

WACŁAW HRYNIEWICZ OMI

Lublin

THE CHALLENGE OF OUR HOPE  
– HISTORY AND ESCHATOLOGY:  
AN EAST EUROPEAN VIEW\*

Eastern Europe is now passing through a very difficult period of change and transition. The gift of freedom demands responsibility. Both individual Christians and entire Church communities were not prepared to face new realities. There is a lot of confusion in minds and hearts of people, both clergy and laity. Many look for simple explications and quick remedies. They display a black vision of the world and detect hostile forces of the devil and sin. This pessimistic worldview creates a mentality marked by a constant looking for outside enemies. It is easier to frighten people than to explain patiently the present-day situation, to give hope and confidence. A realistic approach needs hope. Without hope there is no wisdom. According to Isaac the Syrian, the seventh century mystic, hope is above all, the “wisdom of the heart”<sup>1</sup> Those who propose simplistic solutions seem to lack that quiet wisdom of the heart. They are convinced to possess the whole truth and are therefore inclined to pass verdicts and condemn those who think in a different way. That is why there is a strong polarisation of diverging views and attitudes.

In this situation the need for hope becomes even more perceptible. Hope has a powerful educating force. Very often one can have the impression that

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Prof. Dr. Wacław HRYNIEWICZ – Head of The Ecumenical Institute of the Catholic University of Lublin; address for correspondence: ul. Pana Tadeusza 4 m. 60, PL 20-609 Lublin; e-mail: hryniewa@kul.lublin.pl.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homily 40*. In: *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Transl. by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery. Boston, Mass. 1984 p. 203.

our Churches fear to assume the consequences of the pedagogy of hope. They prefer an old pedagogy of fear. There remains still a clear discrepancy between the official teaching of the Churches and the academic theology on one side, and the mystical experience of hope on the other. The topic "religion and hope" requires a renewed thorough examination.

## I. WHAT CAN HOPE OFFER IN A SITUATION OF DIVISION?

Instances of polarisation and division can be seen practically in all countries of Eastern Europe. It is also the case within the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. An open model of Catholicism faces a strong opposition on the side of those who see in it the influence of freemasonry or even of the devil itself. A closed, popular and traditional mentality becomes easily dominated by fear and condemnation. This is, above all, the fear of freedom and otherness. Some would like to anticipate, as it were, the Last Judgment, passing verdicts and replacing God himself. Equally dangerous is a growing tendency towards exclusiveness in understanding truth and salvation. One of our bishops admitted recently: "A great defect of Polish Catholicism is the conviction, that the world will be only then good, when all convert to Catholicism; that this is the only way to save the world and to reform society"<sup>2</sup> This attitude of a popular Catholicism does not reckon with the complexity of the contemporary world. It forgets that one has to show patiently, by one's own life, how splendid the gift of faith is and to give witness to the hope which is in us (cf. 1 Pt 3:15).

In the eyes of the frightened groups of believers, the so-called "open Catholicism" becomes a synonym of corruption and degeneration, precisely because of its universality, openness and courage to remain in dialogue with others. Who does not fear the unknown, who is ecumenically-minded and hopes for the salvation of all – easily becomes a target of accusations and attacks.

The division between the Roman-Catholics in Poland is an undeniable fact. It does not seem, however, to involve the vast majority of people. Its impact can be seen above all among intellectuals and those who support Catholic media. In ordinary parishes one can hardly notice any interest in these con-

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<sup>2</sup> T P i e r o n e k. *Nie wyręczajmy Pana Boga [Let Us not Replace God]*. "Gazeta Wyborcza" No. 126, May 30-31, 1998 p. 10.

troversies. The two already mentioned formations of Catholicism arose immediately after 1989. Chronologically, the so-called “open Catholicism” came first to being, causing very soon anxiety and worry among traditionally-minded Catholics. The latter are often labelled as “integrists” or even “fundamentalists” They often speak a very aggressive language, not deprived of invectives and personally addressed accusations. Their “private frustrations” and demonstrated fears create a style which defies elementary principles of Christian culture<sup>3</sup> This type of Catholicism is based on a restrictive or selective interpretation of the Church teaching and, at the same time, on a critical attitude to pluralism and tolerance. It has little understanding for ecumenism and for the freedom of individual conscience. The truth is considered to be far more important than the human right to freedom. To the main features of this formation belong also extremist views, both political and national, pretended to be an expression of the only true teaching of the Church.

During the communist era, national identity was built on resistance to an alien and hostile pressure of marxist ideology. When this pressure disappeared, many people became uncertain about their own identity and started defining themselves in opposition to everything that is alien, foreign, unforeseeable, so different as to be opposed. For some people the Catholic faith becomes, in a new situation, the decisive factor of self-definition. Popular Catholicism gives to the lost people a sense of safety. It offers a simple explication of contemporary phenomena, the feeling of dignity and moral superiority, in face of the incomprehensible reality, shaped supposedly by the conspiracy of the enemies.

In times of the communist regime, the Roman Catholic Church in Poland was seen as a natural representative of aspirations and hopes of the enslaved society. People saw in it a real sign of hope. They respected it for its attitude inspired by compassion and tolerance. In the struggle with communist oppression the Church had an influential ally – all those intellectuals who looked for ways of improving the situation. Between the Church and those liberal intellectuals there was a fruitful dialogue and cooperation. The end of communism proved to be, however, the end of this dialogue. The Church became suspicious of liberal democracy. For a significant part of a liberal society it was a turning point. Integrist tendencies within the Church increased the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Ż y c i ń s k i. *Styl Kościoła [The Style of the Church]*. “Tygodnik Powszechny” No. 21, May 24, 1998 p. 10.

feelings of anticlericalism. Very often, one could have the impression that the official Church was becoming a besieged fortress, whose defenders saw only enemies around it. There appeared a language of hatred, contempt, aggression and anathema.

This way the Gospel ceases to be a Good News of understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation and hope. Christians begin to witness against someone and, what is worse, to be against someone. There is only one step to bedevil people, to accuse and to condemn, to look for the presence of the devil in all, what the liberals or the post-communists do. Where is then the spirit of Christ's beatitudes? Where is the message of hope, compassion and mercy?

During the last years the gap between the two above mentioned mentalities has considerably widened. What can be seen is a wounded and dwarfed face of Christianity. Some people of the Church seem to live still in the post-tridentine time, not accepting practically the Second Vatican Council, out of touch with the challenge of a changing reality.

But this is, of course, not only the case in my own country. Similar divisions in the Church appear also in other countries of Eastern Europe. Conservatism seems often to gain the upper hand. One can observe timid attitudes inspired by the spirit of intransigence and exclusiveness. Christian hope is thus deprived of its soteriological universalism. Exclusive tendencies come usually back into existence during the time of confessional tensions, conflicts and rivalries. After 1989 this is precisely the situation in Eastern Europe. The Orthodox Christians fear the invasion of western missionaries. They often speak of proselytism and uniatism. They pass collective judgments on non-Orthodox Christians.

Here are two significant examples. In February 1991 an international Orthodox conference was held at the Pochaev Orthodox monastery. Its participants were very critical of the Roman Catholic Church. They accused it of the enmity towards the Orthodox faith and of expansionism. In their view the Catholics do not belong to the true Church of God. In the final appeal addressed to all Orthodox Christians there is an unambiguous statement that only the Orthodox faith saves people unconditionally (*kotórajá odná bezuslovno spasaet človeka*)<sup>4</sup>

Another example is related to some recent decisions of the Orthodox Church, taken by 39 representatives, gathered for panorthodox conference in

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<sup>4</sup> *Obraščenie k brat'jam po vere*. "Literaturnaja Rossija" No. 8, February 22, 1991 p. 23.

Thessalonica (April 30 – May 2, 1998). Orthodox bishops and theologians decided not to take part in common prayers and liturgical services during the VIIIth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, Zimbabwe (December 1998). This decision displays a deep dissatisfaction of the Orthodox with certain “modernistic trends” in the activity of the Council. Those unacceptable tendencies consist mainly in practicing intercommunion, in acknowledging the possibility of salvation also in the other Churches, in ordaining women and promoting the rights of sexual minorities<sup>5</sup> Here again we can see the old axiom, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, in its rigid confessional interpretation: outside the Orthodox Church there is no salvation.

## II. HOPE FOR RECONCILIATION AND A WISER CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

What worries us 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 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.

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: 7). The last words are crucial: “to the glory of God” Everything that foments division, contempt and hatred 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

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<sup>5</sup> *Itogovyj dokument mežpravoslavnoj vstreči po teme “Ocenka novych faktov v otnošenijach meždu Pravoslaviem i ekumeničeskim dviženiem” (Saloniki, Grecija, 29 aprilja – 2 maja 1998 goda). “Russkaja Mysl” No. 4222, May 14-20, 1998 p. 20; “Tygodnik Powszechny” No. 20, May 17, 1998 p. 2.*

a portion of that whereof they were reminded, so We (Alláh) stirred up enmity and hatred among them to the day of Resurrection. And Alláh will soon inform them what they did”<sup>6</sup> The Muslim commentators have their own reasons in explaining these words. One of them wrote: “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>7</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 hope for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence may be greater than ever before.

The difficult pedagogy of the dialogue compels us to overcome the spirit of rivalry, competitiveness and confessional struggle. Any strategy to weaken the other side arouses only defensive reactions. 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 the christological component: “TO WHOM do 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 (*heautón ekénosen*) to assume the condition of a slave” (Ph 2: 7). *Kénosis* means self-emptying or self-limitation. Christ’s identity, resulting from his equality with God, is contrary to any rapacious possession of this dignity. He was able to renounce His own might and glory, and thus to acquire a new kenotic identity. *Kénosis* implies the ability of self-denial. What God dares is amazing. The purpose of the divine *kénosis* is not annihilation, but transfiguration.

The figure of the kenotic Servant has an ecclesiological significance. Christ’s *kénosis* becomes an imperative for His Church. A special duty of today’s theologians is to ask the question of what their own Church can and should do, to renounce all that diminishes her credibility, her ecumenical honesty, and the hope 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

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<sup>6</sup> Surah V 14. See *The Holy Qur’án*. Arabic text, English translation and commentary by Maulana Muhammed Ali. 6th edition. Chicago, Ill. 1973 p. 245.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* note 674.

in compassion and forgiveness. For this a real breakthrough is needed, in biblical language called *kénosis* – a kenotic act of renouncing everything which does not serve the work of reconciliation.

The ecclesiology of Sister Churches obliges us today to admit the lack of evangelical brotherhood and mercy in our mutual relations. The burden of historic faults and sad experiences of the past continues to live in our memory. The deep roots of distrust still make the progress of reconciliation a very difficult ecumenical task. What we need is 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 a healed and purified memory will allow us to open up a new future and give us hope for better days. An essential part of the process of reconciliation would be the acknowledgment of what other Christians have experienced at the hand of our church community. A compassionate appropriation of each other's memories thus becomes indispensable.

### III. ECUMENICAL HOPE, COMPASSION AND UNDERSTANDING

Out of our controversies and disputes we have built institutionalized divisions and have acquiesced in those divisions. Throughout the centuries our Churches have developed different ways 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 grown 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. Hope and compassion go inseparably together.

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 Isaac the Syrian or Isaac of Niniveh (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 in the "school of compassion" The first one cultivates knowledge of justice,

teaches to pass judgments upon people and to separate them from one another. Such knowledge gives birth to contentiousness, anger, confusion and willfulness. 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>8</sup> The 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... For 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>9</sup>

Mercy and humility give access to true understanding and wisdom. 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. Certainly, a gesture of compassion does not immediately create a new civilization and new relationship, but it has 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, to take the first steps towards reconciliation and forgiveness. God may then amaze us with the speed of His grace. This is our Christian hope.

#### IV LEARNING THE WISDOM OF HOPE

We live in the times when many people, tired perhaps of uncertainty and a multitude of divergent views, start leaning towards exclusivism, integristism or even sectarianism. This concerns not only Christianity but also other religions. A common feature of the attitudes denoted by the terms listed above is, in the area of religion, a tendency to appropriate exclusively truth and

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<sup>8</sup> *The Book of Grace* 6, 29. 32. In: *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* p. 415.

<sup>9</sup> *Homily 71*. In: *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* pp. 344-345.



salvation, accompanied by a desire to disqualify all other beliefs and views. We are thus facing phenomena which are the negation of the spirit of universalism. The problem is not only the literal interpretation of the Bible or other texts recognized as authoritative and normative. Much more important in this kind of mentality seems to be sheer suspicion that the others are completely wrong and in consequence deserve to be damned. All those who do not share my belief, do not belong to my Church or my religious community, are sent to hell. God saves only orthodox members of my community. Others are to suffer eternal damnation. Hell is for others. We are the ones chosen by God and faithful to him. He will save us, all others will be damned. The one whom we condemn is damned by God.

These are several characteristics of a closed and narrow mentality, inspired by the feeling of exclusivism, self-sufficiency and fear of others. It often happened in the past that hell was filled with a countless number of sinners, infidels, pagans, atheists and all other opponents. This attitude lacks any sympathy and understanding for weakness and sin of a human being. There is no compassion for the lost and damned. There resound verdicts of condemnation for the sinful world. Christian Churches used to judge each other this way in the past, guided by the conviction that there was no salvation outside them. The hostile attitude towards certain groups of people (heretics, non-believers, witches, fortune-tellers, Jews, Gypsies), suspected of treating with the devil, was being strengthened in this way. An inclination to regard the division as a normal thing was gradually increasing. The sense of all-human solidarity, being at the very heart of the Christian understanding of salvation, was disappearing.

Today we are astonished by this dark courage on the part of people of the Church of that time in pronouncing collective verdicts of damnation. One should not be surprised that these verdicts did not remain solely in the sphere of theory. They were directly related to the entire human communities existing outside the Roman Catholic Church<sup>10</sup>. The damnation verdict became the reason of unjust treatment of people and many historical tragedies. It justified methods of converting other people, inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel.

The Roman Church's doctrine, upheld over centuries, on the damnation of non-believers and members of other religions and denominations was follow-

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the decree for Jacobites of the Council of Florence (1438-1445). DS 1351.

ing the biblical warnings of hell. These warnings were applied to concrete groups of people. The part of biblical statements which give hope for salvation and redemption was completely ignored. This hope was eliminated from the doctrine and spirituality. It would reappear, but mostly among mystics and people thinking independently.

Over centuries the teaching about damnation and eternal hell was an integral part of the Christian Churches' pedagogy. The fear of death and hell was regarded as an essential motive for moral behaviour. As a result the Christian Good News lost its credibility, especially among non-believers and people distrustful of the Church. Today we are slowly learning again the difficult wisdom of universalism. We are learning it in the age of ecumenism, on the threshold of the third millennium of Christianity, in spite of all difficulties. The lesson of history is especially admonishing in this respect.

The followers of the New Age ideology preach a happy future, an all-embracing cosmic reconciliation, an ultimate harmony of the universe. They offer hope, humanitarianism and universalism. All positive energies present in the world are supposed to overcome finally every sort of evil. It means that we do not need any God-given gift of redemption, liberation and salvation. The universe liberates itself in the process of universal reconciliation and transfiguration. Thus we may hope for the end of any antagonism, between good and evil. The process of self-liberation should result in removing any separation between God and the world, between heaven and hell. The New Age ideology presents itself as a philosophy able to offer to people much more than Christianity. Is this fact not a real challenge to Christian hope and vision of salvation?

Not finding answers to difficult questions concerning the future, many Christians turn over to other religions, worldviews and doctrines. They seek comfort and encouragement in Buddhism, in the doctrine of reincarnation, in theosophy or in the teaching of the Jehova's Witnesses. Still others succumb to the temptation of nihilism, become totally indifferent or even cynical. On the other hand, the atmosphere of the end of the century and of the second millennium favours the growing inclinations towards sectarianism, fundamentalism and integrism. These trends do not spare traditional Churches. Who preaches the existence of hell for the others, will be inclined to fill it with those, whom he or she condemns, and to leave them to their own fate.

## V TOWARDS BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS OF UNIVERSAL HOPE

The eschatology of biblical statements related to hell requires a thorough reinterpretation. Apart from many warnings, the Scripture also conveys astonishing words of hope for everybody, including non-believers. Who fails to realize that there are two series of texts of soteriological and eschatological character will not understand the dramatic nature of the biblical message.

There is a danger of treating Jesus' parables as a reportage outlining future events. Interpreting the biblical texts literally, without understanding their basic intentions, one reduces them to sheer apocalyptic fantasies. This concerns chiefly the parable on the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46). The force of its persuasion is aimed at reviewing the current situation of life, inconsistent with the commandment of the love of neighbour. Christ's words call for reflection. He defends the "least", the weakest, those in need. He identifies himself with them. The only criterion of evaluation, in this vision of the judgment, is the love of neighbour in need. Insensitivity and egoism make people perish.

The Lord of history sends all those, on whom the curse of human harm weighs, to go first through "eternal fire" and "eternal punishment (torment)". Fire is a symbol of purification. The guilty ones are sent into a state of punishment which is to lead them to repentance and conversion – *eis kólasisin aiónion* (Mt 25:46).

The etymological intuitions included in the word *kólasis* itself seem to point to this possibility. Those Greek Fathers, who could sense well the spirit of language and favoured the hope of universal salvation understood punishment in its therapeutic meaning. The word *kólasis* is derived from horticultural terminology (*kólasis ton déndron*). It denotes the pruning a tree, that is cutting off some of its branches in order to improve its fruitfulness. *Koládzein ta déndra* – to cut off wild shoots of a tree means to curb their growth, to prevent that tree from running wild and making it more noble in this way. The act of trimming branches means at the same time inflicting suffering on the tree.

Not surprisingly, the words *kólasis* and *koládzo* in relation to people mean punishing, but with a concrete purpose which is correction and improvement (*prós sophronismón*). In medical terminology *kólasis* means a cure given to someone because of his ill health (*hos phármakon*). In this meaning the word

was used in Old Greek literature<sup>11</sup> In Plato's writings *kólasís* means "the curing of soul (*psychés therapeía*)"<sup>12</sup>

Now, let us connect the word *kólasís* understood in the way presented above with the adjective *aiónios*, just as Matthew does (Mt 25: 46). This might enable the deeper understanding of the meaning of Christ's warning. What does the adjective *aiónios* mean? In Plato's writings it means duration that will finally come to an end<sup>13</sup> Generally, the word *aiónios* in the Greek language is not synonymous with endlessness. It denotes first of all "limited duration" (*periorisménen diárkeian*)<sup>14</sup> The meaning of this adjective has to be found in the Hebrew language. Its counterpart is the Hebrew *olám*, but this word has also many meanings because it is derived from an act of hiding. It may either mean eternity or long duration. Eternity belongs to God alone. It is a sign of his absolute transcendence. Only God is the absolute fullness of life without origin and without end. He alone is really eternal.

In Mt 25:46 punishment, or torment, is called "eternal" (*eis kólasin aiónion*) as a parallel to "eternal life" (*eis zoén aiónion*). In both cases the Gospel uses the same adjective *aiónios*. If there is some kind of parallelism in Christ's words, it is, however, an asymmetrical parallelism. It results from the antithesis on which the parable of Jesus is based. It is the antithesis between the blessed and the "cursed", and in consequence the antithesis between "eternal life" and "eternal punishment" It says that something of human ultimate destiny is anticipated and fulfilled already in earthly life. It is a warning. Such is its basic purpose. The same adjective, "eternal" is used in both cases but its meaning is different, according to the noun following the adjective. Despite apparently close parallelism, the asymmetry of "eternal life" and "eternal punishment" is maintained thanks to the carefully chosen word *kólasís* with its therapeutic meaning. Such a punishment is purposeful only when its therapeutic objective is possible to reach. The other punishment, even only allowed for by God, would not be worthy of his love and mercy.

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<sup>11</sup> See D. D e m e t r a k o u. *Mega Lexikon oles tes ellenikes glosses*. Vol. 8. Athens 1964 col. 3993-3994, 3996-3997.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Abp. A t h e n a g o r a s K o k k i n a k i s. *Eisagoge. Gregoriou Nvsses apanta ta erga I, Dogmatika A*. Thessaloniki 1979 p. 107.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 121.

The Bible has to be read as a whole. One should not snatch from it individual quotations in order to prove a thesis specified in advance. The Scripture requires an honest and deep interpretation, free from any ideological assumptions. As a whole it speaks about God's untiring, searching, attracting and transforming love; about his mercy and patience toward sinful people. It is true that it does not lack warnings of the *Gehenna* – the state of being lost. A number of biblical statements suggest that this state of being lost is transitional. The lost creature must undergo a purifying inner struggle, inseparable from the feeling of pain and suffering. What we popularly call the punishment of hell acquires therapeutic qualities. An endless and eternal punishment, a punishment for its own sake would not be a thing worthy of the good God.

Christians are not the only sheep-flock of Christ. He also has, as he has clearly stressed, "other sheep that are not of this sheepfold" Further words in the passage astonish us with the universalism of vision: "I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (J 10:16). One cannot overlook the eschatological universalism of promise and fulfillment expressed in these words. It would be naive to connect them with the earthly history of the Church. They reach into the ultimate future of the world reconciled with God. Christ tells about some of them: "my sheep", "they listen to my voice", "I know them and they follow me", "I give them eternal life" But he has to bring "other sheep", the ones that are not of this sheep-fold. There is a kind of historical necessity in this statement. Only then the unification of one great "sheep-flock", run by one Shepherd, will take place.

The vivid language of these expressions hides deep eschatological contents. The Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for "the sheep" (J 10:15) – all the sheep, not only those called by him "my sheep" – is not indifferent to the fate of "other sheep" The laying down of life confirms his rights "to other sheep" An astonishing statement about ultimate victory over the power of darkness and a promise "to draw all to himself" by the power of beauty and goodness (his whole life was the sign of it), does not appear accidentally on Christ's lips. The tone of hope and optimism is linked in these words with the motive of judgment and conquering the power of evil: "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself" (J 12:31-32).

This is an unusual announcement of the ultimate victory of the good. We face again the universalism of promise. Jesus did not say that he would want to “draw all” or that he will try to do so but that he will draw them indeed. Is there any reason for disbelieving His words?

The ultimate consequences of these words can be perceived in the teaching of Apostle Paul who says that when the end comes Christ “will hand over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24). In this passage Christ’s victory was presented very vividly in a way characteristic of the mentality of those times: “he will put all his enemies under his feet” There is also an announcement of the ultimate universalism of salvation: “When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

The most daring propagators of the hope of salvation for all used to refer to these unusual words over centuries. We have not learnt yet to collect the voices of hope. Those who are prone to preach damnation to non-believers or believers in other religions and denominations should reflect over the depth and boldness of the quoted statements. And their number is even much greater than it might have seem at first glance.

## VI. UNIVERSALISM OF HOPE

I can see no reason why we should be less courageous than many wise teachers of such a hope in the history of Christianity whom we call saints, the Fathers of the Church or great mystics. Mystics are able to rise above religious and confessional divisions. Mysticism is universalistic and ecumenical in its nature, because it is based on a deep inner experience. Mystics are not bitter loners who have lost the sense of human solidarity. Just the contrary, their spiritual experience makes it possible for them to feel the strongest bonds existing between people. Who reads the witness of mystics, will find in it the negation of all fundamentalism and spiritual parochialism. He will discover their mercy and compassion embracing everyone and everything. Mystics are characterized by extraordinary intuition and wisdom in perceiving the world and human destiny. Mystics can descend into the tragic depths of human nature but do not abandon a hope that “all shall be well”

as Julian of Norwich wrote in the 14th century<sup>15</sup> That is why hope for the salvation of all is so close and dear to them. Thanks to this they are the best allies of genuine universalism<sup>16</sup>

Salvation and damnation are not two parallel determinants of the ultimate destiny of humankind. These are not two coextensive realities. The Christian believes in the ultimate fulfilment of the Kingdom of God. He looks forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Such is the conclusion of the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, the very core of the eschatological hope. What is most important is professed with faith and hope. The symbol of faith does not mention hell. The state of being lost is possible. But can it be really ultimate? Hope dares to trust that the one who has been lost may be found by the Good Shepherd of human history, that with the help of God he may again find himself and his own freedom. The mystery of hope for universal salvation is a mystery of freedom – the freedom which has been cured, regained, transformed and saved.

There is something astonishing in freedom: the ability to reject God comes from his own gift! Everything seems to indicate that the Creator is not afraid of entrusting this dramatic and dangerous gift to his creatures. He behaves as if he were sure that he would be able to save this gift. Freedom may be ill and blind, but it never ceases to be God's gift. Freedom carries in itself a promise and hope for achieving its ultimate goal, because it does not cease to be, even in case of wrong and sinful decisions, an ability given by God. He alone can save the created freedom in a truly divine manner without destroying his own gift.

God himself remains the greatest hope for his creatures. He penetrates even the infernal depths of human heart. He can lead out of the depths of *Gehenna*. He does not destroy the freedom of his creatures. He respects human choice. However, he has his truly divine way of reaching the secrets of freedom of the most revolted beings. He is able to attract and transform them with his goodness, beauty and boundless mercy. The inner state of being lost is constantly revisited by Christ. He does not leave anyone on his own. Hell is the illness of freedom. I do believe that Christ is forever the Good Shep-

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<sup>15</sup> J u l i a n of N o r w i c h. *Showings*. Transl. from the critical text with an introduction by E. Colledge, OSA and J. Walsh, SJ. Mahwah, NJ 1978 p. 149 (=The Short Text, Chapter XIII).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. W H r y n i e w i c z. *Dramat nadziei zbawienia [The Drama of the Hope of Salvation]*. Warsaw 1996 pp. 149-170.

herd of all the lost. Not to leave anyone, to return, persuade and attract – this is the most divine quality of God's existence.

Those who favour the hope of universal salvation are by no means the advocates of forced amnesty. Man has to suffer the consequences of his wicked deeds. Salvation is neither necessity nor compulsion. It is God's gift which has to be accepted voluntarily, with conviction, reverence and gratitude. Hope dares to trust that God will not remain completely helpless in the face of human freedom; that he will finally be able to draw it towards himself, purify it and transform it thanks to his patient and boundless love and mercy. This can be achieved through suffering and torment which in the human language could be termed as endless, lasting for centuries, because of its quality and intensity, as is suggested by the Greek word *aiónios*.

The universalism of hope is a cure for all temptation to appropriate the gift of salvation for the benefit of one's own religious community and to deny it to all other people. Such a hope becomes a strongest ally of ecumenism. The duty of expecting salvation for all may then become an eschatological motive of love and concern. It is not only a passive hope that some day God will be able to reconcile all the creation and gather it in the harmony of the new world. The hope of universal salvation relates also to the present day. Already today it requires a new attitude towards all people whom we will find beyond this life. It is a universal hope, free from the limitations of any ecclesiastical or secular particularisms.

The soteriological universalism of hope requires a new mentality and new pedagogy. We live in the age of a great breakthrough. Something new is being born, a new sensitivity and a new spirituality. Christianity contains in itself a vast and creative potential, which has so far not been fully discovered and appreciated. It does not matter that our roads towards the Infinite are different. He himself remains the greatest hope for every one. This awareness is the great liberation for ecumenism and universalism. Thanks to it the sense of deep unity of all denominations and religions can be strengthened. The universalism of hope has a future before it.



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WYZWANIE DLA NASZEJ NADZIEI – HISTORIA I ESCHATOLOGIA.  
WSCHODNIOEUROPEJSKI PUNKT WIDZENIA

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

Kraje Europy Wschodniej, wraz z odzyskaną wolnością, znalazły się w bardzo trudnym okresie przemian. Spowodowało to zagubienie w nowej sytuacji, co niejednokrotnie objawiło się szukaniem zewnętrznego wroga. Postawa taka nie może być jednak lekarstwem na powszechną dezorientację serc i umysłów. Raczej należy się zwrócić do „mądrości serca” (wyrażenie św. Izaaka Syryjczyka), która proponuje nam pedagogię nadziei w miejsce pedagogii strachu.

W polskim katolicyzmie po 1989 r. doszło do polaryzacji postaw. Jedna, określana jako „katolicyzm otwarty”, stara się podjąć ze współczesnym światem wielopłaszczyznowy dialog, obejmujący życie społeczne, kulturę, zróżnicowanie religijne, ekumenizm. Druga, określana jako tradycjonalistyczna, podchodzi nieufnie do otwartego dialogu z „innością” upatrując zagrożenia w pluralizmie i tolerancji. Nieufność ta obejmuje również ekumenizm i wolność sumienia. Owocny dialog z liberalnie nastawionymi intelektualistami, który Kościół wiódł w czasach komunizmu, wraz z jego odejściem zakończył się. Dialog zastąpiła nieufność wobec liberalnej demokracji. Częstokroć język ewangelicznego zrozumienia i przebaczenia zastąpiony został językiem agresji i konfrontacji. Opisywana polaryzacja mentalności nie dotyczy tylko Polski, lecz większości krajów wschodnioeuropejskich. Widać to na przykładzie chrześcijaństwa prawosławnego, obawiającego się inwazji zachodnich misjonarzy, prozelityzmu i uniatyzmu.

Odpowiedzią na lęk wobec „Innego” powinna być edukacja do dialogu i pojednania. Konfesjonalizm i inne formy eklezjalnego współzawodnictwa mogą być przekroczone, gdy konfesyjne „kim jesteśmy?” zastąpione zostanie chrystologicznym „czyimi jesteśmy?” Ekskluzywizm, rezerwujący potępienie dla innych poza nami, nie stanowi odpowiedzi na pytanie o przyszłość. Prawdziwej odpowiedzi nie dają też nurty religijne oferujące łatwe samozbawienie, jak New Age, buddyzm z doktryną reinkarnacji i inne. Poszukując odpowiedzi, należało by przeanalizować na nowo te dane biblijne, które pozwalają czerpać nadzieję zbawienia dla wszystkich, włączając niewierzących. Boskie bowiem karanie ma wymiar nie tyle potępiający, co terapeutyczny. Nie kończąca się, wieczna kara nie byłaby rzeczą godną dobrego Boga. Chrześcijanie wierzą w ostateczne wypełnienie się Królestwa Bożego. Treścią wiary jest zmartwychwstanie i życie w przyszłym świecie. Wobec tego stan potępienia człowieka, choć realny, nie musi być nieodwracalny. Nadzieja pozwala ufać, że ten, kto się zagubił, odnaleziony zostanie przez Dobrego Pasterza ludzkiej historii.

Żyjemy w czasach wielkiego przełomu. Otwiera się w nim przestrzeń na soteriologiczny uniwersalizm nadziei, która pozwoli przekroczyć wszelkie podziały.

*Streścił ks. Przemysław Kantyka*

**Słowa kluczowe:** nadzieja, historia, eschatologia, soteriologia, tożsamość chrześcijańska, podziały chrześcijan, pojednanie, Europa Wschodnia.

**Key words:** hope, history, eschatology, soteriology, Christian identity, Christian divisions, reconciliation, Eastern Europe.