

WACŁAW HRYNIEWICZ OMI  
Lublin

## RECONCILIATION AND ECCLESIOLOGY OF SISTER CHURCHES\*

Some would describe the present-day situation in mutual relationships of the Churches, especially in Eastern and Central Europe, as “the winter of ecumenism” Relations between Rome and the Orthodox are under stress. Well-known are the difficulties over the Uniates – the Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with Rome. Well-known are also the tensions caused by the activity of the Roman Catholic Church in Russia. The Orthodox feel vulnerable and see many signs of Catholic expansion at the expense of the Orthodox Church. The unfolding of events may give enough reason for pessimism.

The Balamand Statement (1993) of the Joint International Commission for theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church is, in this respect, a very serious attempt to mediate in this difficult situation<sup>1</sup> The document offers not only basic ecclesiological principles but also practical recommendations to be put into practice by the Churches concerned. It has received a generally favourable response from Orthodox and Catholic theologians in the West as a positive contribution to the theological dialogue between the two Sister Churches. Negative reactions from the Eastern Catholic side (esp. from Romania), from within canonical Orthodoxy (esp. in Greece) and from Old Calendarist Greek circles make the situation furthermore complex and delicate. There are many misinterpretations and distortions of the true significance of the work of the Joint Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> *Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion*. “Eastern Churches Journal” [= ECJ] 1:1993-94 no. 1, pp. 17-25.

Although reflections that follow are not devoted primarily to the Balamand document, they will respond at least to the main objection that has been made by its critics. I should like to reflect on the problem of reconciliation and forgiveness in the light of ecclesiology of Sister Churches, with special reference to the biblical idea of *kenosis* and compassion.

What worries today is the growing fear of the Other. There is often almost no willingness to know him, no attempt to understand. What we see is rather a radical tendency to reject the Other, and the otherness as such. That is why education in dialogue, in proxemics (a special branch of human sciences), in ability to forgive and to be reconciled are so important. Dialogue is a sign of an outgoing concern, a willingness to understand the Other, to respect him and to be mutually enriched. Who knows the Other better becomes less aggressive, able to respect him and to live in peace. There is a clear clash today between open and closed mentalities. A closed mentality tends to be xenophobic, harsh and intolerant. Only an open mentality is ready to acknowledge the right of the Other to exist and to remain different. Christians have their own reasons for openness in the Gospel of Christ.

### I. WHEN LOVE GROWS COLD

Thirty years ago, by the patriarchal *Tomos* of December 7, 1965, Patriarch Athenagoras I and the Holy Synod of Constantinople removed the anathemas of 1054 from the memory and from the midst of the Church. In the cathedral of Phanar the following words were read right at the beginning of the *Tomos*:

God is love (1 Jn 4:9); love is the God-given characteristic by which the disciples of Christ are recognized [...] If it should ever happen that love should grow cold and unity in Christ be broken, we must in all urgency lay constraining hands on this evil, and provide a remedy<sup>2</sup>

I recall these words as the most urgent imperative in the present situation of tension and conflict. It has happened that love of the disciples of Christ has grown cold. How to provide a remedy to this drama of the Church? How to overcome that evil? Patriarch Bartholomaios of Constantinople also spoke recently of the “labyrinth of the past frozen love” He did it in his message to Pope John Paul II from June 23, 1992, referring to the difficult problem of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Tomos Agapis. Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970)*. Rome–Istanbul 1971 no. 129, p. 290.

Eastern Catholic Churches<sup>3</sup> This “frozen love” is still unable to find the ways to correct what happened in the past. The memory of the negative experiences, the harsh words and mutual accusations are stronger than the call to reconciliation and forgiveness. Can the wounds of the past be overcome?

The above mentioned document of Balamand does not simply display a kind of retrospective ecumenism when it says: “Whatever the past may have been, it must be left to the mercy of God, and all the energies of the Churches should be directed so that the present and the future conform better to the will of Christ [...]” (par. 23). This is, no doubt, a prospective ecumenism in which the process of reconciliation and forgiveness has a very important role to play. Without a real will to pardon and to be reconciled, all efforts aiming at overcoming the present crisis are doomed to failure.

Ours is the time not to bar the door, but rather to “accept one another as Christ accepted us, to the glory of God” (Rm 15:17). In the context of our reflections the last words are crucial: “to the glory of God” Everything that foments division, contempt and hatred between the Churches can only profane the name of God himself, and in this way discredit the Christian faith as such. It is worth recalling here the words of the shocking “prophecy” of the Koran concerning Christians: “they neglected a portion of that where of they were reminded, so We [Allah] stirred up enmity and hatred among them to the day of Resurrection. And Allah will soon inform them of what they did”<sup>4</sup> The Muslim commentators have their own reasons in explaining these words. One of them writes: “The prophecy that there shall always be hatred and enmity between the various Christian peoples has proved true in all ages, and never more clearly than in our own day”<sup>5</sup> No matter how we Christians would comment on such statements, the sad fact remains that our rivalries and divisions compromise the credibility of Christianity. The need for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence may be greater than ever before.

## II. PRESENT DIFFICULTIES WITH THE EXPRESSION “SISTER CHURCHES”

In difficult times, when ecumenism is under stress, one has to retain a firm grip of essentials and, above all, to retain confidence in insights that have been

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<sup>3</sup> “L’Osservatore Romano” (Engl. ed.) 26:1992 (1 July), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Surah V,14. See *The Holy Qur’an*. Arabic text, English translation and commentary by Maulana Muhammad Ali (6th ed.). Chicago, Ill. 1973, p. 245.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, note 674.

won in the dialogue. This seems to be particularly important today, when the process of reconciliation of the Churches is threatened from the inside.

Some criticism of the Balamand Statement seem to challenge what has already been achieved in the last years of the dialogue between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. This concerns, above all, a sacramental understanding of the Church which unites both Christian traditions. Rediscovery of the ecclesiology of communion (*koinonia*) of Sister Churches which was predominant in the first millennium, revealed a fundamental agreement in all essential aspects of the sacramental structure of the Church (see documents of Munich, Bari and Uusi Valamo). Referring to the Pan-Orthodox Conferences and to the Second Vatican Council, the Balamand document states unambiguously that Catholics and Orthodox “discover each other once again as Sister Churches” (par. 12) and “recognize each other as Sister Churches” (par. 14). The very concept of Sister Churches contributed to a breakthrough in mutual relations already in the time of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras I (see *Tomos agapis*). In his address to the Orthodox Church in Poland, delivered on June 5, 1991 in Białystok, Pope John Paul II said:

Today we see more clearly and understand better the fact that our Churches are Sister Churches. To say “Sister Churches” is not just a polite phrase but rather a fundamental ecumenical category of ecclesiology. The mutual relations between all the Churches should be based on it<sup>6</sup>

The last sentence seems to open up new ecclesiological perspectives which still need to be explored and put into practice.

Now, this basic category of Sister Churches is being accused of theological and canonical unprecision. It is in fact, an ancient expression going back to the very origins of Christianity (cf. 2 J 13; 1 P 2:17; 5:9.13). No doubt, precise significance and concrete implications of this concept are yet to be determined in the dialogue. For some Orthodox critics of Balamand this term is ambiguous and incorrect and can only be used by one Orthodox Church in relation to another Orthodox Church sharing the same apostolic faith. From that point of view, the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church do not profess yet the same “apostolic faith”, as it is presupposed in the document of Balamand (par. 13); the fullness of apostolic faith has been preserved only in the Ortho-

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<sup>6</sup> *Address of John Paul II to the Orthodox in Poland*. ECJ 1:1993-94 no. 1, pp. 104-109, here pp. 106-107.

dox Church and it does not include the recognition of papal primacy and infallibility.

In this way we are sent back to serious issues related to ecclesiology. The Orthodox criticizing the Balamand Statement fear that union between the two Churches may be prematurely concluded without prior agreement on the doctrinal divergences which still separate them. For this reason they are reluctant to admit the mutual recognition of sacraments and apostolic succession. The recognition would mean adopting the position that the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, being Sister Churches, constitute together the true Church of Christ. In opinion of some critics, it would be tantamount to accepting a form of the branch theory, abandoning soteriological and ecclesiological exclusivity, and eventually admitting a possibility of *communicatio in sacris*. Once this happens, they fear, doctrinal differences would soon be treated simply as *theologoumena*.

This situation explains a growing skepticism of Orthodox about the real authority of the Joint Commission and the credibility of the last document. Some fear that the official adoption of the Balamand Statement in its present form could only polarize Orthodox supporters and opponents<sup>7</sup> The statement declares that the Eastern Catholic Churches "have the right to exist and to act" (par. 3). It tends to imply that the Orthodox Church recognizes the whole Catholic Church as a Sister Church, and indirectly recognizes as such also the Eastern Catholic Churches. The plain fact is, however, that many Orthodox are not prepared to accept such a recognition. This way, the whole process of reconciliation seems to be seriously threatened.

### III. THE WALLS OF SEPARATION DO NOT REACH TO HEAVEN

I hope I was fair and honest in this short presentation of the present state in Catholic-Orthodox relations. Personally, I believe that same essential or basic Christian faith exists in Orthodox and Catholic Churches. At the same time I realize that some Catholic and some Orthodox theologians would not be ready to share that conviction. To come to this awareness, one needs not only theological investigation but also a personal ecumenical experience of reconciliation. I have no difficulty in adopting the declaration of the Balamand document:

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. L. J. Patsavos. *An Orthodox Response to Balamand*. ECJ 1:1993-94 no. 3, pp. 22-29.

“What Christ has entrusted to this Church [...] cannot be considered the exclusive property of one of our Churches” (par. 13). There are serious controversial issues which still separate us, but they do not constitute a sufficient ground to exclude the other side from the sacramental reality of the Church which was the subject of the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue in the 1980s.

This conviction is supported by historical evidence. Long after the schism between the East and the West took place, some prominent hierarchs of the Eastern Church continued to express the basic understanding of ecclesiology which was characteristic of the first millennium of the Church's existence. In this understanding the Church is conceived as a *koinonia* of local Sister Churches. At the beginning of the 13th century Patriarch John X Camateros insisted in his letter to Pope Innocent III that „the Roman Church is the first among equal sisters of the same dignity (*próton [...] en adelphaís [...] homotímois*)”<sup>8</sup> As late as 19th century, metropolitan Platon Gorodetskij of Kiev († 1891) compared the Church universal to a large shrine having many chaples, i.e. Christian confessions, separated only in the lower part by walls of division. Those walls of separation do not reach to heaven; they do not exclude spiritual communication at a higher level so that everyone can have equal access to heaven<sup>9</sup> This imaginative comparison is very close to the logic of the ecclesiology of Sister Churches.

It would be historically inaccurate to assert that the expression “Sister Church” was never used in relation to a Church not being in total doctrinal agreement with the Orthodox Church. The concept did not cease to be used for the Western Church after the schism<sup>10</sup> Behind such usage one can discover some basic theological insights. The division in the Church has something tragic in it, especially when it causes mutual alienation, distrust, conflicts, hostility and hatred. But it remains somehow on a visible surface of church life, concerns primarily the canonical and institutional dimensions of Christian existence without reaching the inner ontological depths of the mystery of the Church. The divided Church still remains the only Church of the Risen Lord in the history of humanity. Any harm done to brotherly relations or even total breaking of them do not destroy the deepest nature of God's gift. They mean

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted by M. J u g i e. *Theologia dogmatica christianorum orientalium*. T 4. Parisiis 1931, p. 387

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 309.

<sup>10</sup> Further references in: Bishop Maximos Aghiorgousis. “Sister Churches”: *Ecclesiological Implications*. In: *Epistemonike parousia hestias theologon Chalkes*. Tomos G. Athens 1994, pp. 349-399.

a breaking of the visible bonds of communion between Christians. The Church remains one in its ontological dimension. Division affects its visible historic reality. Ontological unity of the Church can persist amidst divisions. Its divine core has never been broken. It remains a bright and shining reality even in an imperfect communion of the Churches, because it is a gift of the triune God. Human sins have no power to destroy a reality which comes from God himself and which He sustains unceasingly. Divisions obscure, impair and distort its visible form, they are not able, however, to destroy the already existing ontological unity. As God's gift, the unity of the Church is stronger than any divisions. The imperative to strive for a visible unity presupposes belief in the imperishable gift of unity coming from God himself. A constant challenge is also an awareness that more united Christianity would be more credible in the eyes of the world. In the course of human history we can only realize some distant anticipations, iconic realities of the future unity in God. The Church will always be on earth an initial and provisional reality in comparison with the eschatological Kingdom of God.

The Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit remain on both sides of each division in the Church. Doctrinal errors ascribed to the others do not prevent Christ to be present and to act in their Churches. God is no prisoner of doctrines and sacramental rites. Christ and his "sovereign Spirit" (*Pneuma hegemonikon*)<sup>11</sup> will never be at our command. Human errors and sins do not refrain Christ from communicating the gift of his presence. Scandalized scribes and pharisees could not stop him during his life on earth "to seek out and save what was lost" (Lc 19:10; cf. Mt 9:11-13; Mk 2:15-17). In christological perspective, the problem of reconciliation regains its true urgency.

Polish Orthodox theologian, the late Fr. Jerzy Klinger († 1976), often pointed out to an extra-discursive and non-intellectual character of our personal contact with the truth of Christ. In his study devoted to the problem of intercommunion he wrote:

Mais les membres de l'Église orthodoxe ont-ils toujours des conceptions adéquates? Que d'ignorance peut se cacher dans la conscience individuelle de tout homme! Et pourtant cela ne l'empêchera pas d'accéder aux sacrements, puisque l'Église supplée aux manques de conscience individuelle. Est-ce que l'Église, comprise en un sens large, ne peut suppléer aux manques de communautés entières [...]?<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Hippolyte of Rome. *Trad. apost.* 1. 2.

<sup>12</sup> J. Klinger *Le problème de l'intercommunion: point de vue d'un orthodoxe.* In: *Vers l'intercommunion.* Paris 1970, pp. 69-118, here pp. 92-93.

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

*Si nous honorons l'Ésprit Saint [...], l'épiclese eucharistique devrait nous faire sortir des limites étroites de la langue statique de notre liturgie, nous montrer la présence réelle du Christ là où il se trouve réellement [...] C'est alors qu'au feu de la présence réelle du Christ fondent toutes les excommunications entre les Églises, là où elles existent encore<sup>13</sup>*

Who knows the real limits of the true Church? Who can impose them on the salvific action of the glorified Christ to whom "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given" (Mt 28:18)? The presence of Christ overcomes our divisions and excommunications. The other Churches are truly our Church too. Would it be too risky to think that the division in the Church constitutes a difficult and painful pedagogy whose purpose is to protect the Church from an impoverishing uniformity? Is this not a kind of providential meaning of the schism? But the fact remains that the division, because of its negative consequences, is primarily a heresy of life, a lack of communication, contradicting Christ's commandment of love. Every Christian has to overcome separation first in himself. This is the first and indispensable step on the way towards reconciliation of the Churches.

#### IV RECONCILIATION AND THE ETHOS OF COMPASSION

Difficult ecumenical process of reconciliation and mutual forgiveness cannot be accomplished without an ethos of compassion. We are too severe in our judgements. We think too readily of differences in our understanding of the one faith. Of course, one should not underestimate the importance of doctrinal divergences and doctrinal dialogues. But far more difficult to handle are the centuries of living out of communion, very often marked by the spirit of intransigence, harshness and lack of compassion. Out of our controversies and disputes we have built institutionalized divisions and have acquiesced in those divisions. Throughout centuries our Churches have developed different ways

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<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, pp. 111, 114.

of justifying theologically the need for separation. The history of Christianity abounds in apologetic confessional tendencies of that kind. This approach, deprived of the sense of solidarity and compassion, has proved unable to discover the essential content of the faith in another Church. Thus we have accustomed to the consequences of our divisions. Today we are more and more aware that the ecumenism of the mind is not enough. We need also the ecumenism of the heart, and that is not possible without compassion.

To deepen this conviction, I should like to refer to the incomparable witness of a truly ecumenical figure who cut across all the ecclesiastical boundaries. He was humble and compassionate. He has been read in the East and today is more and more appreciated also in the West for his experiential wisdom. His name is St. Isaac the Syrian or Isaac of Niniveh from the 7th century. He speaks of two schools of life within us. The majority of people remain in "the school of justice" Only some are able to escape from it and to enter into "the school of compassion" The first one cultivates knowledge of justice, teaches to pass judgements upon people and to separate them from one another. Such a knowledge gives birth to contentiousness, anger, confusion and wilfulness. The school of compassion, on the contrary, teaches forgiveness and mercifulness towards all, discovers the greatness of God's gift, cultivates peace, humility, patience and love<sup>14</sup> Admirable gift of mercy and compassion is an icon of God's own mercy for all. Isaac's wisdom finds its best expression when he starts speaking about a merciful heart:

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 [...] From his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. [...] He even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God<sup>15</sup>

For Isaac, the goal of Christian life is an active and compassionate love: "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 world"<sup>16</sup> Mercy and humility give access to true understanding and wisdom.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Book of Grace* 6, 29.32 in: *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Translated by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery. Boston, Mass. 1984, p. 415. Some scholars (e.g. G. Bunge) are convinced that Isaac is a real author of the *Book of Grace*.

<sup>15</sup> *Homily* 71. In: *The Ascetical Homilies...*, pp. 344-345.

<sup>16</sup> *Homily* 64. *Ibidem*, p. 312.

We may be tempted today to dismiss such an attitude as an expression of sentimentalism. But let us be honest. The history shows abundantly what happens to us and our Churches when they are deprived of the ethos of compassion. In the famous poem *Parsiphal*, written by a medieval German poet Wolfram von Eschenbach there is a vision of spiritual crisis of our civilization, based on the legend of the Holy Graal. Mythical kingdom was struck by drought. The guardian of the mysterious Graal, king Amphortas, fell ill together with his people. All attempts to heal him failed. The whole region became a barren dry land. The suffering was inflicted on people and nature. Then an unknown knight, Parsiphal, came one day. When he met the king for the first time, he did not even notice his pain and suffering. This lack of sensitivity cost him a lot. For many years he was unable to find the Graal. Only when he came for the second time and showed compassion for the sick king, his trial had ended. Amphortas was cured of his illness, and Parsiphal had obtained the dignity of the king and guardian of the Holy Graal.

Certainly, a gesture of compassion does not create immediately a new civilization and a new relationship between the Churches, but it has a far-reaching consequences. It changes the whole pattern of behaviour. An old maxim says: when somebody advances towards God just one step, God will take ten steps forward to him. We have to dare, in compassion to one another, the first steps towards reconciliation and forgiveness. God may then amaze us with the speed of His grace.

## V IDENTITY, *KENOSIS* AND FORGIVENESS

Difficult pedagogy of the dialogue compels us to overcome the spirit of rivalry, competitiveness and confessional struggle. Ecumenical honesty is now at stake. Any strategy to weaken the other side arouses only defense reactions. Logic of victory and failure inherited from the past, should give place to logic of brotherhood and mutual responsibility, required by the very ethos of ecclesiology of Sister Churches. Ecumenism educates all of us to discover an open, fuller and wiser identity. We are still victims of historical conflicts, confessionalism, denominationalism, and some other forms of ecclesiastical competition. The confessional issue: "who am I" does not take into account christological component: "TO WHOM I belong" To remember who WE are, is not enough. One has to ask above all: "WHOSE are we?" Christian christology and soteriology teaches us that we belong to Christ, the Suffering Servant who "emptied himself (*heautòn ekénosen*) to assume the condition of

a slave” (Ph 2:7). In his *kenosis* “it was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18). *Kenosis*, *koinonia*, and reconciliation go inseparably together.

*Kenosis* means self-emptying. Christ’s identity, resulting from his equality with God, is contrary to rapacious possession of this dignity. He was able to renounce his own might and glory, and thus to acquire a new kenotic identity. *Kenosis* implies ability of self-denial: “I tell you, most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest” (J 12:24). The salvation and transfiguration of the world can be achieved at this price. What God dares is amazing. The purpose of the divine *kenosis* is not annihilation, but transfiguration. The figure of the kenotic Servant has an ecclesiological significance. Christ’s *kenosis* becomes an imperative for his Church.

A special duty of today’s theologians is to ask a question what their own Church can and should do, to renounce all what diminishes her credibility, ecumenical honesty and the possibility of reconciliation. Our Churches do not seem to be ready to change quickly and painlessly the established style in mutual relationships. The most difficult task is to convert the Churches to one another in compassion and forgiveness. For this a real breakthrough is needed, in biblical language called *kenosis* – a kenotic act of renouncing everything which does not serve the work of reconciliation.

To think this way may appear to some a sheer foolishness. But this is “God’s foolishness [...] wiser than human wisdom” (1 Cor 1:25). It has never been easy to imitate the ways of God. We need for that not only the true wisdom, but also courage, modesty, and compassion. Has our Christianity not become too doctrinarian?

Ecclesiology of Sister Churches obliges us to admit the lack of evangelical brotherhood and mercy in our mutual relations. The burden of historic faults and sad experiences of the past continue to live in our memory. The deep roots of distrust still make the process of reconciliation a very difficult ecumenical task. In the already mentioned Białystok address to the Orthodox, Pope John Paul II encouraged to admit humbly our guilt before God and ask for forgiveness:

Let us forgive each other in the spirit of mutual reconciliation for the wrongs we have done to each other in the past so that we may shape our new relations in a truly evangelical way and built a better future for our reconciled Churches.

This is again a prospective ecumenism that does not allow us to remain the prisoners of the past. The lessons of the past should not be forgotten, but all negative memories require healing. Only healed and purified memory is able to open up a new future and to give rise to better days. The question of forgiveness, the “will to pardon”, as the Balamand Statement puts it (par. 20), are in this context of utmost importance. An essential part of the process of reconciliation would be the acknowledgement of what other Christians have experienced at the hand of our church community. A compassionate appropriation of each other’s memories becomes thus indispensable.

Let me be more concrete. The memory of persecution is still much alive among the Eastern Catholics. They are convinced of a certain complicity of the Orthodox in abolishing the Eastern Catholic Church after the second world war (Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia). Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivsky complained recently about “the apparent unwillingness or inability of the Orthodox Church to acknowledge an even partial role in individual cases of suppression of Eastern Catholic Churches, conveniently placing all responsibility [...] on ‘certain civil authorities’” The documentation of recent years clearly implies, according to him, “more than passive acceptance of events by the Orthodox side”, but “the Orthodox seem incapable of dealing honestly with their own history”<sup>17</sup>

To this one can only add that the gift of forgiveness should be mutual. The history of uniatism did not begin in our century. The Catholic side has also to admit faults and injustices done during the long process of consolidating the *unio*, when “outside elements” and “extra-ecclesial interests” (Balamand, par. 8) played their role. One has to remember that resistance to Stalin’s decrees would have surely enlarged the ranks of Orthodox martyrs. Orthodox hierarchs of that time were aware that martyrdom would not have been limited to them personally, but would eventually endanger their faithful as well. This does not change the fact itself, that the forced reunions of Eastern Catholics with the Orthodox (1946-49) violated the principle of religious freedom. Mutual forgiveness is necessary to progress towards full reconciliation.

The question of guilt and responsibility is complex and dramatic. It is the duty of historians and theologians to investigate the past together, as objectively as possible, and to show the degree of responsibility of both sides for their mutual estrangement. We all need God’s mercy and forgiveness. For this reason alone one should show more understanding and compassion for the history of our Churches, so often marked by suffering of many people. Mutual forgiveness

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<sup>17</sup> *Cardinal Lubachivsky to Cardinal Cassidy*. ECJ 1:1993-94 no. 1, pp. 29-35, here p. 31.

could no doubt be fostered by joint respect towards the martyrs and confessors of the recent period of persecutions. "Their sufferings call us to unity" – says the Balamand Statement (par. 33).

## VI. RECONCILIATION OF PEOPLE – JOY OF GOD

There is no lasting reconciliation without forgiveness. Truly forgive can only those who have suffered injustice, who have become victims of human bad will, ignorance, weakness or indifference. Jesus himself gave us an example: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Lc 23:34). Such forgiveness is already an act of *kenosis*, compassion and reconciliation.

The time has come not to lock our confessional doors, but to welcome and accept one another. In Jesus' parable the merciful Father rushed out to welcome his own son who "was lost and is found" (Lc 15:24.32). We all share responsibility for severing the bonds of brotherhood and friendship between the Churches. Something essential has been lost for all of us and is to be found again through reconciliation and forgiveness. The elder son from the parable was a dutiful and righteous man. Sudden return of his younger brother has surprised him. He does not understand the joy of the father. How can one forget everything, forgive so easily, rejoice and celebrate!? His sense of justice has been hurt. The father rejoices, but not because of him. Maybe this is hurting the most? It will not be easy for the elder brother to stretch out his hand to the younger one. The reconciliation within family rests now on him. The parable does not say more about it. It concentrates on the attitude of the merciful father. In his joy of reconciliation he is like shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness and went after the missing one, and when he found it, he would rejoice together with his friends and neighbours (cf. Lc 15:4-7). So rejoices our God.

Admirable are those words in Luke's Gospel about the joy of God! The return of the lost son puts an end to the unrest, expectation and suffering of the father. It is a kind of liberation for him too, expressed in his call for joy and celebration: "we should celebrate and rejoice" (Lc 15:32). But the father's joy cannot be full as long as his two sons are not reconciled with each other. The lack of understanding and readiness on the part of his elder son makes the father suffer. He is urging for reconciliation, expecting it to happen some time. Only then love and joy would fill the house. Unwillingness to get reconciled postpones that moment indefinitely. Love always suffers when there is no understanding and reciprocity. Reconciliation of the brothers will bring joy and

liberation to the father. Thus the parable reveals the profound truth about God himself, about his expectation and joy. The drama of human history is his own drama. Reconciliation among people truly causes "rejoicing in heaven" (Lc 15:7).

Our Churches should give up their maximalistic claims. Lasting reconciliation cannot consist in the returning of one Church to the other. Reconciliation and reunion are possible only through an act of recognizing each other as a Sister Church within communion of the Churches. This communion (*koinonia*) should be based on the most fundamental formulations of the faith. An example in this respect is given by the early Christian symbols of faith, focused on the person of Jesus Christ and his revealing of the true face of God. Christ is the personal truth to all Christians, the truth shared by all the Churches. Each one of them should recognize the basic content of the faith in another Church. Unity in diversity is possible. It should be based on the most necessary truths: *in necessariis unitas* (cf. Ac 15:28), as indicated in the very idea of the "hierarchy of truths" (Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, par. 11). Reconciliation happens because of the *unum necessarium*.

## VII. WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT SAY TO THE CHURCHES TODAY?

The struggle for the soul of Europe is going on. If the New Europe is to be built on a lasting foundation, the Churches must make their contribution and bring in their spiritual values. Past experiences remind us that secular and materialist dimensions of European culture cannot provide such a foundation. The president of Commissions of the European Union, Jacques Delors, said in his address to representatives of the Churches (April 1992): "If we fail, in the next ten years, to give Europe a soul, a spirituality, a meaning, we will lose the game" Political decisions, laws and economic know-how are surely not enough. Collective materialism has been expelled from Eastern and Central Europe. Is it only to be replaced by an ideology of individualist materialism? To survive, our culture needs a deeper meaning, a truly ecumenical spirituality of the whole. It would be tragic if the Churches of Europe fail to help to lay that lasting foundation of a new Europe.

Ecumenical problem of the reconciliation of the Churches themselves appears today in all its acuteness. The 5th World Conference of the Faith and Order Commission (Santiago de Compostella, August 1993) said in its final message: "Only the Church which allows to be healed itself, can preach con-

vincingly the healing for the world”<sup>18</sup> Everyone has the right to quote the old saying: “Physician, heal yourself” (Lc 4:23).

Unity, concord, and peace are the gifts which the Risen Christ has entrusted to the Church “for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:2). Nobody is entitled to judge the world nor to condemn it. As St. Peter says in his letter: “The time has come for the judgement to begin at the household of God” (1 P 4:17). These words express both warning and hope. Are we ready to “listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Rev 2:7.11.17.29; 3:6.13.22)?

The Christ of the Apocalypse is begging and warning: “You say to yourself, ‘I am rich, I have made a fortune, and have everything I want’, never realising that you are wretchedly and pitiably poor, and blind and naked too” (Rev 3:17). These are the words addressed to the last of the seven Churches of Asia.

Number seven stands as the symbol of the Church universal. It means the whole, the fullness. Seven times is repeated the encouragement and the warning that should shake our consciences: “If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” This encouragement is directed by name to everyone. It is preceded each time by the divine criticism of the human church communities. We have to accept this criticism today with gratitude and the sense of responsibility.

## POJEDNANIE A EKLEZJOLOGIA KOŚCIOŁÓW SIOSTRZANYCH

### S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł jest tekstem referatu wygłoszonego przez autora na wspólnym (szóstym z kolei) posiedzeniu Rady Konferencji Episkopatów Europy (CCEE) i Konferencji Kościołów Europejskich (KEK), które odbyło się w dniach 11 do 14 maja 1995 r. w Asyżu; obradowano nad przygotowaniami do II Europejskiego Zgromadzenia Ekumenicznego pod hasłem „Pojednanie: Boży dar i źródło życia”

Autor szkicuje we wprowadzeniu aktualną sytuację eklezjalną, zwłaszcza w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej, jako pewnego rodzaju „zimę ekumenii” Odnosi się to przede wszystkim do napiętych stosunków pomiędzy Kościołem rzymskokatolickim a Kościołami prawosławnymi. W tej sytuacji Dokument z Balamand (1993) Wspólnej Komisji Międzynarodowej do spraw teologicznego dialogu rzymskokatolicko-prawosławnego może stanowić swoisty instrument intereklezjalnej i ekumenicznej mediacji. W świetle tego dokumentu autor podejmuje interesującą próbę ukazania

<sup>18</sup> *Für eine umfassendere Koinonia*. “Orientierung” 57:1993 no. 17, p. 178.

problemu eklezjalnego pojednania i przebaczenia z punktu widzenia eklezjologii Kościołów siostrzanych oraz z uwzględnieniem biblijnych idei kenozy i miłosierdzia.

Całość swoich refleksji ujmuje autor w siedem podstawowych punktów.

Trwały podział Kościoła Jezusa Chrystusa kończącego się tysiąclecia uświadamia nam, że znajdujemy się w „labiryncie przeszłej, oziębłej miłości” (patriarcha Bartholomaios), stąd też konieczność pojednania i pokojowej koegzystencji Kościołów staje się niejako nakazem chwili (I).

W obecnym czasie pełen nadziei proces pojednania obu Kościołów stanął pod dużym znakiem zapytania, pomimo odkrywania na nowo świadomości pierwotnej wspólnoty eklezjalnej „Kościołów siostrzanych” Do tego dochodzą jeszcze współczesne trudności, związane z funkcjonowaniem i interpretacją tej charakterystycznej kategorii eklezjologicznej (II).

Ontologia Kościołów siostrzanych zawiera w sobie żywą świadomość fundamentalnego przekonania, iż mury eklezjalnego podziału „nie sięgają nieba” (III). Opierając się właśnie na tej pierwotnej ontologii, można z nadzieją podejmować wysiłek pojednania międzykościelnego i pielęgnować etos miłosierdzia (IV).

Tego rodzaju swoista szkoła ekumenii uczy nas wszystkich, jak odkrywać bardziej otwartą i mądrzejszą tożsamość przynależności do Chrystusa, jak posługiwać się biblijnym „językiem kenozy i przebaczenia” (V). Bez przebaczenia nie ma trwałego pojednania; kiedy wszakże nastąpi pojednanie między ludźmi, wówczas i w niebie zapanuje więcej radości (VI).

Swoje rozważania autor zamyka swoistym „orędziem Ducha Świętego”, kierowanym do Kościołów w dobie obecnej.

*Streścił ks. Stanisław Józef Koza*