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## THE SIGN OF GOD'S SALVATION

Marcin SKŁADANOWSKI, *Humanizm Krzyża. Staurologia w perspektywie ludzkiego losu* [The humanism of the Cross: Staurology in the perspective of human fate], Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2017, 323 pp. ISBN 978-83-8061-420-8.

The Paschal mystery is of crucial significance in theological issues, and the central place in it belongs to the Cross, which unites all Christians in a special way. The Cross, after all, is a unique sign of all baptized people. This is because it shows God in a unique and very clear way as loving man and the world in His Son, and as loving them to death.

The author of the reviewed book is Professor in the Department of the History of Dogmas and Historical Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. He is an author of many articles, sketches, and presentations, highly committed to ecumenical activity. He has also published several books, including *Tożsamość wyznaniowa. Studium ekumeniczne* (Denominational identity: An ecumenical study; Lublin, 2013), *Pragnę żyć. Interdyscyplinarna dyskusja o bezpieczeństwie i godności życia ludzkiego* (I want to live: An interdisciplinary discussion on the security and dignity of human life; Lublin, 2014), and *Niewiele mniejszy od aniołów. Wspólne chrześcijańskie świadectwo o człowieku* (A little lower than the angels: The common Christian testimony about man; Lublin, 2014).

The book opens with an extensive quotation from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians (p. 5) as well as a foreword (pp. 7–8) and a list of abbreviations (p. 9). The actual content of the study starts with an introduction (pp. 11–17). The whole body of the text that follows is divided into five chapters, which in turn are subdivided into sections and smaller units.

The first chapter is titled "The Cross in the Church's Faith" (pp. 19–83). What this refers to is the awareness of the religion of the Cross—namely, its reality and the awareness of the apostolic ministry of the Church that the humanism and testimony of the Cross are part of. This always means the elevation of man. Attempts at reinterpreting the Cross and the orthodoxy of Christianity are also discussed.

The title of the next chapter is "With Us and for Us" (pp. 85–142). The Cross is a revelation of love, open to dialogue. It becomes the authenticity of the Incarnation. It

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means questions about Divinity and Humanity on the Cross. As the title of the chapter suggests, the Cross is the culmination of being “with us” and “for us.” It contains a synthesis of the mission of Jesus and the Church. The first excursus has been placed here, titled “Forsaken by God?”

The title of the third chapter is “The Bearer of Our Suffering” (pp. 143–196). It addresses the question of martyrdom and suffering in the light of the truth of the Cross. The analysis of the crucified Christ’s suffering is important, particularly the analysis of its meaning and significance. Further reflection explores Christ’s humility. The second excursus asks a question: “God’s suffering?”

In the next chapter, titled “The Sacrificial Lamb” (pp. 197–249), Rev. Marcin Składanowski addresses the problem of freedom in a world of bondage, which leads to Jesus’ voluntary Passion and death. The Cross confronts human sin. It became the atonement, although this teaching is particularly difficult; in this context, St. Anselm’s and St. Thomas Aquinas’ proposals are worth knowing. The Cross is Christ’s sacrifice of expiation and salvation.

The final chapter is titled “To Die with Him in Order to Be Resurrected in Him” (pp. 251–298). It concerns participation in Christ’s death. Human mortality is confronted by the theology of the Cross. Staurology gives meaning to human mortality. Finally, the author asks about the sacramental union with Christ’s death. The culmination is the juxtaposition of the Cross and the Resurrection. The Cross has been shown as the judgment, the foundation of hope, the brightening of human destiny, and the testimony of the Church. The third excursus has been added here: “The Legend of Golgotha.” The content part of the study ends with Conclusion (pp. 299–301).

The book also has a bibliography (pp. 303–314), divided into five sections: 1. The Bible; 2. The Teaching of the Catholic Church; 3. Fathers and Doctors of the Church; 4. Primary Literature; 5. Secondary Literature. Additionally, there is the text of the homily “To Look at the Cross of Jesus,” delivered on 28 March 2007, in the Evangelical–Augsburg Holy Trinity Church in Lublin (pp. 315–319). At the end, a detailed table of contents is provided (pp. 321–323).

Already at the very beginning the author clearly, and rightly, points out: “This book is about the Cross of Jesus Christ, which is the identification of the Church—unique and unfathomable in its contents, though at the same time well and commonly known, particularly in the Western culture, where many of the most precious elements of mankind’s heritage are related to Christianity, contain this sign, and pass it on in various ways” (p. 7).<sup>1</sup> This sounds particularly constructive in the context of contemporary attitudes towards the Cross: attitudes of defiance or even aversion or rejection, which, in consequence, means the rejection of its message and salvific fruits.

The proposed research-based reflection touches upon an important theological issue, because it consists in devoting attention to the fundamental message of the Gospel. It is an attempt to highlight one of the particularly important signs defining the identity of

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<sup>1</sup> “Ta książka mówi o Krzyżu Jezusa Chrystusa, a zatem o znaku rozpoznawczym Kościoła—wyjątkowym i niezgłębionym w treści, chociaż dobrze znanym i powszechnie, zwłaszcza w kulturze Zachodu, w której wiele najcenniejszych elementów dziedzictwa ludzkości związanych jest z chrześcijaństwem i w różny sposób zawiera i przekazuje ten znak.”

Christ's disciples, regardless of denomination. Christ's Cross and man's human fate are interrelated. In the Cross one touches and experiences the special presence of God, full of love and mercy. How close He is, in Jesus Christ, to man!

When reading, one ought to remember that "this is a theological book, and therefore the author attempts to engage in reflection using the scientific methods specific to theology. Nevertheless, one can hardly fail to notice personal involvement on the part of the author, for whom the crucified Jesus Christ is «God's power and wisdom» (1 Cor. 1:24)"<sup>2</sup> (p. 7). It seems advisable to follow the author's example in this respect and reach out for them in the same spirit: to feel the flavor of one more personal encounter with the Cross and to have a deeper insight into its message as well as its personal and social fruits.

The author very strongly underscores his ecumenical openness (p. 16)—which, however, is mainly directed towards the Protestant tradition. It is a pity that the Orthodox tradition has been ignored, since it also seems to be interesting as regards the interpretation of Jesus Christ's Cross. These topics are indirectly present in references to the Eastern Fathers of the Church, but this is, after all, the Common tradition of all Christianity. These expectations seem to be induced, among other things, by the author's words: "Special significance should be attributed to the Cross, considered today to be the most obvious and the most recognizable symbol of Christianity regardless of denominational divisions"<sup>3</sup> (p. 11).

The analysis of staurology undertaken by the Rev. M. Składanowski also poses questions about the presence of the Mother of God—Theotokos—in the paschal work of Her Son, the Man God. This does not refer only to the title of Co-Redemptrix: Her presence in the whole reflection in this book is disturbingly marginal (pp. 25, 97, 112, 126). It seems that Mary deserves more in-depth theological analysis in this context; this kind of analysis actually seems to be indispensable for a more complete and more human understanding of the humanism of the Cross, which is the central subject of the presented book.

In the section "The Bible" in the bibliography, some Polish translations are missing, such as the Warsaw-Praga Bible (*Biblia Praska*), the Poznań Bible (*Biblia Poznańska*), or the Paulist Bible (*Biblia Paulistów*) (p. 303), and what they offer could certainly be even more inspiring in the analyses of biblical texts. Perhaps this was the author's conscious choice, though. The methodology behind the "Teaching of the Catholic Church" section (p. 304) provokes questions as well. Unfortunately, entries for some papal and conciliar documents are not provided. In the latter case, this would make it clear which translation the author used. It seems that, by their nature, the liturgical books of the Church have greater theological value, especially in theological analyses (pp. 313–314).

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<sup>2</sup> "[...] jest to książka teologiczna, a zatem autor usiłuje w niej prowadzić refleksję, posługując się metodami naukowymi właściwymi teologii. Niemniej jednak w książce tej nie da się ukryć również osobistego zaangażowania autora, dla którego Jezus Chrystus ukrzyżowany jest «mocą i mądrością Bożą» (1 Kor 1,24)."

<sup>3</sup> "Szczególne znaczenie należy tutaj przypisać Krzyżowi, uważanemu dzisiaj za najoczywistszy, najbardziej rozpoznawalny znak chrześcijaństwa niezależnie od konfesyjnych podziałów."

It should be noted that each chapter opens with a reproduction of an interesting painting associated with the issues addressed (pp. 21, 87, 145, 199, 253), followed in subsequent pages by biblical, patristic, or liturgical passages that can serve as a kind of motto for or introduction to the analyses.

The Lublin scholar's analyses constitute one more reliable attempt to probe the mystery of the Cross. The broad perspective makes it legitimate to conclude that the title of the book is fully justified. This in turn inspires personal hope and deepens the awareness of Jesus Christ as extraordinary and totally undeserved endowment. The author helps his readers understand and experience this in the spirit of gratitude for the Cross. The study by the Rev. Prof. Marcin Składanowski, PhD, DSc, once again confirms the truth that "Christianity has no sign more fine than the Cross"<sup>4</sup> (p. 301).

The presented book is an important analysis, useful also in the field of moral theology, both general and specific. This is because it concerns particularly the great subject of suffering, which is an existential element for every human being. The broad context, which resounds particularly in the creative analysis of God's suffering, especially in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, provides significant arguments to get acquainted with this dynamic scholarly investigation. Regrettably, this issue is usually presented in a rather simplified form, referring to a very small extent to the actual reality of the ministry of humanism that Jesus Christ's Cross carries. Staurology has particularly extensive implications for moral theology, too.

*Translated by Piotr Czyżewski*



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<sup>4</sup> "[...] chrześcijaństwo nie ma znaku piękniejszego niż Krzyż."