason, one can speak about an anthropological “Passover”, taking place within our own being.

The decisive factor in shaping our humanity is not only our attitude towards other people, but also our attitude toward truth and goodness. The joy of finding the light of truth has in itself something similar to the joy of Easter morning. The very choice of good and truth is, in fact, a paschal event. By every free decision to do good we enter the “sphere” of the acting power of the resurrection of Christ. Our human option becomes, so to speak, a threshold of the supernatural presence of the risen Christ – a kind of “personal Passover” Such is the natural and supernatural logic of the paschal option for the true values. Human freedom plays a decisive role in this process of self-transcendence.

The fundamental option for truth and goodness determines the genuineness and the quality of our human existence. This option concerns every human being, no matter who he or she is, or whether they believe in God. While serving truth and goodness, man attains a real participation in the grace of salvation, and becomes a friend of God. This happens through the saving power of goodness, whose primary source is God himself. Christ’s Passover becomes thus, through the mediation of goodness and truth, the Passover of a concrete man or woman.

The sacramental space of human existence is much broader than that determined by the seven Church sacraments. Dedication to the highest values of truth, good and beauty, becomes one of the forms of an authentic liturgy of life. Men and women are, in the depth of their decisions, a liturgical being. His or her life may become a paschal liturgy of doing the good and serving the truth. Even if they commit an evil act, they do not change their fundamental option for truth and good. What matters is their inner integrity. The genuineness of their existence may then remain unharmed.

According to the teaching of the II. Vatican Council, “by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man” This solidarity of Christ with every human being makes it possible that His Passover may also become a reality for all people:

For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery. (*Gaudium et spes*, 22)

Such is a salvific universalism of the paschal mystery of Christ. Whosoever does good becomes a participant of His Passover, even when he or she is not aware of this. The choice of truth and good in the depth of their being has a saving character. By its very nature, the good brings liberation and leads to the ultimate fulfilment of one's humanity. Moral goodness as an ethical value is the most universal sacrament of salvation. Whoever cares to establish a true communion among people, contributes, even without his or her knowledge, to the realization of the ultimate goal, which is the Kingdom of God. A prominent German theologian, Karl Rahner (died 1984) wrote at the end of his life:

Who therefore [...] receives his own existence, i.e. his humanity (and this is not so easy!) in silent patience or, better, in faith, hope and love [...] as a mystery [...], he says "yes" to Christ even if he does not know about it. [...] Who receives fully his humanity (oh, how ineffably difficult it is and remains not clear whether we really do it), he has received the Son of Man, because in Him God has accepted man⁷

In another publication, the same author has modified and broadened his statement in relation to all other people: "Who fully receives his human being (and, naturally, even more, the humanity of the other), he has accepted the Son of Man"⁸ Not only the acceptance of one's own humanity is important, but also of the humanity of the other people.

2. *Man is an epicletic being*

The category of the invocation of the Holy Spirit (in Greek: *ἐπίκλησις*) is well known in the Christian sacramentology, especially in the practice of the Eastern Christianity. I am inclined to broaden this notion and to apply it to anthropology, thus passing from the sacraments to human beings. There is one basic reason for this: Man is an epicletic being. He bears in his nature a hidden appeal for rescue, salvation and fulfilment. His very existence is a living invocation of God, or even more – this existence becomes a great *epiklesis* for God himself. The name of God is a synonym for invocation and, in this sense, an epicletic name. He is the Invoked One and, at the same time, the Invoking One.

The epicletic character of human nature is an expression of its relational openness, a sign of its responsiveness, and a symptom of unfulfilment and inner poverty. Our poverty is an unceasing call addressed to God. Man calls his

⁷ K. Rahner. *Zur Theologie der Menschwerdung*. In: i d e m. *Schriften zur Theologie*. Bd. 4. Einsiedeln–Zürich–Köln 1962 pp. 153-154.

⁸ K. Rahner. *Grundkurs des Glaubens. Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*. 6. Aufl. Freiburg im Br. 1977 pp. 225-226.

Creator, even unconsciously, by his very existence – be it a fallen and sinful one. There exists an ontological, voiceless and silent *epiklesis*, but nonetheless a real one. This invocation may be present in the form of a person's broken life, an experience of emptiness and meaninglessness, shattered hopes, or suffering and death. No one is able to unmistakably recognize the voice of this call. It is fully perceptible only to the Spirit of God, who penetrates the depths of the human heart.

A certain degree of incomprehensibility belongs to the very nature of human existence. This mysteriousness seems to many people so provocative, that they prefer to call it absurd. The ability to perceive this absurdity is already an indication that we can transcend and overcome this feeling. The absurdity present on the surface of our lives tells us, in its own way, about a mysterious call which arises from the very depths of our being.

The Christian experience of Easter is also an experience of the happiness because of man, and an experience of the joy of God's image restored by Christ. Without taking the connection between Easter and the iconic dimension of man into account, one can impoverish a very important spiritual source of Christian life. Man's iconicity restored by Christ constitutes the very mystical depth of paschal experience. Easter recalls the mystery of man's creation to the image and likeness of God. For this reason, it is not only the solemnity of Christ's death and resurrection, but the feast of pure joy and happiness because of man also. This joy cannot be taken away by the dark sides of life, which deform the true face of man. This paschal joy, a true *gaudium paschale*, has its foundation in the liberating power of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and is stronger than all human failures. This joy is a Christian answer to a human cry: "L'enfer c'est les autres", "Hell, it is the others" (J.-P. Sartre).

3. *Paschal Christianity and a contemporary mentality of success*

A mentality shaped by science and technology elevates effectiveness, profit and success to the rank of the ultimate criterion of life. Thus, effectiveness and usefulness becomes a sort of moral demand. Religious life has to prove that it is a useful lifestyle as well. People aim, therefore, at achieving something significant in their life. They want to fulfil their role in society, find recognition and self-realization. Achievements, successes, career, consumption and higher standards of life, simply become the most meaningful justification of human existence.

The meaning of life seen in these categories becomes a serious challenge to Christian spirituality. Higher values cease to count. Striving for success and all-present rivalry deprives people of their inner freedom and plunges them into

a net of dependences. Life may then become similar to a record-seeking sport, in which one success immediately demands another. Man is subject to the pressure of success, which slowly overpowers and alienates him. Success often justifies indecent means and an egoistic form of existence. Thus, we remain far from the paschal freedom of self-dedication to serve others and focus on the true values. The demand for success has become a contemporary form of “the curse of the law” (Ga 5:15).

Christian paschal consciousness reveals the insufficiencies and the limits of the mentality of success. What appears to be a failure can prove, in God’s eyes, to be the greatest achievement. The paschal mystery of Christ illustrates, in a very radical way, that the greatest victory may take place, so to speak, at the bottom of what is called failure and defeat. We simply do not know the criteria of the true achievements and of the real efficacy. These achievements are neither an ultimate justification of life, nor a decisive measure of the realization of our own humanity.

It is true that the Gospel requires from the disciples of Christ to develop the talents entrusted to them (cf. Mt 25:14-30). It does not deny human effort, ingeniousness and good actions. On the other hand, it warns against the tendency to regard those achievements as a measure of human and Christian fulfilment. It liberates from the pressure of success. Before God, no one can boast of his or her own justice. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector clearly states this (cf. Lc 18:9-14). Man is not justified through his merits, but through his faith and confidence in God’s mercy.

Not only does human life display its meaning when it is full of successes and achievements, but also when it seems to be of no greatness and outward splendour. The crucified Christ forever remains a living proof that salvation is a gift from God, “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rom 4:17). The meaning of life is God’s gift to be received in humility, responsibility and confidence. This gift precedes all of our achievements.

Neither a resigned pessimism nor a naive optimism can be reconciled with the inner logic of the Gospel. We believe in man’s dignity, in his iconic likeness to God. The main source of the tragic character of life continues to be a human freedom. Hope does not suppress suffering and tragic nature of life, but instead gives a new sense. The paschal wisdom is no expression of passiveness and dolorism. It urges to oppose evil and overcome suffering in all of their manifestations, although it knows also the limits of human efforts and possibilities. Christian optimism is based on confidence in God – the ultimate source of love, good and meaning. The paschal mystery of Christ is a mystery of love.

4. *Paschal nature of love: "ubi caritas et amor, ibi Pascha est"*

In the history of Christianity, there has been much mistrust and suspicion towards the human *eros*. A French Orthodox theologian, Olivier Clément, is right in saying that before being left to the traders of sexuality, the *eros* has been often profaned by Christianity itself.⁹ Christians were contaminated by stoic, Gnostic and Manichean views. The *eros* was rather negated than transfigured. Protecting the mystery of the human person and the institution of family, Christianity displayed a tendency to deny the nuptial mystery of the *eros* – restored, in fact, by Christ to its original beauty and nobleness.

Christian tradition knows the concept of a "chaste marriage" which could be traced back to the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325). That Council defended the dignity of Christian marriage and confirmed the possibility to ordain married men to the priesthood. In this context, "chastity" refers to the integration of the *eros* into a personal relationship. This integration has its own paschal implications. Human "I" has to transcend itself, to become relational, and thus to find one's own self anew in the relation to another human being. In a personal encounter with another, the human *eros* can experience an unusual energy, a profound transformation, which allows one to discover the very content of a true love. Love brings joy and celebration, enabling the process of common creativity. This kind of the so-called "ethics of the transfigured *eros*" was once put forward by some Russian philosophers and theologians (Boris Vysheslavtsev, Paul Evdokimov). It brings new and fresh insights to the contemporary debate about human sexuality.

When human *eros* is negated or profaned, it provokes revolt. This revolt is present today, to a full extent. In the encounter of man and woman (in erotic experience) secularized society is inclined to see, perhaps, the only mystical experience. For many young people, *eros* remains their last sacredness. At the same time, however, despite the existing traps of pornography, they long for tenderness, true friendship, faithfulness, and belonging. The Church has, in her message, to unite *eros* with tenderness and responsibility. The human *eros* manifests, in its depth, the breath of the Creator himself. Contemporary pornography distorts and violates this hidden quest for God at the very sources of human life. Our Christian task in this situation is not censorship. The world does not require new taboos, which could only raise protest and revolt. Instead,

⁹ O. Clément. *A propos de l'érotisme*. "Service Orthodoxe de Presse" (SOP) janvier 1976 No. 4 pp. 7-8; i d e m. *Rome autrement. Une réflexion orthodoxe sur la papauté*. Paris 1997 p. 124.

it needs creative Christians, and not those who lament over the evil of our civilization. Our task is to bring light and meaning, launching an appeal to replace the relation of possession by the relationship of reciprocity, mutual respect and communion. Otherwise, women will be reduced to the condition of an erotic object, and the human body will be treated solely as a mechanism to produce pleasure. This is a direct example of depersonalization, contrary to the whole logic of the paschal mystery of the human being.

Christianity of the future will have to discover, more creatively, the meaning of the human *eros*. It has yet to learn how to appreciate the personal and ennobling love between man and woman, the *eros* fully integrated into the encounter of the two persons, into tenderness and faithfulness. Every pleasure is by its nature ambivalent: it combines both joyful celebration and temptation to “instrumentalize” another human person. The pleasure, when isolated, risks the disaggregation of human beings, and possible addiction. Constantly facing innumerable human weaknesses in this respect, the Church must learn to act according to the ethos of mercy and compassion, specifically addressing those who “grope” their way through the passionate excitement of their youth. This is their blind quest of the Absolute.

Love belongs to the category of pre-original words of humanity, which are the most exposed to deformation and profanation. One of our tasks today is to deepen the understanding of this fundamental human experience. All true human love has a paschal and “resurrectional” nature. I would like to concentrate on its two constitutive paschal dimensions.

The first, kenotic dimension, finds its basic expression in the affirmation of another person. Denying one’s own self-sufficiency (*kenosis*), a human person finds the way to a new existence. Much courage is needed to leave oneself and to trust in another person. Whoever loves, exposes oneself to the risk of being hurt, misunderstood, affected by fault, suffering and death. Sacrifice and renunciation are, however, relational categories. Their value depends on the measure of love and concern. The paschal wisdom of Christianity teaches us how to pass over (a paschal event again!) from love directed by the desire of one’s own happiness (love as need) to love experienced as a gift to the others.

The second, “resurrectional” dimension of love demonstrates its own creative power: it is a resuscitating love. A disinterested and non-egoistic love, which may seem powerless and ineffective only to the cynics is, in fact, the most fascinating ideal of humankind. Its transforming and transfiguring power has no equal to itself. This intuition has found an incomparable expression in F. Dostoyevsky’s novel *Crime and punishment*, in which Sonia voluntarily

shares Raskolnikov's punishment – a seven-year sentence in Siberia. He suffered because of his wounded pride, though after having committed the crime of murdering an elderly woman, he did not feel any repentance. His crime, he thought, was only in the fact that he had broken down and acknowledged that he had committed the crime. He was ashamed of this weakness, and continuously tortured himself – he who believed himself to be a man to whom more was allowed than others. This kind of suffering cannot change a man's heart. The regeneration comes when he became aware of his love for Sonia. Until then, he had treated her quite roughly, with irritation and almost with aversion, although he knew what she had done for him. At the end of his novel, Dostoyevsky shows, in a masterly manner, the effects of resuscitating love – in a paschal context. [Everything happens in the time following Easter]. During Lent and Holy Week, Raskolnikov became ill. Within the second week, following Easter, Sonia too became ill. When she feels able to visit him again, everything has changed. Sonia has unexpectedly brought the grace of awakening and regeneration. The last pages of the novel are worthy of profound reflection: They show clearly the face of the man, resuscitated from inner death.

This spiritual resurrection is a true Passover, similar to “passing from one world to another” What the convict's punishment of hard labour had failed to do, what empty suffering could not change, has been brought about by the resuscitating love. Only love can overcome spiritual death. Dostoyevsky's pages, devoted to this truly paschal transformation, have no equal in the world of literature. They portray a very profound theology of an existential resurrection.

Human person is able to realize itself in love and outgoing concern. Love gives intensity and depth to human life. The loss of the ability to love leads to inner emptiness, disillusionment, fear, loneliness and feeling of meaninglessness. Whoever has no one to live for, feels that his or her own existence has become a barren, empty, unhappy and fruitless one. An inability to love is a sign of a slow degradation of one's own humanity. St. Augustine stated long ago: “*Pondus meum, amor meus*”, “My weight is my love”¹⁰ What a striking and profound expression! One could paraphrase it as follows: “*Pascha meum, amor meus*”, “My Passover is my love”

¹⁰ Augustine of Hippo. *Confessiones* 13, 10. PL 32, 849

III. TOWARD SPIRITUALITY ABLE TO HEAL AND TRANSFORM

Ours is not the world of lengthy, slow, or quiet processes of transformation. Instead, it is the world of fast changes, nervousness, noise, tension and conflict. In such a world, it is not easy to find a deeper dimension of life. We need, therefore, a new type of asceticism, able to restore inner calm, concentration and the ability to pray. It should be an asceticism of open eyes and of a compassionate heart – asceticism of sensitivity to other people and to the fate of nature.

Christian paschal spirituality teaches us how to disclose the hidden beauty of human nature and how to liberate it from an egoistic self-centeredness. This is a truly paschal wisdom. In the development of one's own personality, an important role is assigned by modern psychology to the ability of empathy. This ability allows man to become a sensitive, caring and compassionate being. A good relationship between people is impossible without empathy, understanding, friendship, benevolence and outgoing concern. Love, friendship and compassion are paschal gifts. Elder Zossima, a Russian monk in Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* speaks about the universal friendship:

Brothers, have no fear of men's sins. Love a man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth. Love God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. [...] Love children especially, for they too are sinless like the angels; they live to soften and purify our hearts and as it were to guide us. [...] Brothers, love is a teacher; but one must know how to acquire it, for it is hard to acquire, it is dearly bought, it is won slowly by long labour. For we must love not only occasionally, for a moment, but for ever¹¹

This passage seems to be a distant echo of other words, which derive from a mystic of the 7th century, St. Isaac the Syrian, whom Dostoyevsky once read in Russian translation:

I advise you this also, my brother: let the scale of mercy always be preponderant within you, until you perceive in yourself that mercy which God has for the world¹².

And what is a merciful heart? It is the heart's burning for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. From his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear or to see any injury or a light

¹¹ F. Dostoyevsky. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Transl. by C. Garnett. New York 1950 pp. 382-383.

¹² Isaac of Nineveh. *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Transl. by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery. Boston, Mass. 1984 p. 312 (= *Homily* 64).

sorrow in creation. For this reason he offers up tearful prayer continually for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God¹³

I would be inclined to describe spirituality as an inner culture of human freedom. From another point of view, it is a therapeutic process of the transformation of our humanity, an answer to the temptation of despair, indifference, cynicism and nihilism. Spiritual life is a constant effort of inner transfiguration. The struggle with human weakness and fault remains, at the same time, a struggle with one's own solitude and sickness of the spirit, which can negatively affect all inter-human relationships. The way of spiritual resurrection is a life-long paschal task.

Christians learn to understand God's drama not only in the history of humankind, but also in every individual life. God's love is humble and patient. He can wait infinitely long for a free answer of His own creature. God does not order. He invites us to a relationship of reciprocity. To leave the space of freedom, He limits His own omnipotence. In a sense, not ceasing to be all-powerful, He can become all-powerless. Once again, the biblical theme of Christ's *kenosis* is present here: God in Christ "emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave" (Phil 2:7). Here we see an unusual intuition, which evokes God not in a language of perfection and fullness, but preferring the category of emptiness. According to St. Clement of Alexandria, "the Saviour is polyphonic and acting in many ways": Πολύφωνός γε ὁ Σωτὴρ καὶ πολύτροπος εἰς ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίαν¹⁴. This extraordinary text deserves a profound meditation.

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

Paschal Christianology makes us more sensitive to the resurrection of Christ and, at the same time, to the spirituality of transfiguration and transformation. This spirituality requires an integral knowledge of the mind and of the heart,

¹³ *Ibidem* pp. 344-345 (Homily 71).

¹⁴ Clement of Alexandria. *Protreptikos* I, 8, 3. SCh 2, 62.

a heartfelt knowledge, which combines the demands of intellect with the wisdom of the heart. The world does not need the lament of Christians, but their inspiration, witness, creative efforts and new incarnations of the Gospel. There is no need to close our eyes to the infernal dimension of the world. It does exist! But the destinies of the *inferno*, which has grown up within human hearts, may be overcome by the compassion and liberating love of many.

God loves this world, in spite of the overwhelming amount of human faults and sins. Christ, “our Passover” (1 Cor 5:7), remains its Saviour and Healer forever. Salvation is the divine therapy of the world. God cures the sick freedom of His creatures. He will never stop doing this. The infernal abyss of the human heart can always become a place revisited by Christ. He is the Conqueror of hell and of all dark powers. It is never too late to call Him by His own name. An English historian and antiquarian William Camden (1551-1623) wrote centuries ago: “Betwixt the stirrup and the ground / Mercy I asked, mercy I found” Our Saviour is truly polyphonic! Christianity is a paschal religion of hope, confidence and encouragement, able to heal and transform human life.

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KU CHRYSTIANOLOGII PASCHALNEJ

Streszczenie

Pojęcie chrystianologii oznacza systematyczną refleksję nad samym sposobem bycia chrześcijaninem dzisiaj. Autor wyraża i uzasadnia w artykule swoje przekonanie, że przyszłość należy do prawdziwie paschalnej wizji chrześcijaństwa, do głębokiej i egzystencjalnie doniosłej duchowości przemienienia. W duchowości takiej centralne miejsce przynależy do prawdy o zmartwychwstaniu Chrystusa i Jego przemienionym człowieczeństwie. Tym, co ma wartość ostateczną nie jest cierpienie, abnegacja i śmierć, lecz przeobrażenie, przemiana, nowe życie i nowa rzeczywistość. Prawdziwie paschalna chrystianologia – oparta na centralnej prawdzie wiary chrześcijańskiej – nadaje przeżywaniu chrześcijaństwa pogodniejszą i bardziej optymistyczną tonację. Pozwala spojrzeć na niespokojne dzieje świata z większym zrozumieniem i życzliwością dla grzesznych ludzi. Zarysowuje wizję chrześcijanina bardziej wrażliwego na światło Zmartwychwstania.

Autor podejmuje refleksję nad tymi zagadnieniami na tle duchowego wyzwania naszych czasów: szybkiego rytmu przemian, utraty poczucia sensu życia, samotności i wewnętrznej pustki. Życie pozbawione pozytywnej orientacji narażone jest na zniechęcenie, obojętność, cynizm i rozpacz. Żyjemy w epoce przerostu mobilności, w której liczy się nade wszystko sukces, skuteczność i zysk. Nic dziwnego, że rozlegają się apele o uspokojenie rytmu życia i samoograniczenie. Społeczność ludzka potrzebuje nowej formy globalnej duchowości, która lepiej służyłaby instynktowi przetrwania oraz poczuciu odpowiedzialności za losy świata. Współczesne zainteresowania duchowością innych religii i doświadczeniem mistyków świadczą o tym, że potrzebujemy oświecenia i głębszego zrozumienia tajemnicy istnienia. Chrześcijanie jako świadkowie prawdy o zmartwychwstaniu Chrystusa mogą pomóc ludziom przewycięzać poczucie absurdu i nicości. Pascha Chrystusa jest sposobem boskiej terapii dla świata. Zbawienie ma charakter terapeutyczny. Wspólnota Kościoła powinna stawać się miejscem odrodzenia i przemiany człowieka.

Artykuł zarysowuje wizję chrześcijaństwa bardziej wrażliwego na prawdę o zmartwychwstaniu. Do głosu dochodzą przesłanki antropologiczne. Pascha Chrystusa wyznacza podstawowe prawo istnienia. Człowiek jest istotą dialogiczną, ekstatyczną, relacyjną i epikletyczną, czyli przyzywającą Bożego Ducha samym ubóstwem i niespełnieniem swojego życia. Epikletyczny charakter natury ludzkiej jest wyrazem jej otwartości na rzeczywistość transcendentną. Tym, co określa jakość ludzkiego istnienia jest podstawowa opcja za dobrem i prawdą. Ktokolwiek czyni dobro staje się uczestnikiem Paschy Chrystusa, sam nawet o tym nie wiedząc. Poprzez wolną decyzję czynienia dobra włączamy się w sferę zbawczej mocy zmartwychwstania Chrystusa. Dobro wskrzesza, ożywia i przemienia. Chrześcijańskie doświadczenie Wielkanocy jest wyrazem radości z człowieka i jego ikoniczności, odnowionej poprzez wyzwalający i przeobrażający trud Chrystusa. Chrystianologia paschalna jest wyzwaniem dla współczesnej mentalności sukcesu rozumianego jako najważniejsza wartość ludzkiego życia. Ukazuje ona wskrzeszający charakter miłości: „ubi caritas et amor, ibi Pascha est” Nawiązując do wypowiedzi francuskiego teologa prawosławnego, Oliviera Clémenta, autor stwierdza, że w pewnej mierze chrześcijaństwo przyczyniło się w ciągu swej historii do sprofanowania ludzkiego erosu. Można mieć nadzieję, że w przyszłości potrafi ono bardziej twórczo i mądrze podejść do tego trudnego zagadnienia akcentując rolę relacji wzajemności, cielesności, komunii osób i poszanowania godności każdej z nich.

Chrystianologia paschalna uczy, jak odkrywać ukryte piękno natury ludzkiej przez współodczuwanie, życzliwość, przyjaźń i wzajemną troskę. Głęboka duchowość człowieka wyraża się wewnętrzną kulturą wolności, zdolną oprzeć się pokusie zubożenia, rozpacz, cynizmu i nihilizmu. Droga duchowego zmartwychwstania jest zadaniem całego życia człowieka. Świat nie

potrzebuje lamentu chrześcijan, ale ich twórczej inspiracji. Chrześcijaństwo jest paschalną religią nadziei, ufności i zachęty, zdolną leczyć i przemieniać ludzkie życie.

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Słowa kluczowe: chrześcijaństwo, duchowość, mistyka, zmartwychwstanie, antropologia przemienienia.

Key words: Christianity, spirituality, mysticism, resurrection, anthropology of transfiguration.