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GOD IN THE GLOBAL CITY

A b s t r a c t. The global city became a significant symbol of radical secularization as well as a sign of *God's eclipse* in contemporary society. The experience of the absence of God seems to be one of the pivotal problems for the ecclesiology of communion, which interprets the mission of the Church in the light of the “signs of time.” In this paper the author presents the city as a life space where people of all nations and cultures can find the presence of God in both secular and religious realms. Using the correlation method typical of contextual theology, he describes the phenomenon of the secular city with some of its features and potentials. Then he identifies the signs of God's presence in the global city in the light of the teaching of Pope Francis. Further on in the article, the author describes the Church as a sacrament of liberation in the context of so called “experience of contrast” characteristic for a metropolis. Finally, he formulates some pastoral implications.

Key words: God's presence; global city; Church; liberation; signs of time; secularization; hope.

In his best-selling book *The Secular City* published in 1965, American Baptist theologian Harvey Cox took up and developed Bonhoeffer's remarkable idea, namely, that the world has changed dramatically and no longer takes the presence of God for granted. The city became a significant symbol of radical secularization and the process of globalization as well as a sign of *God's eclipse* in contemporary society. Proponents of the “death of God” theology (e.g., Paul van Buren, William Hamilton, and Thomas Altizer) noted that modern people are not talking about the absence of the experience of God; rather, they speak of the experience of the absence of God.¹ The motif

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¹ Cf. Thomas ALTIZER, William HAMILTON, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*

of the “death of God” seemed to capture the atmosphere of an important moment in the Western cultural history of the late 60s. Now, half a century later, these problems remain as relevant as when they appeared for the first time. Today we can rightly ask: Is God really dead in the social sphere? Are we still able to recognize his presence and action among everyday human activities? Can we responsibly develop contemporary theology out of our human concerns? The exploration of the relationship among the rise of urban civilization and the decline of institutional religion seems to be one of the pivotal problems for the ecclesiology of communion, which is always ready to interpret the mission of the Church in the light of the “signs of time.”

In this paper I will present the city as a life space where people of all nations and faiths can fulfill their potential and find the presence of God in both secular and religious realms. Using the correlation method typical of contextual theology, I will first describe the phenomenon of the secular city with some of its features and potentials. Then I will identify the signs of God’s presence in the global city in the light of ecclesiology of communion. Further on in the article, I will describe the Church as a sacrament of liberation in the context of so called “experience of contrast” characteristic for a metropolis. Finally, I will formulate some pastoral implications.

1. PHENOMENON OF THE SECULAR CITY

Sociologists have described the modernization process in different ways. Some of them (T. Parsons and his school) argue that this process has happened in spite of the Church and institutional religion. Others (A. Greeley and his school) insist that the Christian faith made the technological and scientific revolutions possible. According to Parsons, one can easily note the growth of competing institutions alongside the Church and the family. Some productive and economic functions have been taken away from the family unit and shifted to new corporations. At the same time, the Church yielded many of her legal, economic, education and welfare functions to the new state institutions. On the contrary, Greeley says that certain uniquely Christian notions led to the new outlook on secular reality. Christians have understood that science is not only an accumulation of knowledge for its own sake but rather

(Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966); Paul VAN BUREN, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1963).

for the sake of action. Similarly, they discovered that history is a process rather than a cycle and that the universe is intelligible (that is, it has design and purpose) and therefore understandable. Seriously taking into account the secular value of the world, they started to consider this world as a sacrament of God's presence. They became aware of the calling from God to collaborate actively with the divine plan for the world.² Harvey Cox presented a similar statement in *The Secular City*. In his opinion, secularization – understood as a process of moving away from a religious answer to every human problem and toward the acceptance of human responsibility for life upon earth – is not the enemy of the Gospel. Secularization is the fulfilment of God's command to fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:28) rather than a betrayal of Christian vocation. Cox suggested that one should carefully distinguish between two notions: secularization and secularism. The former (secularization) is a descriptive term that implies a historical liberating process in which society and culture are delivered from the tutelage of religious or church control. The latter (secularism) is the belief that religion should be eliminated from the ordinary social and political activities of a country. Secularism can easily become an ideology imposed through the organs of the state.³

For such theologians as H. Cox, J. Robinson, P. Tillich, and E. Schillebeeckx secularization doesn't mean the denial of God. Rather, secularization denotes a new way of thinking and speaking of God in a world which has changed profoundly and rapidly over the past several decades. It is evident that science and technology have contributed a lot to modernity. Modern improvements in transportation and communication have been made possible on account of science and technology. Material growth and educational progress has liberated people from having to accept things simply as they are, giving to humanity powerful means with which to change the world and build a hopeful future. In addition, science and technology have also help to foster the new human consciousness regarding an essential aspect of human existence, namely, that we are persons in dialogue. Today more so than in the past, we understand the values of racial and gender equality. We respect more and more freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. Generally speaking, we developed a deeper awareness of our interdependence and a greater sensitivity toward our responsibility for the peace, freedom, reconciliation, and unity of

² Richard MCBRIEN, *Catholicism. New Edition* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), 91.

³ Harvey COX, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective. With a new introduction by the author* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 25.

the human race. The Vatican II document *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* is a credible and insightful answer to the new set of challenges produced by the process of modernization which the Church faces. The proposition *in* is here very important, as this ecclesiastical document doesn't want to describe the Church and the world as separated from each other. The pastoral constitution emphasizes the integration of Church and world, namely, that the Church is not something completely outside or independent of the world. The Church is "other worldly." She is not *non-world*, but neither is she by her nature of this world. The relationship between the Church and the world seems to be not dialectical but rather analogical. There is no dialectical opposition between Church and world. These realities are more similar than dissimilar. We cannot understand the Church as a simple negation or antithesis of the world, as the Church by definition is not against the world. She is not to condemn secular reality but to be for the world a sacrament of salvation whose origin is from God (*sacramentum mundi*). The pastoral constitution states: "In their proper spheres, the political community and the Church are mutually independent and self-governing. Yet, by a different title, each serves the personal and social vocation of the same human beings" (n. 76). This ecclesiastical document encouraged the Church to enter into the dialogue with the modern world. It underlined very clearly that the Church cannot be seen as an isolated island or small ghetto of believers separated from the heart of the world. The process of modernization is a special opportunity for the Church, because it reveals the interdependence of the people which requires mutual support and openness toward each other in public dialogue between various groups within society. This leads Christians to rediscover the value of the brotherhood and sisterhood of all human beings as children of God, the one Creator of the universe. To accept the unity of the human race in its diversity means similarly to recognize the richness and generosity of God whose will is to unite and save all his children. There is no doubt that one of the most important achievements of Vatican II is the Church's adoption of a generally positive, though not uncritical, attitude toward modernity.⁴ The main task of the Church indicated by the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* is the "duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (n. 4). The Church doesn't live and develop in a cultural vacuum. To fulfill effectively her salvific mission as the sacrament of God's presence in the history of

⁴ R. MCBRIEN, *Catholicism*, 92-96.

humankind, the Church must “recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics” (n. 4).

We can rightly ask: What are the principal features of the modern world? It is not my intention to present the whole panorama of the modern world with all its ups and downs. I would like to discuss only a few aspects of contemporary culture which seem important for contemporary contextual theology. The largest modern cities have become the sign of economic, social and cultural changes. Even more, they are now a kind of local junkyard of the many problems produced by globalization. The big metropolises are becoming more and more a kind of laboratory where people experiment with their life and try to learn how to live with such problems without solving them. Enough has been written so far to explain the economic effects of globalization. Hence it is better to consider the migration aspect of this process. In the history of modern migration, we can distinguish three waves: emigration from the wealthy, developed countries to the new unknown territories (colonization), “reverse” immigration (after the collapse of colonial empires) and new emigration (current two-way migration). The latter inaugurated a time of different diasporas, an archipelago of ethnic, religious and linguistic settlements widely spread all over the world. All of these diaspora-archipelagos are fragmented and internally incoherent. They are extended beyond the one territorial sovereignty and authority of a given state. The new emigrants do not follow the older imperial-colonial directions of travel but undertake the new paths marked primarily by globalization. This produces the so-called “double nationality” and “double loyalty” effect. Instead of being rooted in the history and culture of the given territory they occupy, the emigrants are only temporarily anchored, always ready to leave. Life *in* and *among* diasporas pose very important questions about the possibility of coexistence among different cultures.⁵

It is evident that the city makes a space where the strangers live close to each other. The presence of such newcomers, especially when they live together in close proximity to native citizens, becomes very often a source of anxiety and hidden aggression. People try to find a way how of living in a space which is to be shared with the strangers. Of course, that is a matter of a personal choice, but the necessity of this choice in everyday life is indis-

⁵ Zygmunt BAUMAN, *44 Letters from the Liquid Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 149-152.

putable. Zygmunt Bauman identifies two contrasting tendencies: *mixophobia* and *mixophilia*. The former denotes rejection of foreigners and manifests itself in the tendency toward a “community of sameness.” The latter signifies acceptance and openness to novelty, diversity, risk, surprise and danger which are immanent features of urban life. *Mixophobia* and *mixophilia* coexist in every city. These tendencies are present as well inside every one of those who live in major cities. *Mixophobia* looks for the small islands of homogeneity in the big ocean of diversity and results in building “gated communities” in the cities.⁶ The walls, electronic gates, monitoring and security guards are to protect rich people against the potential dangers. The inhabitants in the “gated communities” desire above all to secure their freedom from all threats, being ready to pay a lot of money for this. The key question is the following: is coexistence with strangers the only reason which generates the feeling of being threatened? Is it true that the walls and gates will effectively protect us against this fear? Is not this hope a vain one?

But here is the rub: there are many reasons which cause our feeling of danger other than the proximity of strangers. People can easily become unhappy because of unemployment, loss of social status, economic crisis, disease, accidents, natural catastrophes or family trouble. Every day experience confirms that we are still living in a risk society. Unlimited safety seems to be a delusion. The inhabitants of “gated communities” sometimes suffer from an obsession for security. They become addicted to new technologies which promise ever greater security and certainty. But we must remember that even the best equipment cannot entirely ensure customer safety and satisfaction. The more technological inventions there are, the more anxiety in regard to whether they will function well or not. Eliminating all fear remains always a dangerous utopia.

Modern cities are mainly shaped by anonymity and mobility. They are also marked by a pluralism of cultures, world-views and religions. Quite recently, such large cities were also severely and dramatically targeted by terrorist attacks. City living is not without ambiguity and ambivalence. We cannot forget that cities simultaneously attract and repel. The variety of urban environments can be a source of confusion and fear, but the same urban scenery, full of novelty and surprise, can be also a source of inspiration and creative power. Because of its heterogeneity, the city may support and offer more attractions than rural or small town life. This can help to overcome repetitive

⁶ Ibidem, 157-162.

routine and stagnancy in both one's mode of thinking and in action. Cities are ambiguous places, full of contrasting experiences, tensions, struggle and conflicts. They are spaces of life where "the magic blend of security and adventure – of supervision and freedom, of routine and surprise, of sameness and variety – is sought, with mixed success."⁷ City life, like a mirror, reflects the course of the secularization process which consists of three dimensions: the disenchantment of nature, the desacralization of politics and the deconsecration of values (i.e., no longer treating values as sacred).⁸ City life also manifests desecularization trends and forces (e.g., the worldwide resurgence of religion), giving rise to a deeply modified image of God from the Christian tradition. Taking into consideration such complex and ambiguous phenomena of the so-called "secular city", we rightly ask: How can Christians find God's face in a large metropolis, a place symptomatic of human worries and expectations?

2. THE SIGNS OF GOD'S PRESENCE IN GLOBAL CITY

The topic of God's presence and action in the large cities of the world was taken up by Pope Francis during his last apostolic visit to the United States of America. In his homily spoken at Madison Square Garden (New York City, September 25, 2015), the Pope described the large city as a place where people constantly carry within them "all their joys and hopes, their disappointments and regrets."⁹ In his opinion, the metropolis is also a living environment where the variety of languages, customs and historical experiences meets the common interests of many people from different cultures, religions, races and styles of life. The city has been described by the Pope primarily in a personalist and theological way. The real richness of our metropolises is not their technological achievements but human persons – concrete people living in different parts of the city. The city is also a place where God can be revealed with his message of hope and liberation. Although living in a large city is not always easy because of the pressure of a multicult-

⁷ Zygmunt BAUMAN, *City of Fears, Cities of Hopes* (London: Goldsmiths College, 2003), 25.

⁸ H. COX, *The Secular City*, 26-37.

⁹ FRANCIS, "Homily (Madison Square Garden, NYC 2015)", in: *The Allure of Goodness and Love: Pope Francis in the United States, Complete Texts* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), 63.

tural context, Pope Francis finds its basic value in bringing together “all the different ways which we human beings have discovered to express the meaning of life.”¹⁰ The city is therefore not supposed to be a field of social upheaval and ruthless economic competition. It can become a forum for sharing the various viewpoints on the meaning of life.

Adjacent to its splendid features and opportunities, each city always has its dark side, sometimes quite hidden. As former archbishop of Buenos Aires, Pope Francis knows from his personal experience all the social maladies typical for such metropolises, where the gigantic economic contrast between different urban areas is evident. For this reason, in his homily he openly spoke about so called second-class citizens: people deprived of their right to live in the city and be a part the urban environment. In such an atmosphere of traffic noise and the rapid pace of change, many faces pass by unnoticed, creating a depersonalized background for the true and important actors in the urban scenery (namely, the first-class citizens). By his preaching in New York City, Pope Francis became a voice for the voiceless. He spoke of the tragic fate of “the foreigners, the children who go without schooling, those deprived of medical insurance, the homeless, the forgotten elderly.”¹¹ The current pluralistic, urbanized and mobile society has elaborated a special technique to protect itself from such oppressive feeling of loneliness. Erving Goffman calls this “civic indifference.”¹² This means avoiding any contacts with others and providing comfortable anonymity as a value of primary importance. This attitude may lead to moral indifference, loneliness in a crowd and total social self-marginalization.

In the face of this danger mentioned above, the Pope encourages people to believe in the saving presence of God in all circumstances of human existence. Strictly guarding anonymity and escaping from public life into one’s own subjectivity is not a solution. That only magnifies the sense of desolation and finally leads to despair and isolation. The solution rather is to start with learning to see more than heretofore: to learn to notice those persons heretofore unnoticed and look at reality in a deeper way. Even in the midst of smog produced by our cities, Christians can discover the merciful face of God who never abandons his people. According to the Pope, “knowing that

¹⁰ Ibidem, 64.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Anthony GIDDENS, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 46-47.

Jesus still walks our streets, that he is part of the lives of his people, that he is involved with us in one vast history of salvation, fills us with hope.”¹³ What is this hope given us by Jesus, and how does it work? Surely this hope does not offer us cheap consolation nor does it neglect our engagement in making the world more just and peaceful. On the contrary, it gives people the power to overcome all alienation, pessimism and passivity. As the Pope rightly underlines, this is a hope “which liberates us from the forces pushing us to isolation and lack of concern for the lives of others, for the life of our city. A hope which frees us from empty connections, from abstract analyses, or sensationalist routines. A hope which is unafraid of involvement, which acts as a leaven wherever we happen to live and work.”¹⁴

But who can teach us to see the life-giving light in the darkness of urban smog? How do we encounter the living God in the urban landscape, pulsing with daily affairs and concerns? In his homily, Pope Francis cited the famous fragment of Isaiah who had prophesied: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:1). His prophesy certainly can be related to Jesus who became for us “Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Listening to the words of this biblical prophet, we are able to enter spiritually into the life of our Savior, so that his life can be manifested in our life. This is not a simple and “mechanical imitation” of Jesus’ lifestyle. It is rather a living together in such deep communion with Jesus that his essential values can be expressed in and through our free human actions. Therefore Christians should not become simply duplicates (simple copies) of inimitable Jesus, but rather credible witnesses of the Risen Lord doing his works in their own lives. “Truly, truly, I tell you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I am doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12).

The Church as a pilgrim fellowship of faith is also responsible for the accurate interpretation of the biblical titles related to Jesus. In this hermeneutical service, the Church always tries to interpret the meaning of the Christian faith within the context of contemporary culture, i.e., in the context of the so-called liquid modern world. How should we understand the title “Wonderful Counselor” in relation to Jesus? The Pope explains that in the biblical story, one finds a Christ who proposes, encourages and motivates people. Therefore

¹³ FRANCIS, “Homily (Madison Square Garden, NYC 2015)”, 64.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

the Church is always called and urged by Jesus to go out and meet people in the different places where they stay, live and sometime deeply suffer. Contemporary ecclesiology should never present the ecclesial community as a passive or esoteric group of contemporary neo-Gnostics constantly separating themselves from the everyday life. The Church has been sent to the world as a sacramental community open to everyone, especially to those who are sad, sick, lost, hopeless, oppressed and wounded. It is very important for the Church to develop in herself a spiritual instinct rooted in the constant guidance of Holy Spirit. By having merciful and perceptive eyes, the Church is able to see and meet people “where they really are, not where we think they should be.”¹⁵ Without this human sensitivity, the Church would seem to be another “cold” institution or simply one of many ideologies. In large cities where people experience deafening anonymity, it is the mission of Church to go out and accompany individuals and groups on the roads of their life without “fear and hesitation.”

Another biblical title to be considered is “Mighty God.” For secularized society, a powerful God seems to be a dangerous idea. Nowadays, the connotation of the word “almighty” is often negative. It causes anxiety that God’s omnipotence means in fact a kind of violence against the world, in particular against human freedom. To counter this objection, we must remember that in the Christian creed, one finds the following phrase: “We believe in one God, the Father almighty.” This means that Christians do not believe in impersonal divine energy which can be dangerous for the people because of its omnipotent power. They do believe in personal God who has the concrete face of a loving Father. The love of this Father for all people is almighty, creative and merciful. The Church has been called by the Holy Spirit and is constantly inspired to be a witness to Jesus in whom “God himself became Emmanuel, God-with-us, the God who walks alongside us, who gets involved in our lives, in our homes, in the midst of our ‘pots and pans’, as Saint Teresa of Jesus liked to say.”¹⁶

It is not easy for the people living in liquid modern society to accept the existence of any everlasting things. Reality seems to be very fragile, mutable and unbalanced. We can even speak of ‘liquid life’ which cannot keep its shape for long time. Bauman rightly noticed that such ‘liquid life’ “is a pre-

¹⁵ Ibidem, 65.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

carious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty.”¹⁷ In this kind of life “getting rid of things takes precedence over their acquisition.” However, in this fast-changing world, the Church should have courage to proclaim God as an Everlasting Father. God has revealed himself not as a perfectly immobile first Mover but as a merciful Father “who himself goes out, morning and evening, to see if his son has returned home and, as soon as he sees him coming, runs out to embrace him.”¹⁸ To believe in the Everlasting Father means to be deeply convinced that no circumstances can separate us from God’s eternal Love. Pope Francis evokes the symbol of the Fatherly embrace taken from Jesus’ teaching. It is never an embrace of enslavement but always a gesture of the purification and elevation of human dignity.

In cities around the world, we observe many conflicts, prejudices, racial antagonisms and religion enmities. Cities are multicultural; they consist of many various subcultures which do not always live together in peace and harmony. Although they coexist in the same urban space, they often resort to violence, intolerance, racism and segregation. Edward Schillebeeckx expressed this perfectly by using term ‘contrast experience’.¹⁹ On the one hand, there are people who are rich, filled with food, and able to develop personal and family life. On the other hand, we find in the same cities people who are poor, sick, hungry, and oppressed, without means necessary for life. Pope Francis is deeply aware of this painful contrast we see in our everyday life. He wrote in his exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* that cities are often “the scene of mass protests where thousands of people call for freedom, a voice in public life, justice and a variety of other demands which, if not properly understood, will not be silenced by force” (n. 74).

Taking account of this constant ambivalence created by major cities, we should not fall in despair. Christians believe in the God who is the loving Father of all nations. He is not the God of revenge or persecution but of forgiveness and reconciliation. At Madison Square Garden, Pope Francis emphasized that God in his immanence is always walking at the side of every human being. This action of God accompanying his people describes the subtle divine presence which is the deepest source of every spiritual and social renewal of humanity. God has revealed Jesus as the Prince of Peace.

¹⁷ Zygmunt BAUMAN, *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁸ FRANCIS, “Homily (Madison Square Garden, NYC 2015)”, 65.

¹⁹ Edward SCHILLEBEECKX, *Church. The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 5.

That beautiful metaphor helps us to understand that God is never far from his creatures but wants to be for them a loving and merciful Liberator and Peace-giver. In our religious and theological language, the meaning of the term salvation is too often limited to the transcendent aspect of salvation of human souls (e.g., the popular slogan “save your soul”). The term salvation (understood as healing) refers not only to the eschatological fulfilment of every human being but also to the betterment and renewal of worldly realities. Hence salvation also means liberation from all kinds of social oppression. In the history of salvation, God manifests himself not as one who upholds the unjust social order but as a great Liberator of men and women from all the circumstances which degrade their human dignity. According to Pope Francis, God “frees us from anonymity, from a life of emptiness, and brings us to the school of encounter.”²⁰ He is always ready to liberate us from unhealthy competition and destructive self-absorption which seem to be the root of various conflicts, tensions and struggles. He calls Christians to be open to genuine peace, which is the fruit of accepting others in need as sisters and brothers, never as enemies and competitors.

3. THE CHURCH AS SACRAMENT OF LIBERATION IN THE GLOBAL CITY

In contemporary contextual ecclesiology, the accent is placed on the fact that the Church is essentially for this world the sacrament of Christ’s liberating presence. The salvation given by God in Christ which is proclaimed by the Church cannot be understood as an abstract reality. If we believe that Christ is the true Savior of the world, the salvation brought by him should be at least partially visible in this world. Otherwise the preaching of salvation given us by Christ would easily become an ideology not worthy of belief. The proclamation of salvation that came to us in Jesus is not merely a simple recollection or description of his salvific words and actions; it is also our deep participation in his on-going salvific activity through the creative imitation of the Savior’s manner of life. People living in the state of oppression need to be consoled by the power of the Holy Spirit, whose delicate and effective presence can cure the deepest wounds of human existence. But such consolation is not sufficient for oppressed people. They also need to be libe-

²⁰ FRANCIS, “Homily (Madison Square Garden, NYC 2015)”, 65.

rated from everything which oppresses them. The Church is called to harmonize the proclamation of Gospel with social engagement by helping the poor and bringing change both to human hearts and the structures of evil.

Usually we interpret a city in a functional manner, seeing it mainly as a large network of different social groups. But Pope Francis invites Christians to look at the global cities “with a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith which sees God dwelling in their homes, in their streets and squares” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 71). Does this not sound too anthropomorphic to contemporary society? Is not this a hidden acceptance of a radical dualistic vision of reality? Are we not too naïve, believing in two parallel worlds? Despite its mythological language, this papal statement tries to underline the inexpressible presence of God that can be understood as the deepest ground of such values as solidarity, brotherhood, truth, good and justice. One of the goals undertaken by the Church is to help people to discover this saving and liberating divine presence which is manifested permanently through the existence of values. God’s presence is not the product of our imagination; it is by no means a kind of delusion. His presence is always something prior to our human knowing and action. The Church community as a sacrament of the Risen Lord has been sent into this world to be a credible sign for those who seek God with a sincere heart. She is oriented towards God’s Kingdom that is still growing up on this earth. Being a great sign of God’s Kingdom, the Church is called to enter into dialogue with all those who seek the meaning of life and religion. Instead of supporting isolation and mutual distrust, she puts much effort into promoting the culture of solidarity, encounter and integration among people.

Pope Francis spurs the members of the Church to believe that God is living in our global cities stigmatized by rush and desolation. He wants us to offer a wonderful gift of hope which is not a passive expectation for a better future but rather our responsible, human cooperation with God’s grace which overcomes all painful alienations. This hope which is both a gift and a task will always win, even in the age of the “fear of the future.”²¹ At the present moment, Christians are conscious of their responsibility for the world’s future. They remember well the prophetic words of Pope Francis who teaches us that to give the world hope “means more than simply acknowledging the centrality of the human person; it also implies nurturing the gifts of each man and woman. It means investing in individuals and in those settings

²¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Europa* (Vatican, 2003), n. 8.

in which their talents are shaped and flourish.”²² In the light of this message, all parish communities are invited to promote faith, family life, education, ecology, dignity of labor and to care for all people in need.

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The prophetic voice of Pope Francis challenges us to avoid abstract preaching and theology that neglect the problem of poverty, discrimination and suffering in the world today. It would be something contradictory to the heart of Gospel if we were to celebrate Eucharist without a sense of responsibility for the poor, sick and marginalized. Christians can therefore never regard the Eucharist as the celebration of their “own ego” but as the great sacrament of Christ’s love, which tends to heal and renew both individual and social life through our service and works of charity. On the one hand, we deeply feel that Christ in Eucharist calls us “to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God’s image and likeness” (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, n. 89). On the other hand, we know that we cannot become pure activists relying only on our human knowledge, strategy and skills. Both quietism and Pelagianism are wrong solutions because of their one-sidedness.

In the light of faith, we better understand that definitive salvation has its transcendent source in God and is not a product of purely human efforts. Our praxis in promoting God’s Kingdom on earth is a reflection of the fullness of salvation in heaven. As Schillebeeckx rightly points out, the positivistic tendency toward the total salvation of humanity by humans themselves remains an unrealistic and dangerous utopia. This will inevitably lead to an ideological imposition of the desires, values and control of one social group upon other groups.²³ Theologically speaking, the salvation which comes from God and is mediated by Christ is liberation from the power of sin and participation in the divine love. In this process of salvation, God freely offers us the gifts of forgiveness, justification, regeneration and reconciliation. The Risen Lord sends the Holy Spirit to heal the whole man – not only his soul but also his body and relationships with God, other persons and natural environment. Our task is to respond to God’s offer of forgiveness and healing.

²² *Address of Pope Francis to the European Parliament*, Strasbourg, France, 25 November 2014.

²³ Antonio SISON, “The Prophetic-Liberating Schillebeeckx: Reclaiming a Western Voice for the Third World”, *New Theology Review* 22(2009), 4: 65-66.

Jesus reveals in history the compassionate love of God. His death on the Cross manifests the suffering love of God, who liberates men and women from sin. His resurrection is the victory of divine love, which is stronger than death, sin and any internal or external hostility. The Holy Spirit convinces us that only self-giving love can triumph over the power of self-destructive egoism. Day by day we discover and experience this self-giving and reconciling love by contemplating and imitating Jesus' life which was one filled with Spirit.²⁴ Those communities in the Church living in the largest secularized cities are like small islands in the ocean. They are privilege places where the Gospel of hope is being proclaimed and the Eucharist, the sacrament of love, is celebrated. The biblical image of "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven" (Rev 21:2) speaks of an eschatological reality which transcends all human dreams, efforts and possibilities. This beautiful metaphor will always remind Christians that God is the future of man and history. In the Liturgy, we proclaim and anticipate our future glory. Vatican II teaches that "in the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem towards which we journey as pilgrims, until Christ our life will appear and we too will appear with him in glory" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n. 8). In our parishes, both in the global cities and in the local towns and villages, the Liturgy and the service of charity become for believers the great school of love, solidarity and unity. Through rediscovering the authentic meaning of Christian service, we can experience God's saving presence and nearness both in prayer and in the witness of love. Then our ecclesial communities become more and more aware that God is present and acts not only through his Word and sacraments but also through our good deeds. Christian mysticism and action do not exclude each other but are rather complementary to one another. We can realize better that, as Schillebeeckx said, "God is mystery, but the mystery of God is the mystery of goodness."

²⁴ Keith WARD, *Christianity: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), 60-64.

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BÓG W GLOBALNYM MIEŚCIE

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

Globalne miasto stało się znaczącym symbolem radykalnej sekularyzacji, a także znakiem *zaćmienia Boga* we współczesnym społeczeństwie. Doświadczenie nieobecności Boga wydaje się być jednym z palących problemów dla *eklezjologii communio*, która interpretuje posłannictwo Kościoła w świetle „znaków czasu”. W niniejszym artykule autor ukazuje miasto jako życiową przestrzeń, w której ludzie wszystkich narodów i kultur mogą odnaleźć obecność Boga zarówno w wymiarze świeckim, jak i religijnym. Stosując typową dla teologii kontekstualnej metodę korelacji, autor najpierw opisuje fenomen świeckiego miasta ze wskazaniem niektórych jego cech i możliwości. Następnie w świetle nauczania papieża Franciszka identyfikuje znaki Bożej obecności w globalnym mieście. W dalszej części artykułu ukazuje Kościół jako sakrament wyzwolenia w kontekście tzw. doświadczenia kontrastu charakterystycznego dla metropolii. W zakończeniu formułuje kilka wniosków pastoralnych.

Słowa kluczowe: obecność Boga; globalne miasto; Kościół; wyzwolenie; „znaki czasu”; sekularyzacja; nadzieja.