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CHRIST AS THE FACE OF THE FATHER'S MERCY.
A TOP-DOWN AND THEOPHANIC CONCEPTION
OF GOD'S MERCY

Abstract. The author of the article *Christ as the face of the Father's mercy. A top-down and theophanic conception of God's Mercy* draws the most fundamental approach to the mystery of mercy as a form of the inner revelation of the Triune God's life from the ample Polish literature devoted to the issue of God's Mercy, and analyzes it. Also practicing mercy, according to this conception, may be done in the right way if its features are recognized in Jesus Christ the Incarnated Son's deeds. The author calls this perspective of theology of mercy "a top-down conception", as humanity is not able to comprehend the essence of mercy without the aid of the supernatural world that, on the one hand, shows what God is like in His essence, and on the other, how one should follow God to be saved. God's self-revelation in the salutary events becomes – according to the author – the best interpretation key of God's theology of mercy, showing His Trinitarian character.

Key words: God's Mercy, Jesus Christ, cross, resurrection, redemption.

The conception of mercy in the bull *Misericordiae vultus* coincides in its main points with the theology of mercy worked out by the Polish theologians who met in Zamość and Krasnobród to attempt to systematise the contents of the theology of mercy according to the schemes of dogmatic treatises. By having done that, they switched the focus of the whole theological reflection from the mere notion of mercy and its works to the self-revelation of the Triune God, whose all works make up the aspects of one and only self-revelation of the Trinitarian mystery.¹ The theologians noted that the Triune God fully reveals His nature precisely by His mercy. In this way, they overcame the predominant tendency of an aspectual treatment of the mystery of mercy from the perspective of the Divine attributes, or the bottom-up one, namely –

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¹ The lectures from this conference have been published in the monograph *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, ed. Krzysztof Góźdz and Krzysztof Guzowski (Lublin: KUL, 2010).

tackled from the experience of grace that sinners are granted from the merciful God. Unfortunately, this approach had contributed to the situation where mercy had been understood principally along the lines of the “corporal works of mercy.” Rare occasions when the “spiritual works of mercy” were at all mentioned had been limited to the functional meaning. Polish dogmaticians, in the same way as Pope Francis, fully agree that mercy is not a mere attribute of the Divinity, but the revelation of the essence and salvific work of the Trinity. As a result, human mercy ought to consist in imitating God in His mercy. This a crucial criterion of moving from *logos* to *ethos*, from the truth to action. Christian will practise works of mercy, only if they partake in God’s – i.e. Trinitarian – work of saving the entire man and... all men with no exception. God wants to lead all men to Himself. It is for that reason that the Father has sent forth the Spirit and the Son.²

In the bull *Misericordiae vultus*, we come across various passages in which the top-down movement is outlined. The other kind of movement – bottom-up – is possible only thanks to God’s initiative. Owing to the fact the Christ descended from on high and entered history, the bottom-up movement of mercy is possible. The individuals of the Church, by means of the works of mercy, attain salvation, at the same time incorporating others in the stream of salvation. Therefore, thanks to the attitude and the works of mercy, we have the participation in the mercy of God Himself and in His life. The salvific mediation of Christ has become the cause of both the eternal covenant and the mediation of the Church. In the mystery of the Church, we may discern both movements – from God to man and from man to God. Divine mercy, worked in the Church, cannot be reduced to some cases of man’s misery, but it should have a universal scope, since as such it emerges from the contemplation of the mercy revealed in Christ.

It so happens that Christian societies leave the matter of justice to administration, forgetting that it is in fact the situation of sin and fall that calls for the Church to represent Divine Mercy. Christ, performing His mission in Palestine in a given context of political situation, did not cease to work and proclaim Divine mercy, which is a clue for the Christians of today. Pope Francis writes: “With our eyes fixed on Jesus and His merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity. The mission Jesus received from

² Cf. Krzysztof Gózdź, “Miłosierdzie jako nawiązanie komunii Boga i człowieka,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 9-11; Agnieszka Dudek, “Relacyjny charakter miłosierdzia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 418-21.

the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness.”³ Mercy is more than compassion, but rather God’s engagement in the history of mankind “from within,” inasmuch as the Person of Jesus Christ is the meaning and shape of the revelation of Divine mercy. “Jesus of Nazareth, by His words, His actions, and His entire person reveals the mercy of God.”⁴ Jesus Christ is the epitome of mercy, so it is in Him, as the new Torah, that the Church reads the rule of the new law – the law of mercy. Christ has loved all men, especially sinners, who He came to set free. He, however, has not loved the sin that is the cause of the debilitation and break of the bond with God. The key to the revelation of mercy is therefore the cross of salvation.⁵

1. THE CROSS REVEALS THE MEANING OF DIVINE MERCY AND SERVES AS THE CRITERION FOR ITS UNDERSTANDING

In the Catholic theology of the 20th century, there were a number of key changes in the field of pursuing theology. Apart from some minute changes, it is worth paying closer attention to two revolutions – the “Trinitarian revolution,” and the discovery of the benefits of personalist thought that ensued, as well as the “anthropological revolution,” which was directly related to the readjustment of the historical thought in theology. Rahner’s axiom: “The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity,” opened the way for theologians to combine all the redemptive works with the internal life of the Persons of the Trinity, whose radiance was seen on Christ’s face.⁶ The mystery of Pasover also began to be reinterpreted in this Trinitarian light, thanks to which Catholic theology has generated its own take on the “theology of the cross,” proposed earlier by protestant thought. Catholic theology completed the theology of the cross in the paschal theology, in which the cross is seen as one of the stages of the revelation of the three Divine Persons in the work of salvation, as well as the mission of the Word Incarnate. Catholic theology more firmly stressed the integrity of paschal events, among which the cross and resurrection are of central importance. “God reveals Himself for the sake of

³ Francis, The Bull *Misericordiae vultus*, no. 8, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html, henceforth abbreviated MV.

⁴ MV, no. 1.

⁵ Cf. Andrzej A. Napiórkowski, “Miłosierdzie Boga. Teo- i antropocentryczna wizja dziejów zbawienia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 323-25.

⁶ Cf. Grzegorz Barth, “Misterium miłosierdzia Bożego jako wartość trynitarno-osobowa,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 331-3.

man's salvation," which means that the history of revelation and the history of salvation coincide as one stream in the history of the world.⁷

In the Trinitarian, top-down perspective, the cross appears as the place of the Trinity's revelation, the sign of Divine mercy, which is called the Redemption. In the same light, Christ's Passover, being the revelation of the Trinity's salvific love, also fully reflects the mystery of God's merciful love. The Son of God's suffering and God the Father's consent to this suffering will never be comprehended with human mind, in the same way as the mercy Christ expresses in the command to love enemies.⁸ The mind which is not enlightened by the faith coming from the Holy Spirit stops at the level of experiencing suffering, which for human nature is but a burden to be rid at any cost. Only after we have begun to reflect on Christ's suffering on the cross in the light of Divine mercy, are we able to discern the truth of the revelation: through incarnation Christ identified Himself with the lot of people, who are enslaved by the sin, death and Satan. At the same time, He identified Himself with the will of the Father, who wishes to set free and grant eternal life to everyone, even the sinner who is debased by evil.⁹ This descent into the very bottom of the abyss of sin (which made the human heart hate the loving God) was the ultimate sign of the revelation of who God is and how mighty His love is. This love that deigns to reach to the lowest point of human misery is the mercy. Therefore, love and mercy are two words that describe the mystery of the Triune God, but they do not stand for different realities. Only God and those who freely said yes to the Holy Spirit, who cries "Abba-Father" in our hearts, are capable of merciful love. Since the meaning of the Cross and Mercy has been revealed, pagans (i.e. people who trust their natural reason) are unable to comprehend either the cross or the love of sinners. The love of enemies is the core of God's mercy, which does not wait until man's conversion, but makes way for it, endowing him with love, so that he may realise that it is impossible to hate if you remain in God's love. This is what goes against nature and man's natural logic.¹⁰

⁷ Cf. Waclaw Depo and Krzysztof Guzowski, "Dogmatyka czy symbolika miłosierdzia?" in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 18-9.

⁸ Cf. Marek Pyc, "Chrystologia," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 111.

⁹ Cf. Roman Karwacki, "Soteriologia," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 127-8; Wojciech Nowacki and Zdzisław Zyśk, "Zbawcza wartość cierpienia w doświadczeniu świętej Faustyny Kowalskiej," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 386-73.

¹⁰ Cf. Józef Warzeszak, "O Bogu Jedynym. Miłosierdzie jako przymiot Boga," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 58; Benedykt J. Huculak, "O Bogu w Trójcy," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 68-71.

Obviously, the mercy revealed in Christ embodies the essence of God even more, since the almighty God could have “carried out [his plans of saving man] using numerous means, and still he chose an unusually strange one – a voluntary and selfless death (on the gallows of the cross) of the Son of God in His adopted, human nature. Human minds flinches at such a ‘passive’ way of fighting against evil”¹¹ The voluntariness in question is the heart of the gift of love. No one forced God – He might have done otherwise, yet He decided on the shortest way, the best one for sinners, not for Himself.

In light of the mystical theory of redemption, what has been redeemed is what has been accepted. Since sin and death had made themselves at home in man (taken as mankind), destroying the bond with the life of God, the Saviour voluntarily took upon Himself the situation of man in sin and death so as to create the new man in this way – the man completely surrendered to God in will, in body, in blood and in death. The Holy Spirit brings us into the new internal life of Christ, anoints us and fills us up with it. The cross was thus the revelation of Divine mercy and Divine nature.¹²

The meaning of the sacrifice of the cross may be understood only in the light of the truth of Divine mercy. Mercy is the unlimited and universal love and, as a consequence, God does not narrow his offer of salvation down to the Chosen People, nor to the Church, or to the just people, who obey the Law. Mercy expresses Him alone – He is measureless and boundless in His mercy. The only dam here can be put up by a creature capable of love, namely – a man or an angel. Nevertheless, we have no right to speak of an objective boundary in this case, because such does not exist. The theory of *apokatastasis*, through the faith in mercy, seems to be trying to nullify the dramatic and evil situation of human sin that is committed consciously and voluntarily. However, God neither sentences His Son to death, nor is He forced to be merciful by sin. God is merciful by virtue of His nature and in the context of the Cross the power of His merciful love is revealed. The work of redemption is a “voluntary act of love that comes from all the three Divine Persons.”¹³ The Son of God consciously and voluntarily offers Himself for all people and describes it as the act of supreme love. Christ’s answer to conscious disobedience is voluntary obedience.¹⁴

¹¹ Wincenty Granat, *Dogmatyka katolicka. Synteza* (Lublin: TN KUL, 1964), 218.

¹² Cf. Włodzimierz Wołyniec, “Charytologia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 186-7.

¹³ Granat, *Dogmatyka*, 220.

¹⁴ Cf. Czesław S. Bartnik “Miłość i miłosierdzie,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 244: “The theology of mercy [has to be] completed with the theology of love; they need to

The most controversial issue in the theology of the cross and mercy is the realness of the Son of God's suffering. National heroes' sacrifice might be comprehensible, because they are not almighty, but weak and mortal. What is shocking, however, is that God's omnipotence gives way to the reality of sin. Here we are to adopt the criteria of biblical and theological thinking. We know that Christ expresses Divine mercy by redeeming man from the captivity of death and renewing his nature. Only by renouncing our human conceptions and carefully listening to the Revelation, can our intellect be opened to the understanding of the depth of mercy rooted in the eternal life of the Trinity, as if in a spring that is reflected in history and in our lives.¹⁵ We are grateful to God for not having to die forever in darkness and loneliness and we are grateful to Him for the love revealed in the suffering of the Son of God. Scripture constantly reminds us of the insurmountability of the shackles of sin without God's help, since each generation adds to the consequences of original sin the consequences of personal and social sins. St Paul by an image of the new Adam, who had to come to pay off (clear) the first Adam's debt and give a new beginning to mankind, shows how profound the work of redemption had to be. It concerned the creation of the new man, and only a partial renovation of human will.¹⁶ Human nature had to be renewed so profoundly and entirely that – as Medieval theologians suggested – man caused the Messiah to suffer, as where sin had increased, the even mightier repairing grace was needed. And here we would need a mystical view, rather than purely human digressions.¹⁷

In the context of a top-down reflection, it is worth adding that in Christianity neither the cross nor death or passion have been thought of as values in themselves, but as manifestations of goodness. Were suffering a mere consequence, manifestation or cause of the evil, God could not have chosen the path of suffering. Since suffering is part of human existence, Christ,

be correlated and mercy must be given more positive meaning so that it may not be equated with pity, and thus turned to a kind of humiliation of man and his creational dignity, which is the fear of contemporary anthropology.”

¹⁵ Cf. Jerzy Szymik, “Pewien zaś Samarytanin... Chrystologia miłosierdzia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 309: “The steep ridge of difference runs here between faith and lack of it. More precisely – between agreement to the Christian image of God, who answers to the inconceivable mystery of suffering with His own suffering, and the disagreement to such an image of God; this refusal takes on the form of disillusionment, despair and rebellion.”

¹⁶ Cf. Janusz Królikowski, “Protologia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 86-7.

¹⁷ Cf. Edward Ozorowski, *Dialogi o Bożym Miłosierdziu* (2nd edition, Białystok-Los Angeles: Wybór, 2008), 41-2.

empathising with the afflicted, chooses it in order to transform it. Anything that man experiences in union with the Saviour will be transformed to goodness. This is the only reading in which the cross, voluntarily agreed upon, is the source of goodness, according to Christ's lesson: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friend" [Jn 15:13]. In light of the resurrection, as a sign of the mercy of the almighty God, all crosses in history are lit up, because "every kind of truthful love brings about goodness," as W. Granat wrote, and even more so the love of the Saviour. The issue of suffering and death was thus absorbed in the process of creating goodness. Those most human issues, such as suffering and death, have acquired a new significance.¹⁸

The greatness of Divine mercy is expressed in the entire life of Christ that "contributed to the creation of goodness in the world, yet the more important role was given to the sacrificial death (and resurrection); 'God set [Him] forth as an expiation, through faith, by his blood' [Rom 3:25]."¹⁹ God's merciful love is the cause of all positive consequences of the Son of God's incarnation, of His works and sacrifice. The Saviour's death brought man numerous goods: liberation from sin, forgiveness of God, compensation, merit, justification, grace, friendship with God, God's heritage, freedom in the Spirit, dignity of the child of God, new life in God, and many others. We can understand Divine Mercy only in the light of Jesus Christ's life and works. He brought in completely new possibilities of self-realisation of man in situations that were perceived as the punishment, as signs of rejection, by the Jews of the times before the Babylonian exile.²⁰

2. MERCY AS GOD'S INVOLVEMENT IN HISTORY

Christ is the face of mercy for yet another reasons. God is directly involved in history through the Person of the Word Incarnate and the Holy Spirit. Christ's sacrifice is frequently understood by non-Christian thinkers as an expression of passivity, or even subservience, in the face of evil. Meanwhile, it is in this sacrifice that "the power of love that can reach to the interior of the human mind and order it got revealed, instead of the activity

¹⁸ Wincenty Granat, *Fenomen człowiek. U podstaw humanizmu chrześcijańskiego* (2nd edition, as part of "Kolekcja Katedry Personalizmu Chrześcijańskiego KUL," Lublin: KUL, 2007), 209-10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁰ Cf. Ozorowski, *Dialogi*, 25-6.

of a victorious leader and an exceptionally wise social reformer.”²¹ Christ had inaugurated God’s reign in the very centre of human history, and through the Holy Spirit, God’s sovereignty extended over human souls, thoughts and consciences. His kingdom is governed by other “rules of power,” which for the sinful world are synonymous to weakness, as God’s work does not entail violence, but love and peace. John Paul II in the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* introduces us to the spirit of the kingdom of God that is ruled by the law of mercy: “The kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program subject to free interpretation, but it is before all else a person with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God. If the kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the kingdom of God which he revealed. The result is a distortion of the meaning of the kingdom, which runs the risk of being transformed into a purely human or ideological goal, and a distortion of the identity of Christ, who no longer appears as the Lord to whom everything must one day be subjected [cf. 1 Cor 15:27].”²²

The new life after Pentecost has been shaped by the Paraclete unto the pattern of Jesus Christ. The Cross is precisely the consent to God’s vision of life that is worthy and to God’s work in human lives, and, at the same time, the dissent to egoism rooted in the human heart. All kinds of humanism that only favour Epicurean delights of life and further joy of possessing, of satisfying human passions, claim that they know the right shape of mercy – it is to be conveyed by agreeing to any lifestyle, as long as man is submissive to the voice of nature, or in fact to himself. Humanity knows how misleading the way of instincts and addictions, which take over man, is. The sufferings triggered by these dependencies are not a fictional, but real tragedy. Therefore, Christ’s cross indicates the transformation of the whole human existence, including the Saviour’s acceptance to carry the crosses of history, so that man may be able to get help to overcome them in union with Christ. Christ’s cross teaches us to look at life as it really is; it “discovers the source of pure joy, teaching to defeat egoism that deprives us of the joy of life.”²³

The perfection of Christ’s sacrifice stems from the voluntariness of accepting it and the dignity with which Jesus experienced it on all levels – during the trial, the way of cross and the crucifixion. The Saviour’s activeness, not passiveness, is manifested by that fact that His spirit resists

²¹ Granat, *Dogmatyka*, 222-3.

²² John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (December 7, 1990), no. 18, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html.

²³ Granat, *Dogmatyka*, 223.

revenge, hatred, the desire to fight back. This is the activity of love and spirit. Spiritual struggle against the voice of instincts prefigures the new humanity's submission to the power of the Holy Spirit after the victory that Christ wins in His body and blood. The Saviour is then the special pattern for all who have to put up with unjust judgement, humiliation, physical sufferings, etc. Christ's cross convinces us that suffering and death alone have a humanistic dimension; love, on the other hand, has a triple dimension – divine, divine-human and human.²⁴ Hence, we cannot grasp the essence of Christian mercy, which flows from these events, independently of human factors connected to the mystery of His sacrifice on the cross and, on the level of faith, without reference to God, who is Love and enables man to such love that is capable of sacrifice.²⁵

In a world driven by human passions, egoism, ambitions, hatred, envy and violence, Christ chose the path of humility, obedience and, above all, love. This is His victory of spirit over all that destroys man from within and truly threatens societies and nations the most, causing disagreement, battles and wars. This is the manifestation of His greatness – He showed that man's goodness and faithfulness to the truth, mission and love are the values that are much greater than life; that one may sacrifice himself to avoid stepping on the way of falsehood, fickleness, or compromise with evil. Therefore, in Christian culture the cross has become the sign of victory, "the sign of faith, hope and love, and in popular tradition, it has changed from the sign of ignominy to the sign of reward and distinction."²⁶

3. THE FATHER'S MERCY REVEALED IN THE RESURRECTION OF THE SON

The truly valuable trend of pneumatological Christology has sprung from paschal theology and the theology of the incarnation. It has raised the possibility of the synthesis of both trends – incarnational and paschal. In pneumatological Christology, Christ's mission is interpreted in the close relationship with the internal life of the Trinity and the missions taking place there, which we learn about from the revelation. In the light of the method incorporated

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 222.

²⁵ Cf. Marian Kowalczyk, "Miłosierdzie Boże w urzeczywistnieniu się królestwa Bożego," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 280-1.

²⁶ Granat, *Fenomen człowieka*, 208.

by the representatives of this trend, Christ's mission and any other of His works point out to the simultaneous participation of the Spirit and, above all, the Father, who is the original Source of the Trinity's life *ad intra* and *ad extra*. According to this assumption, Christ's resurrection reveals Mercy, making possible a partial insight in the Divine plan for the world.

The resurrection is the foundation of Christian faith, which was explicitly stated by St Paul, "and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all" [1 Cor 15:17-19]. Christ's resurrection reveals what has taken place during the redemption of the cross – God took full responsibility for the life of each person owing to the fact that Christ handed His death over to the Father and the Spirit. Since then, death, which had brought about the separation from God, has turned to the cause of eternal union with God.²⁷ It may therefore be stated that the law of death was overcome, because Jesus the Man surrendered Himself completely to the power of God. For this reason, Christ loves sinners, but rejects sin. He leads sinners to the Father, and what separates them from the Father – sin – is eliminated from their body and soul by the power of the Spirit, who dwells in them. This law of Passover is actualised during the liturgy of sacraments that both realises and reveals the mysteries of Christ's own Passover.²⁸

What is insufficient, or even erroneous, is limiting Christian mercy to the help offered to the needy, according to their expectations. Practising Divine mercy requires introducing God and the grace of the Holy Spirit in the very heart of the human lot through sacraments and works of mercy. Man, under humanistic assumptions, needs maximal conditions for his development. Nonetheless, no endeavours, efforts or spiritual exercise can trigger off the indestructibility of the body and eternal life in the transfigured body that is not susceptible to pain, illness, hunger or thirst. Man, however, after the resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit, began to partake in the new life in question.²⁹ These are not merely future consequences for all who will be risen from the dead in Christ, but the present consequences of the resurrection that we experience now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, participating in the love of God through sacraments, gifts and fruit of the

²⁷ Cf. Henryk Szmulewicz, „Eschatologia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 237.

²⁸ Cf. Andrzej Czaja, „Człowiek w ramionach Bożego Miłosierdzia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 254-5.

²⁹ Cf. Grzegorz M. Bartosik, „Pneumatologia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 170-1.

Holy Spirit. Charismatic graces, such as healings, also result from the grace of the resurrection. St Paul presents Divine mercy in the earthly life of man as justification – i.e. forgiveness of sins, rebirth and sanctification of man: “Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as (being) dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus” [Rom 6:11].³⁰ The fruit of the resurrection is the gift of new life in Christ that is “being risen from the dead,” or – as St Paul puts it – renouncement of immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire³¹, and clothing in the new man with his deeds, such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and, above all, love [cf. Col 3:12-15]. This way, a Christian already in this life may experience the truth about the resurrection of Christ, uniting himself with Him and with all people. Moreover, such spiritual resurrection allows us to live with optimism and hope [cf. Rom 6:8].³² This hope is based on God’s faithfulness and omnipotence. He confirmed it by Christ’s resurrection. The Saviour encourages Christians, by means of His resurrection, to let go of the “old man,” and to accept good deeds and remain in joy.³³

The whole programme of Christian life is being carried out in relation to the teaching of the resurrection, because the Holy Spirit is the life-giving principle in “human members” since the moment they receive the life of God in the sacrament of baptism. Divine mercy is realised precisely in that after the resurrection, the old Law, based on orders and prohibitions, was abolished, and the new Law was given unto us – i.e. the Holy Spirit who grants us the strength to live according to His power. Since Pentecost, there has no longer been the division between God’s order, seen as the external law, and human order, taken as natural, which struggles with the imperfection of human nature and unattainability of the perfect order of the life of God. The life of God has served as the yeast of the life-giving grace inside of man. Mercy, as the Divine work in the world, may be realised not necessarily owing to man’s effort, but because now it is “not the suffering Christ that works in the world and the Church, but the resurrected Christ, who grants all His suffering brethren the ultimate victory and resurrection.”³⁴

³⁰ Cf. Rom 6:6-11; Col 3:9-14; Wincenty Granat, “Chrystus – apostoł miłości miłosiernej,” in *Bóg bogaty w miłosierdzie*, by W. Granat (Sandomierz: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne Sandomierz, 2011), 155.

³¹ Cf. Col 3:1-5.

³² Jarosław Kupczak, „Antropologia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 90.

³³ Cf. Wincenty Granat, *Chrystus Odkupiciel i Kościół – Jego Mistyczne Ciało* (Lublin: TN KUL, 1960), 116-7.

³⁴ Granat, *Dogmatyka*, 234; Leon Siwecki, “Eklezjologia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 152-5.

Christ's resurrection has never been perceived in light of Catholic theology as an isolated fact (as the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth), but as the salvific act that "broadens the boundaries of humanity, confirms the transcendental dimension of man, speaks of the full meaning of his life, prevents from disillusionment and despair, points out to the dignity of the human body and value of life in general."³⁵ Christ's resurrection gives an opportunity to attain the fullness of life, which consists in nothing less than possessing God, and is the type of the resurrection of all men. There is a yearning for life present in man, as well as the fear of death, nothingness and meaninglessness, and resurrection is the source of lasting hope, hence it serves as an expression of Divine mercy that embraces not only the situation of man's entanglement in evil, but the entire being of man, from conception to natural death. At the moment of the resurrection of Christ as the first man to be raised from the dead, human nature was elevated, receiving – as entirety – the gift of immortality. The Resurrected prefigures the resurrection of all men. However, the work of redemption stresses the dignity that man was granted at the moment of creation, when he was made in God's image and likeness, as well as at the moment of the Son of God's incarnation, when the nature in question was renewed. Christian mercy is thus based on the reality of Christ and faith in the work of redemption carried out by Him.³⁶

4. LIBERATION AND FREEDOM AS SIGNS OF MERCY

The fact that God is carrying out His plan of mercy not only for the needy, but also for all men, who to attain salvation need the greatest gift – the Holy Spirit, shows us what was the essence of the gift of the redemption. The redemption of man and justification of sins gave man access to the gifts of Divine Mercy. If we take into account the fact that the grace of liberation from the bondage of sins, death and Satan is lasting, and its fruit is given us on a daily basis thanks to the union with Christ through sacraments, it becomes easy for us to understand why Catholic soteriology tends to differentiate between objective and subjective redemption. The latter is also called salvation. Salvation is precisely the incessant influence of the Spirit of the new life upon our internal life so that we may persevere in this freedom and

³⁵ Granat, *Fenomen człowieka*, 213.

³⁶ Krzysztof Gózdź, "Teologia Bożego Miłosierdzia," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 208.

become stronger in it. The fact that Christ once freed us, so that we may be free, and now, with the power of the Spirit, our life is being shaped in the freedom from sin and death, reveals the truth that we live thanks to Divine Mercy, which should be understood dynamically, just as we understand the salvific economy of the Trinity *ad extra*.³⁷

Christ's teaching about His salvific mission presents two key truths. Firstly, Christ travels in order to set people free from various forms of enslavement and to be the redeemer of sinners, paupers, prisoners, the blind and afflicted. Secondly, He announces the coming of the Paraclete, who will be sent to the Church as the continuator of Christ's work. Therefore, the goal of redemption, which Christ carried out by paying the "ransom," is the gift of the new covenant that indicates, generally speaking, the gift of the new life in union with God, under the rule of the Holy Spirit. Redemption has no additional goals – just the one of granting people the dignity of God's children, and, at the same time, the new life that comes directly from the Father, thanks to the Son, and in the power of the Spirit. The teaching and attitude of the Word Incarnate towards the people He met alone are convincing of the fact that man may regain the dignity of God's child and strike up the relationship of friendship with God.³⁸ The first person to be found in the range of the grace of mercy, owing to Christ's works, was the Immaculate. Early on, Christianity connected Her with the basic truths of faith – the Incarnation and Redemption.³⁹

Christ's grace of redemption, although it concerns, above all, the redemption of man from the bondage of sin, which used to block man's access to the life of God, comprises various spheres of human life. Christ Himself interpreted sin as enslavement: "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So if a son frees you, then you will truly be free" [Jn 8:34-36]. Divine Mercy, as revealed in the redemption, is capable of setting free and granting true freedom, which is shaped after the redeemed existence. Christ the Lord liberated us from the bondage of passions, loneliness,

³⁷ Paweł Warchoń, "Miłosierdzie według Jana Pawła II," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 350-1.

³⁸ Anotni Słomkowski, "Miłosierdzie Boże we Wcieleniu i Odkupieniu," in *Ewangelia miłosierdzia*, ed. Wincenty Granat (Poznań–Warszawa: Pallottinum, 1970), 88.

³⁹ Cf. Wojciech Życiński, "Mariologia," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 142-3; Stanisław C. Napiórkowski, "Tajemnica miłosierdzia," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 482.

fear, minute regulations, superstitious practices and anything that is sinful or leads to sin.⁴⁰

Hence, Christians find in mercy – taken as the act of God Himself – the pattern of how to help man. Since God, through the work of redemption, eradicates, first of all, the causes and results of internal enslavement – sin – so as to impact the change of social relations as well, Christianity ought to deem itself to be an extension of God's hands, and not merely an institution that helps people found in dire straits. It transpires that the lack of the top-down perspective of mercy has led certain Christian circles and cliques to belittle sin as the factor that cuts people off from God and ushers evil into social relations. Vigilance has been dulled, especially in the prosperous countries.⁴¹ In the times of Christ, slavery was commonplace. Its end was, to a great extent, brought about by the spread of Christ's teaching. Proclamation of brotherhood, equality before God and, above all, the life of Christians, which is steeped in love, slowly changed this sphere of human life as well. However, throughout history, Christianity brought into the world various forms of freedom without formulating political decrees and economic reforms – being guided solely by the faithfulness to the Gospel and obedience to the Holy Spirit. This proves that Christian mercy is in need of the prophetic spirit so as to find out God's views on freedom and enslavement.⁴² A purely external outlook is certainly insufficient, as it is the heart of man, as Christ says, that is the place to be transformed so that the face of the world may change.⁴³ Therefore, redemption is, first and foremost, the answer to man's moral enslavement, but it opens him up to the sanctity of life in the Holy Spirit, who deifies the entire human being and elevates him to a higher level of being. In his teaching on the novelty of life and new creation, St Paul sees the direct relationship between the state of the new life according to the Spirit and the grace of redemption. The Apostle sets out an integral conception of redemption and salvation when he depicts the vision of the renewal of the entire creation in Christ. This novelty of life is both a gift and a task to be carried out.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Cf. Granat, *Chrystus Odkupiciel*, 70.

⁴¹ Cf. Sławomir Pawłowski, "Błogosławiony ksiądz Michał Sopoćko – prorok Miłosierdzia Bożego," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 380-3.

⁴² Cf. Jarosław Grabowski, "Czy miłosierdzie przeczy sprawiedliwości? Odpowiedź Jana Pawła II," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 186.

⁴³ Cf. Mt 7:16-20 and Mt 12:34-35.

⁴⁴ Cf. Granat, *Chrystus Odkupiciel*, 68-9.

The question of subjective freedom and freedom in the face of sin is juxtaposed in the New Testament with the issue of the spiritual struggle. God reveals Himself in His mercy not only in the salvific works of Christ, but also in the constant accompaniment of grace on the way to salvation. A Christian, possessing the grace of the Holy Spirit, undertakes the daily effort of discernment, because human nature, contaminated as it is with original sin, is the battlefield of whether to choose good or evil – real or false good. St Paul writes about this tension and need for fighting for the freedom of God's child in the Letter to the Romans: "For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" [Rom 7:22-23]. The redeemed man is also liable to the temptations of satan. Here St Paul leaves no alternatives: satan works through a community of people whose will is subjected to the prince of darkness. There is a community in evil by analogy with the community in good. "You were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you once lived following the age of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the desires of our flesh, following the wishes of the flesh and the impulses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest" [Eph 2:1-3]. The Apostle encourages the Ephesians to put on the full armour of God, so that they "may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil" [Eph 6:11]. God's weapon is the truth, justice, peace, word of God, faith and prayer [Eph 6:13-18].⁴⁵

The subject of freedom is one of the key problems that make it clear that the top-down reading of the mystery of Divine mercy is indispensable, since redemption expresses and shapes the mercy. On the other hand, it is the redeemed man, who has been granted the life in the Holy Spirit, which fully reflects the constancy and permanence of the grace of mercy. "Remaining in Christ" guarantees the lasting participation in the life of God, which should be perceived dynamically and personally. The Holy Spirit's presence in a Christian and in the Church is identical to the presence and work of Divine Mercy, because the Paraclete, on the one hand, sets us free from sins and cleanses us from their consequences, and, on the other, forms in us a will so that we may be capable of receiving salvation. In scholastic theology, the grace and love of God were distinguished in order to stress that the grace is

⁴⁵ Granat, *Fenomen człowieka*, 194; Jerzy Lewandowski, "Miłosierdzie Boże wczoraj i dziś," in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 274.

the work of love. In the same vein, we may tell Divine Mercy from the grace of mercy, as well as the essence of God is distinguished from His action. The distinction in question, however, helps us to see more clearly that God, who is Mercy, reveals His essence to us through the works of mercy, among which the most important are redemption and sanctification. The work of Divine Mercy is actuated and spread by the Church, which, by administering sacraments, preaching the Word and practising active charity, does not represent herself, but God.⁴⁶

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Among the ever growing amount of literature dealing with the theology of Divine Mercy, few synthetic studies that present hermeneutic approach are found. What is meant here is a joint take on both orthodoxy and orthopraxy in regard to the subject of Divine Mercy, as mercy cannot be properly read on the basis of the anthropological or sociological perspective. Mercy is the fundamental tie between God and man; therefore, we get to know its essence from the Revelation. In light of Revelation, the mystery of mercy indicates both God's nature and His acts. Particular truths of faith lead us to the only Truth – Christ. Prof Czesław Bartnik thus claims, “It may be said that living theology is an attempt to reach this vision of God, oneself and reality that Jesus Christ had. This basically comes down to the vision of one Truth – Jesus Christ. However, in the human analysis, the Truth will be reflected in countless fragments that in practice were called ‘dogmas.’”⁴⁷

The truth that Christ is the face of the Father's mercy is expressed in both the Incarnation and Redemption. Works of mercy, theologically speaking, are the salvific works of Christ – His passion, death and resurrection, as well as the Eucharist that constitutes the continuation of Christ's sacramental presence and the Holy Spirit's works of salvation. Nevertheless, God did not become merciful only because of sin. After the sin, however, the depth of love has been revealed. It has been given different name to stress the infinite difference between what man understands by charity and pity, and the mercy that springs from within God.⁴⁸ The tie between the man created in the image

⁴⁶ Siwecki, “Eklezjologia,” 150-3.

⁴⁷ Czesław S. Bartnik, *Metodologia teologiczna* (Lublin: n.p., 1998), 37.

⁴⁸ Cf. Czesław Rychlicki, “‘Demitologizacja’ obrazu Boga w *Deus Caritas est* Benedykta XVI,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, 443-447.

and likeness of God is deeper than the creative tie of existence itself, for this is the tie of love. "It is love which not only creates the good but also grants participation in the very life of God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For he who loves desires to give himself."⁴⁹ Works of mercy discover the source of life for all people – not only for sinners – which exists in God. Therefore, mercy's scope is universal – we are unable to foresee its limits, since it is in mercy that God transcends even the boundaries between God and people that sin introduced.⁵⁰ The Holy Spirit's breath is also the feature of the universality we call Divine Mercy.

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⁴⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical *Dives in misericordia* (November 30, 1980), no. 7, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html.

⁵⁰ Cf. Góźdz, "Miłosierdzie jako nawiązanie komunii," 9.

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