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## **THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE POLITICAL UPHEAVAL IN EASTERN CENTRAL EUROPE: A CHALLENGE FOR ECCLESIASTICAL ECUMENISM**

For all of us it is a fact that the year 1989 led to dramatic upheavals in the political, spiritual and intellectual landscape of Europe, indeed to an enormous transformation which could not have been predicted by anyone even shortly before it took place. The new element in this revolution was that it was not effected through political or military powers but through a spiritual and intellectual revival which simply withdrew the foundation from beneath the old power structures and made them collapse almost overnight. This process affected not only the states until then dominated by Marxist ideology: a worldwide phenomenon. It reaches beyond the political sphere, this being largely a consequence of its metapolitical origin and its political activation indeed has brought to light the political power of originally non-political factors<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger has not hesitated to interpret the „metapolitical” aspect of this upheaval in religious terms by drawing the analogy to the bringing down of the walls of Jericho: „This fabric of fulfilment and responsibility of giving and mission comes spontaneously to mind when one thinks of the political process of the most recent past in Europe though one should certainly not draw illegitimate parallels between the biblical tale of man’s salvation and events of our present time and one should not endow them with sacral connotation. That walls should collapse in face of prayers has appeared to us enlightened ones highly incredible. But now we have experienced not just this, it is true, but at least a somewhat similar phenomenon: „The ideological wall which divided not only Europe but everywhere invisibly partitioned the whole world no longer exists as it did. And it was not brought down by the force of arms nor, of course, simply through prayers but through a flight of spirit and mind, through demonstrating processions for freedom, which finally turned out to be stronger than barbed wire and concrete. Spirit and mind have demonstrated their power; the trumpet blast of liberty was stronger than the wall which was

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Wendezeit für Europa. Diagnosen und Prognosen zur Lage von Kirche und Welt (Time of Change in Europe [Diagnoses and Prognoses concerning the situation of the Church and the World])*, Freiburg 1991, p. 59.

meant to curtail this liberty. And even though we should not be overeager to detect the hand of God in these things it remains true that belief in Him or at least the quest for Him played no small part in modulating these liberating trumpet blasts"<sup>2</sup> The direct contribution of the church to the radical change in Eastern Central Europe so made becomes particularly clear by the tremendous support given the „Solidarity movement” (Solidarność) in Poland. In our country the Catholic Church became the „refuge of freedom” for intellectuals during the period of ideological oppression: authors, artists and creators of national culture. People of different persuasions found a place in the Church, even those from the ranks of the left who were not tolerated by the Party. A similar role was played by the Protestant Church in the former GDR in the previously mentioned flight of the spirit and the aspiration for liberty displayed by the bold and later by the masses too.

This fact therefore entitles us to refer to the consequences of the political upheaval as a „challenge for ecclesiastical ecumenism” — of course, not all „consequences” can be touched on. I wish to draw attention merely to three important essential ones, since they indeed can only be overcome and mastered ecumenically, that is by Christian Churches in Central Eastern Europe. Above all it is a matter of the final conquest of the „homo sovieticus” in ourselves (I), the overcoming of problems of nationalism (II) and the curbing of the ideological fragmentation of our continent by contributing to the unification of Europe through a new evangelisation (III).

#### OVERCOMING OF THE „HOMO SOVIETICUS”: A PASTORAL TASK FOR THE CHURCHES

1. Only since the above mentioned upheaval it has become clear that one particular, not quite evident phenomenon must be tackled with concentration and consistently since it represents an extremely dangerous threat for the re-organization of social life in all countries within the domain of the „factually existing socialism” or communism of the part. Though this inhuman system displayed in its details different ideological and political structures and was realised in practice in diverging ways its ultimate goal was nevertheless the achievement at any cost whatsoever of the total „sovietization” of the individual. Prominent dissidents like Alexander Solschenizyn, Andrej Sacharow and Tatiana Goritschewa often drew attention to this dangerous process in their numerous publications; they did so by posing indirectly the question of the „homo sovieticus”, one of the most important components of the communist society envisaged in its final state. The concept of the „homo sovieticus” is not new. One can find it in publications of the ideologist of revolution Georgij Sinowjew, who with Lenin was one of the top leaders of the Bolsheviks between 1919 and 1927 head of the

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 105f.

Third Communist International. At that time this term had „positive” meaning: Sinowjew intended to describe a human being who was to renounce his relations to his own individuality, family and church and who was required to profess with complete conviction his allegiance to a new state party and to the soviet collective. A self — confident, communist human being was to arise who knew only one form of morality: to serve the interests of the class warfare of the proletariat and of the pierestrojka (reconstruction) pieriekowka (reforging). The aim was to „reforge” the Russian citizen by way of a Marxist-Leninist and atheistic education. The „homo sovieticus” was considered the ultimate of all utopias<sup>3</sup>

2. This human being is regarded above all as a completely „one dimensional entity”, for whom the vertical dimension is illusion and not even permitted to exist since the essential element of our existence is present on this earth anyway. We have here a being completely ensnared by terror. The notion of the existence of a heaven was regarded not only as an error but rather as a betrayal of the interests of the proletariat. Moreover this was a creature full of needs: the need to satisfy all other needs. In harmony with the doctrine expounded by the classic proponents of communism the „homo sovieticus” was permitted no „soul” That meant in the first place that he was basically a „lump of matter” more specifically a „form of matter” continuously rendered human by means of his labour. It also meant this and proved to be essential — that his total inner life was finally reduced to the functioning of his „consciousness which was determined by his being” This short formula is a warranty for immeasurable depth. His thoughts determined by his being, liberty determined through his being, activity determined through his being [...]. The vital values prove in this case to be the strongest values. They also carry the day finally. It is through these very values that the deepest truth about human existence is expressed. To sell one’s freedom for bread means to retain one’s own person<sup>4</sup>, which was not to experience any genuine solidarity in its falseness, envy and aversion to repentance. In short: we are confronted here with a deep inner transformation of the human being by way of a far reaching dehumanisation of his being. This ideological orientation of „Sovietisation” is particularly fatal and should not, therefore, be equated with the predominantly political and much less harmful phenomenon of Russification on the lines of Germanisation or Polishisation. The goal was namely an all encompassing fiction of the human being, his transformation. That is: into a mere thing. In this connection the „Communist conception of

<sup>3</sup> M. Heller, *Maszyna i wintikik. Istoria formiowania sowjetskiego czelowieka* [The machine and the screws. History of the formation of the Soviet human being], London 1985, p. 10; cf. also the doctrine of the VIIIth party conference of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks 1919 (*Ateistyczne wospitalnije w wysszej szkole*, Moscow 1953, p.5).

<sup>4</sup> J. Tischner, *Homo sovieticus*, „Tygodnik Powszechny” 44:1990 No. 25 p. 1; cf. also A. Nossol, *The upheaval in Eastern Europe as a Challenge for the Church*, [in:] A. Rauscher (ed.), *The Social Responsibility of the Church*, Donauwörth 1992, p. 195; M. Mommsen, *Nationalism in Europe*, Munich 1992, p. 61 f.

the human being" was decisive, the ideological image of the human being, and not the concrete, personalised and historical human being. Hence the collective played the most important role, not the individual, who in the light of religious belief is to be considered a creature. The conclusion drawn from this was that existence was overwhelmingly passive and schematic involving a levelling of all without taking account of the personal dignity of the individual. Instead of giving prior place to the highest spiritual values and humanistic ideas emphasis was laid on a form of Utopian ideological eschatology, orientated towards an earthly „paradise"

3. In this connection one can agree wholeheartedly with Bishop Karl Lehmann who speaks of „deeply wounded souls" and of „suspicion and fears" which are still elements influencing the attitude to life of many human beings in the East. It is true „The church is for this very reason a predicament because it is only now that is beginning to experience intensively the long term effects of the totalitarian system in the hearts and minds of men and women. We are sometimes at risk restricting many phenomena to the unsuccessful economic policy of the eastern model society. But behind that inability to bring about technical and cultural innovations there suddenly appeared a false picture of man. Basic dimensions of human existence were faded out: his longing for freedom, his demand for truthfulness, creative development, freedom of movement. The miracle of the liberation consists in the end in the fact that man — as an individual or in society — has prevailed with his hopes and desires against a system which seemed absolutely perfect and unconquerable. But much seems to be infected and unhealthy even in those who had resisted the pressure. When people have for decades been held on a short leash, it is difficult all of a sudden to produce creativity and phantasy. To those who could never chose between different possibilities the duty of making decisions is at first an ordeal"<sup>5</sup> Until we have overcome the after-effects and repercussions of „homo sovieticus" „in ourselves", it will hardly be possible for the „homo oeconomicus" to master the new situation. Purely economic and social efforts are by no means sufficient to remedy this situation. An integrated and person orientated mission is urgently needed and this can only be undertaken, so to speak, „in the manner of the gospels" or — in other words — ecumenically.

#### THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF SOLVING PROBLEMS OF NATIONALISM

1. A genuine and at the same time enormously complex crisis in the field of national identities was engendered by the upheaval which took place in the whole of Eastern Central Europe. It is of fundamental importance here to point out that the communist goal of creating a thoroughly integrated

<sup>5</sup> K. L e h m a n n, *Neo-Evangelisation in East and West*, „The Political Opinion" 37:1992 No. 267 p. 59.

socialist dominion by first drawing nations together and then fusing them into a unity completely undermined within the space of a few decades only. The conception of an evolving integration of nations and peoples has become completely discredited even in the former Soviet Union. Admittedly, the strategy of socialist internationalism was intended to establish an international relation of a new type involving a disolution of the bourgoise conception of the sovereignty of national states. In the socialist view international and national interests were capable of harmonization. In cases of conflict priority would have been given to common international interests. Along these lines the communists united beneath the banner of proletarian internationalism had the aim of educating peoples and nations to live within a new multi-national community guided by a uniform set of socialist values. In such a society all national divergencies would have been completely effaced. However, in actual fact events took a different course. From decade to decade a strengthened national consciousness evolved and the aspirations of proletarian and international became the object of ever severer criticism.

2. The fact that after the demise of communism in Eastern Europe nationalistic demands and slogans have become so popular can only be understood against this background in Eastern Europe. Nationalism so to speak promised liberty in place of the oppressive, integrative social order set up beneath the banner of socialist internationalism. Forms of national renaissance also manifest themselves here as a defence of national cultures against decades of totalitarian „Russian civilization” In this way the formation of national states in Eastern Europe has been gaining increasing importance and the movement has also assumed extreme forms so that the danger of violent and bloody national conflicts exists in some places or has even become a reality as is the case in the former state of Yugoslavia. A peaceful and democratic future in this area therefore can certainly not be realized in a national state but only in a state of nationalities. „The era of peaceful coexistence and mingling of nationalities in the multinational states of ancient history holds out new attractions. The East is becoming aware of its integration in European history. It sees itself as part of a comprehensive cultural area hitherto in opposition to each other. Models for future interrelationships between East and West must be sought in a spirit of exchange not as hitherto in one of antagonisms”<sup>6</sup>

3. It is above all the Christian churches which must make a decisive contribution to this process and they must do so in a spirit of conscious ecumenism. To do so they simply have to procede in accordance with the supreme „International” which teaches that all of us are God’s children through our faith for „there are no longer Jews and Greeks, slaves and free people, men and women; for ye are all ‘one’ in Jesus Christ” (Gal,3,28). From the most authentic Christian point of view therefore, a mythologizing of the national-

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<sup>6</sup> E. R a t z, *The Political Opening in the East as Challenge for the Church*, [in:] *The Lutheran Church in the World*, Bd. 38, Erlangen 1991, p. 82 f; cf. J. R a t z i n g e r, p. 87 ff.

ist sentiment or its degeneration into chauvinism is precluded. In accordance with the gospels, then, we Christians should always cooperate in changing the national, and occasionally nationalistic character of the churches<sup>7</sup> Together we must courageously and premonitorily advocate the following conviction: „The many nations — also those which are now re-emerging — must not revert to the old error of following only their own interests. The nation is not the highest value of a community. Nations, however, must not for this reason disappear. On the contrary: they are still living cultural and spiritual entities which are a manifestation of the spiritual wealth of Europe. Europe places itself in jeopardy if it comes to resemble an artificial, centralistic, administrative state. No European should lose the home of his whose roots reach far back into the past. Nations always had their right to a home within the church but nations are not the ultimate goal of evolutionary development. It was primarily the catholicity of the church as a whole which saved the churches in individual countries from being forced into line and from being absorbed by national regimes. It was above all allegiance to Peter's successor which has again and again proved an effective antidote to the endeavours of states to bring the churches into line. The individual churches in the various countries of Europe with respect both to their internal and external relationships must learn from each other and try to weaken or avert movements in the direction of fragmentation or domination which are always observable in the multifariousness large of communities. This means of course that relationships between the churches themselves and between them and the centre in Rome must function in such a way that each church is permitted the influence due to it and taken seriously in the greater community. The European synode in November/December 1991 was the first great opportunity for efforts in this direction”<sup>8</sup>

#### RE-EVANGELISATION AS A CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCHES TO A UNIFIED EUROPE

1. It is a cause of astonishment that leading Protestant theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann should suspect that a „renewed Catholicisation of Europe” is our covert aim when we talk of the absolute necessity of „re-evangelizing” our continent. This in my opinion is certainly not a conclusion which can be legitimately be drawn from the declaration made at the conclusion of the special assembly of the bishops' synode for Europe. On the

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<sup>7</sup> M. Hoeffel, *The European Challenge*, [in:] *The Lutheran Church in the World*, No. 38, Erlangen 1991, p. 153; Cf. J. Siklova, *Nationalism in the East and Central Europe as a Substitution for the loss of Values of Secondary Social Status*, [in:] *Change in Eastern Europe*, Vienna 1992, p. 125—132; K. Hübner, *The National Element*, Vienna 1991.

<sup>8</sup> K. Lehmann, p. 64f; cf. R. Spaemann, *Universalism or Euro-Centrism*, [in:] P. Braittling et al. (eds.), *Universalism, Nationalism and the new Unity of the Germans, Philosophers and Politics*, Frankfurt/M. 1991, p. 81—90.

contrary this document explicitly states the following: „We are aware of the immense challenge of the present hour, but see also its great opportunities, and we wish to make our contribution to the building of a new Europe in cordial cooperation with our brothers and sisters in Europe and in the rest of the world”<sup>9</sup> However, the theologian of Tübingen is right when he says: „Because European history is a past full of conflicts and schisms, Europe presents itself today in a great variety of different traditions. Europe has, it is true, pasts in the plural but it has a future only in the singular. The future exists only in the community, and only in the community can Europe become the subject of its own history” But how can people who because of so many breaks in tradition live in so many different times, how can such people come to discover the community of a single present? Only through synchronisation of the different European pasts. Europe has hitherto solved its conflicts through schisms. In this way the separate developments of its Orthodox, the Catholic and the Protestant churches and cultures came into being. „The road into the future can only proceed in the reverse direction: by way of ecumenical cooperation between Protestants and Catholics; and through ecumenical cooperation between Western and Eastern churches. No evolution, however, can be reversed, neither the Protestant nor the Catholic nor the Orthodox forms. The churches can only maintain their substance in a new Europe in a spirit of mutual recognition. Europe needs a re-deployment of Christianity. The task of the churches in modern Europe must be ecumenical; failing this a new struggle between the confession will produce secularisation and atheism as 300 years ago” Something else must be clearly emphasized by the churches after the revolution: „This is not the hour of triumph over ‘godless communism’ this is the hour of escape from our own confessional narrowness. This is the hour of Christian and religious ecumenism in a new Europe; failing this, the churches will become relicts of an outdated past. We do not need, therefore, a one-sided „neo-evangelisation” of Europe<sup>10</sup>

2. It is in this direction that the afore-mentioned creative ideas of Bishop Lehmann on a „neo-evangelisation” of Europe point. They appear to me extremely appropriate in so far as they were published within the framework of the monthly journal „The Political Opinion” [Die politische Meinung]. Here he states unambiguously: „The Catholic church will contribute to this process its long experience in history, its heritage of a long European history and its universal structure. This is its strenght, which, however, has yet to prove its worth. There is no point in being suspicious about this potential strength. Nobody is interested in restoring uniformity. But Christianity can only really represent a public and socially relevant force in future Europe if it can overcome the schisms within itself and contribute in convincing way

<sup>9</sup> Quoted after: J. S c h w a r z, *Upheaval in Europe. Challenge, Chance and Objectives of the Church*, [in:] *Church and Society*, Cologne 1992, No. 190 p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> J. M o l t m a n n, *Christianity and Europe*, [in:] M. H a e r d t e r, et al. (eds), *Facets of the Alien Element — Europe between Nationalism and Integration*, Berlin 1992, p. 199f.

the basic common Christian values a dialogue within a country and between the European countries. The deterioration of ecumenical relations in many countries of the East, relations which were better and more fertile at the time of common persecution, is one of the saddest side-effects of the revolution and needs correcting at its earliest possible time and with the greatest of efforts. There is sufficient utilizable experience in the field of ecumenism and there are many common ties to make it possible for the churches. To come closer together at least in the central matters of faith and ethics. But they must not remain bogged down at the stage of mere fruitless coexistence as, more still, adopt mutually hostile attitudes, phenomena which are today often discernible in the relations between Roman Catholics, members of the Orthodox churches and Protestants and indeed even between various movements and national groups within the Church of Rome itself. It is particularly in this domain that the churches of the West and the Holy See bear great responsibility. This point has been frequently emphasized by the Holy Father during his visits"<sup>11</sup> Incidentally the Bishop of Rome is always at pains to emphasize that it is imperative for the church in Europe to make full use of both its lungs, which means that both western and eastern traditions are called upon to play their part in the process of renewal. „This he places in the same niche as St. Benedict of Nursia who is the „patron saint of Europe” and the „patriarch of the West”, St. Cyril and Methodius, the „Greek brothers” and apostles of the Slavs” The two latter saints carried the gospel to the East utilizing Eastern languages, and through taking account of customs and ethnic differences. Even today this can still — be considered the system of common European roots. Here, in addition, lies one of several reasons why Christianity never allowed itself to be completely suppressed during long periods of totalitarian dictatorship"<sup>12</sup> From a theological point of view a precise ecumenical postulate should be formulated requiring that all our churches belonging to the great triangle of christianity should acquire much more Catholic breadth, Protestant depth and Orthodox dynamics in the pneumatological sense.

3. For the future there is still another pastoral task of the church in the period following the revolution which is essential to mention here. This is the vigorous propagation of truth, liberty and love. It is indeed no easy task. But after the time of struggle the propagation of our teachings and living according to it is the best way of evangelising and indeed the most effective way of leading a christian life. The striving for liberty is actually one of the basic drives of the human soul because it represents within us as creatures of God the spark of God, the „scintilla dei” To this extent freedom is also a gift, which, however, must at the same time always be seen as a task.

<sup>11</sup> K. L e h m a n n, p. 65; cf. also: *The Re-shaping of Europe and the Church*, [in:] Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference (eds), *Studentag at the Autumn Conference of the German Bishops' Conference*, Arbeitshilfen 94, Bonn 1991.

<sup>12</sup> J. S c h w a r t z, p. 14; cf. J. G a i l l o t, *Modern Europe — a Challenge for the Churches*, „Concilium” 28:1992 No. 2 p. 172-178.



Genuine democracy and freedom are, therefore, a state but dynamic realities and learning processes within an all comprehensive act of humanisation. If this is not understood there is a permanent risk of freedom being transformed into arbitrariness just as national pride may deteriorate into jingoism and the outcome may well be that freedom dissolves into nothing. Rather than presenting a complex analysis of the concept of freedom let us merely call to mind that freedom is in essence a kind of self-determination leading to a condition determined by ethical necessity. Therefore one should never become estranged from truth. In the gospel according to St. John we find this passage: „Thou shall recognize the truth and the truth will set thee free” (Joh. 8,32). „We should, therefore, be at pains to ascertain the full meaning and the value of truth: Beyond the truth there is no true freedom. It is mere appearance. It may even become serfdom” This is how John Paul II put it during his fourth pastoral visit to his home country by way of emphasizing the primacy of the truth over freedom. At the same time he stressed the essential Christlike quality of Christian freedom by drawing attention to the twofold nature of this state: it is „the freedom we attain through Christ’s having liberated us”, which can also be seen as „freedom attained through knowledge of the truth”, and it is also „liberation from Christ” Those two aspects of the truth are for him „two paths which Europe is at present taking and will continue to proceed along”<sup>13</sup> It is incumbent on us today to bear witness to the essential Christ-like quality of freedom and to the truth, and this we must do in the spirit of love, for love is the ultimate fruit of freedom.

It is on this foundation in the wake of the revolution that the liberated peoples of Eastern Central Europe must seek to integrate into the systems of values in their various countries a fostering of the common weal and of collective responsibility. During the period of socialist thralldom their sensitivity to these values was almost entirely lost. In this sphere, too, the Church is duty-bound to accord these peoples unrestricted support and help. What is at stake here is after all actual human existence in an entire region of our continent. It is thus not inapposite that the most recent encyclical on social matters should proclaim that „man is the way of the Church”<sup>14</sup> Thus in the new reevangelized Europe we are striving for it is man who should at all times be our central concern.— And may almighty God stand by us in this great task!

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<sup>13</sup> „Bogu dziękujcie — Ducha nie gaście” *IV Pielgrzymka Jana Pawła II do Ojczyzny: 01-06-09—06.1991 r.* [„Thanks be to God — do not extinguish the Spirit!” The 4th pilgrimage of J. P. II into his home country], Olsztyn 1991, p. 161.

<sup>14</sup> J o h a n n e s P a u l II, *Centesimus annus*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1991, p. 112 (chapter VI of the Encyclical; No. 53—62).

## PRZEŁOM 1989 ROKU W EUROPIE ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ JAKO WYZWANIE DLA WSPÓŁCZESNEGO EKUMENIZMU

### Streszczenie

Ze względu na tajemnicę Wcielenia jest wiara chrześcijańska wiara, która kocha życie i ziemię i jako taka musi być zawsze „uziemiona”. Dlatego też wywiera wpływ na historyczne wydarzenia i powinna się do nich zbawiennie ustosunkować. Odnosi się to oczywiście także do tzw. „Jesieni Narodów” 1989 roku. Z jednej bowiem strony wskazuje ona na ich tzw. „metapolityczne” komponenty, z drugiej zaś — zmusza Kościoły do zajęcia ściśle ekumenicznej postawy w celu sprostania im. Dotyczy to zwłaszcza opanowania powstałych nacjonalizmów, sięgających w byłą Jugosławię aż do tzw. „etnicznych czystek”, i przeradzających się bardzo często w zgubny szowinizm. W tym przypadku może wyłącznie chrześcijańska „Międzynarodówka” (Ga 3,28) przywrócić należyłą równowagę. Ponadto chodzi o nieodzowność w ogóle ekumenicznej reakcji na aktualną sytuację. Wolność, stanowiącą równocześnie dar i zadanie, należy nauczyć pojmować jako rodzaj samodeterminacji do etycznej konieczności; nigdy też nie wolno jej odrywać od prawdy. Na drodze świadectwa powinna ona również stale przechodzić w miłość, by sprostać pozostałej po procesie „sowietyzacji” depersonalizacji człowieka. Krótka rzecz ujmując — tylko „ekumenizm integralny”, który uwzględni serio zarówno problemy konfesyjne, jak też międzyreligijne oraz multikulturowe czynniki, może skutecznie jako nowa ewangelizacja prowadzić do wspólnego Europejskiego Domu. W tym też kontekście wolno nam mówić o „epoce ekumenizmu” jako o „epoce ludzkości” szukającej ostatecznie swej metapolitycznej jedności w Tajemnicy Jezusa Chrystusa.