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JOHN PAUL II'S ECCLESIOLOGY OF *COMMUNIO* AS A GIFT TO THE WORLD

The world today, though so proud of its scientific and technological progress, is at the same time a restless place. There returns always anew a question whether that „progress, which has man for its author and promoter, make human life on earth ‘more human’ in every aspect of that life? Does it make it more ‘worthy of man’? There can be no doubt that in various aspects it does. But the question keeps coming back with regard to what is most essential – whether in the context of this progress man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all”¹. All those questions and concerns, expressed by Blessed John Paul II at the threshold of his pontificate seem to have lost nothing of their relevance now, well into the 21st c. Amidst all the restlessness of the modern world the Church of Christ continues to proclaim and give witness to the truth of God who is communion and therefore calls all men and women to come and share in that same Trinitarian communion. Because „God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

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¹ J o h n P a u l II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, The Vatican: LEV 1979, no 15.

1. DIVERSE FACES OF THE WORLD

Perceiving man as her *primary and fundamental way*, the Church is to discern always anew the overall situation and state of the world in which man lives. All that happens, phenomena and trends are to be interpreted *in the light of the Gospel* and thus the Church will be able to answer the questions of the men of our time who continue to experience *the joy and hope, the grief and anguish*². It is in almost all John Paul II's documents and in so many speeches that a serious attempt to understand *signa temporum* can be found so that the proclamation of the Gospel is not done *in abstracto*, but in the context of man's current situation which is in no way uniform. The Pope does not describe that situation by enumerating sheer facts but rather tries to see them in the perspective of Christian faith as having both roots and consequences for man's life and supernatural vocation.

There are over seven billion people in the world now. Regardless of all aspects of globalization, its (good and bad) effects and the degree of its advancement, the world remains a „intricate mosaic” of nations, cultures, languages, traditions and religions. They all, however, comprise the one rich patrimony of the human family. In so diverse a world a common longing for freedom should be noticed: „an extraordinary global acceleration of that quest for freedom [...] is one of the great dynamics of human history”³. This shows that the world, though so manifold and mixed, can experience phenomena common to all men and women.

In order to identify more important *signa* as challenges the Church has to face, I will often refer to several documents not so often analyzed, namely to the apostolic exhortations which followed continental synods of bishops convoked by John Paul II. They are a valuable source enabling to understand the panorama of the modern world. Though some of the characteristics relate to some parts of the world more than others, they all in some way allow us to apprehend the complexity of the world.

² Cf. GS 1 and 4; RH 14.

³ „This phenomenon is not limited to any one part of the world; nor is it the expression of any single culture. Men and women throughout the world, even when threatened by violence, *have taken the risk of freedom*, asking to be given a place in social, political, and economic life which is commensurate with their dignity as free human beings”. J o h n P a u l I I, *Address at UN Headquarters* (New York, 5.10.1995), no 2. Cf. J o h n P a u l I I, *Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia*, The Vatican: LEV 1999, no 6.

Though an ever more globalized reality, the world remains deeply divided and marked by many injustices. The globalization itself is an ambiguous phenomenon with different implications. There are positive consequences like efficiency, increased production, growing economic links between countries and nations – thus bringing greater unity among peoples. But it is also true that ruled by merely laws of the market, it serves mainly the powerful. Economy is being absolutized, the distance between rich and poor continues to grow (including poor nations, not just parts of a society which find themselves in abject poverty), it brings about unemployment, reduction of public services, little regard for the integrity of the of the environment etc. Not only in the American context the growing urbanization is accompanied by external debts, corruption, the drug trade and ecological concern⁴.

A lot of modern societies undergo all kinds of rapid changes. Like the above mentioned emergence of huge urban conglomerations in which some sectors of society are being exploited and terrorism, organized crime and prostitution thrive in large depressed areas. Another major social event is internal and external migration through which people become vulnerable to uncertain and difficult economic and cultural problems and situations, causing destructive effects on individual and family life⁵. While some nations are highly developed or rapidly developing, others see no hope for a better future living in the persistent reality of poverty and the exploitation of people.

Social and political difficulties like famine, wars, racial tensions and divisions, political instability, social disorientation and despair, the violation of human rights and the threats to the family, including the spread of AIDS and even the survival of the practice of slavery, are in fact true not only in many African nations. The international debt, the arms trade, growing numbers of refugees and displaced persons are too present in Latin American and Asian countries where there is little regard for safety and dignity of people. Another group of problems are those related to demography where it is often overlooked that the population growth is not merely an economic or political problem but above all a moral one, as it involves the essential issue of human promotion where human dignity and inviolable rights of every person should be respected. It refers also to the problem of poverty and exploitation of women who need their authentic liberation. The awakening of women's

⁴ Cf. J o h n P a u l II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, The Vatican: LEV 1999, no 20-25.

⁵ Cf. EiAs 7.

consciousness to their dignity and rights is a striking *signum temporis* in the modern world⁶.

A particular question is the vast field of social communication facing an unusually rapid and deep transformation. While the modern information and communication technologies are a true human achievement and can be an important force for good, it happens often that the modern mass media have a negative influence on human and social life being intrusive and manipulative, full of images of violence, hedonism and materialism, imposing „a distorted vision of life and of man, and thus fail to respond to the demands of true development”⁷.

When referring to Europe and Euro-Atlantic civilization John Paul II puts stronger emphasis on the philosophical and cultural dimension of the current transformations of society. Not disregarding corruption, ethnics conflicts, the re-emergence of racism or interreligious tensions, the family and marriage crisis as well as social selfishness, he points out to *signa temporum* which are especially „clouding the horizon of the European continent”. Among those he draws attention to existential fragmentation, inner emptiness and the loss of the meaning of life, loneliness, practical agnosticism and religious indifference, prevalent concern for personal interests and privileges. All this leads to „the emergence of a new culture, largely influenced by the mass media, whose content and character are often in conflict with the Gospel and the dignity of the human person. This culture is also marked by a widespread and growing religious agnosticism, connected to a more profound moral and legal relativism rooted in confusion regarding the truth about man as the basis of the inalienable rights of all human beings. At times the signs of a weakening of hope are evident in disturbing forms of what might be called a ‘culture of death’”⁸. More and more Europeans seem to live in the world closed to transcendence and so European societies – as John Paul II puts it – are „suffering from horizontalism”. A vision of the world with no spiritual roots is being created where its religious, particularly Christian heritage is

⁶ Cf. J o h n P a u l I I, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, The Vatican: LEV 1995, no 47-51; EiAs 7. „In a world controlled by rich and powerful nations, Africa has practically become an irrelevant appendix, often forgotten and neglected”. EiAf 40.

⁷ EiAf 52. „New forms of behaviour are emerging as a result of over-exposure to the mass media and the kinds of literature, music and films that are proliferating on the continent”. EiAs 7.

⁸ J o h n P a u l I I, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, The Vatican: LEV 2003, no 9.

ignored. It is all based on a „vision of man apart from God and apart from Christ”⁹.

This flawed, reductionist concept of man yielding to the temptation of self-sufficiency is sometimes called „a new cultural model of man” and was for John Paul a major concern. This model would be comprised of radical individualism and subjectivism, secularism, spiritual nomadism, materialistic naturalism accompanied by a perniciously invasive impact of mass media. When speaking to representatives of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków during his pastoral visit to Poland in 1997 the Pope stressed that the crucial debate about man had not been finished with the collapse of communism and Marxist ideology, quite the opposite – it continues to intensify in the contemporary cultural context¹⁰.

Looking at the world and living one’s life *as if God did not exist* lead to secularism, which is characteristic to many parts of modern society. A tendency to live and develop contemporary individual and social life without reference to God seems to be on the rise. Religion is both moved to the margin of public life and regarded as belonging strictly to the private sphere. Consequently, the natural religious sense is being weakened and religious convictions are denied their role in forming people’s moral life and consciences. It follows that the Church has a diminished role in public affairs. According to John Paul II, a growing number of people „are no longer able to integrate the Gospel message into their daily experience; living one’s faith in Jesus becomes increasingly difficult in a social and cultural setting in which that faith is constantly challenged and threatened. In many social settings it is easier to be identified as an agnostic than a believer. The impression is given that unbelief is self-explanatory, whereas belief needs a sort of social legitimization which is neither obvious nor taken for granted”¹¹.

Obviously, all those negative and disturbing realities of modern world do not exhaust the Pope's description. In many of his documents and addresses he would stress that signs of hope are in no way lacking both in Church life and in the world. Men and women today are ever more conscious of their human dignity and inalienable rights as well as ready to safeguard them.

⁹ EiE 9 and 34.

¹⁰ Cf. S. N o w o s a d, *Współczesny spór o człowieka*, in: M. H i n t z (ed.), *Kościół – pluralizm – Europa*, Warszawa: KKSFL 2005, p. 49-53; S. N o w o s a d, *Man as the Primary Way for the University*, „Roczniki Teologii Moralnej” 1(56)2009, p. 93-105.

¹¹ EiE 7. Cf. EiAs 29; J o h n P a u l II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*, The Vatican: LEV 2001, no 7.

Despite growing secularism and materialism, among many nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America people have preserved a profound sense of the existence of God and of a spiritual dimension of life. A strong sense of community, respect for the family and for human life, a powerful sense of solidarity as well as of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence are held dear in many parts of the world. There can often be found openness and new forms of cooperation in the spirit of fraternity accompanied by hard work and discipline. In places like Europe, North America and Australia, while legitimate diversity is being respected and fostered in civil societies, just democratic procedures in administration and government are being introduced leading to the growing unity of the continents. Being very Western in cultural patterns or social structure, often multicultural and technologically developed, those nations refuse to accept structural poverty, reject terrorism and violence as means of political or social change, foster the right to education and health care for all¹².

Though modern societies are often marked by increasing secularization and spiritual „deserts”, one cannot leave unnoticed positive and praiseworthy *signa temporum* among Catholics and all Christians. Though in some the sense of God and of His providence has diminished, there are a lot of Catholics with a growing awareness of belonging to the Church and accepting responsibility for her mission in the world. They bear clear witness to the primacy of ethical and spiritual values in daily life. Though restrictions are being imposed on the freedom of religion, so many of Christ’s disciples bear daily testimony to the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ living their lives of authentic holiness and thus leaving a most precious inheritance to the future generations. There are also those who amid situations of hostility or even persecution, are ready to make the supreme sacrifice and shed their blood for the Lord of life, thus proclaiming the Gospel of hope in the most radical way¹³.

In all these complex situations of mankind today the Church is to find new effective ways in order to respond to questions of men and women. As in the past, she is now to proclaim and testify to her deepest conviction and

¹² Cf. EiAs 6-8; EiAf 42-43; EiE 12; EiO 7.

¹³ „[...] they tell us that martyrdom is the supreme incarnation of the Gospel of hope: ‘In this way, martyrs proclaim the Gospel of hope and bear witnesses to it with their lives to the point of shedding their blood, because they are certain that they cannot live without Christ and are ready to die for him in the conviction that Jesus is the Lord and the Saviour of humanity and that, therefore, only in him does mankind find true fullness of life’”. EiE 13. Cf. EiO 6.

faith that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life to man of every age. Though so many people face „dimming hope” and seem disoriented and uncertain, the Christian message brings new hope to all presenting them the gift of communion offered in Christ. When the man of today finds himself threatened by the result of the work of his hands, the Church cannot allow „her voice to be silenced or her witness to be marginalized”¹⁴.

2. *COMMUNIO ECCLESIALIS* – ITS ESSENCE AND ASPECTS

Among the many contributions of Vatican II (1962-1965) to the Church's self-understanding the concept of *communio* (Greek: *koinonia*) should be regarded as the central one expressing the very heart of the mystery of the Church established by Christ as His Mystical Body and as the People of God: „*The reality of the Church as Communion is, then, the integrating aspect, indeed the central content of the 'mystery', or rather, the divine plan for the salvation of humanity*”¹⁵. These two other concepts make the necessary context for a proper understanding of the Church as *communio*. It was in 1985 that the Catholic bishops gathered at the extraordinary synod declared that „the Church is essentially a mystery of communion, a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This sharing of the life of the Blessed Trinity is the source and inspiration of all Christian relationships and every form of Christian community”¹⁶.

The Greek term *koinonia* can be found in Plato where its meaning included a clear transcendent aspect – men through *koinonia* can share in the eternal realities. This understanding of the term is similar to St Peter's phrase „to share in the divine nature” (2P 1:4) and St Paul's various uses of *koinonia*: shared holiness, participating in Christ's sufferings and in His Supper, sharing in the needs of the saints and even practical assistance to the poor

¹⁴ EiO 7. Cf. RH 15; EiE 7.

¹⁵ „The ecclesiology of *communio* is a central and fundamental concept in the conciliar documents”. J o h n P a u l I I, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, The Vatican: LEV 1984, no 19.

¹⁶ Quoted from: EiO 10. „From the beginning, Jesus associated His disciples with His own life [...]. And He proclaimed a mysterious and real communion between His own body and ours: 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him'”. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, The Vatican: LEV 1992, no 787.

brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (cf. 2Cor 6:14, 1Cor 10-11, Rom 12-13, 2Cor 9:13)¹⁷.

In his early study of the post-conciliar years *At the Foundations of the Renewal* the young card. Karol Wojtyła stressed *communio* as a notion and reality that would most explicitly reveal the catholicity of the Church, referring to *Gaudium et Spes*: in *communio personarum*, which the Church is in her deepest nature, all men and women can fully discover their true selves in the sincere giving of themselves. Hence, through this giving the good belonging to one person is being shared by all, consequently it becomes universal (catholic). When the good becomes a gift, the community (the Church) becomes universal (catholic). In this sense *communio* is the foundation of catholicity¹⁸. As Vatican II teaches: „In virtue of this catholicity each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase”. In this way the *communio* of the Church bears fruit when the members of the Church share these goods in common. *Communio* is a characteristic bond of the community of the People of God which brings with itself both „a distinction” and „a union” among the members of the Church. Its fruit is also the fact that „all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ”¹⁹ – all are truly equal in the Church. For this and other reasons it is of utmost significance that all in the Church were conscious of *communio*. The meaning of *communio* is fundamentally theological and ecclesiological, but Wojtyła would as well stress its ethical dimension, because it makes it possible to form a truly Christian social morality which would be introduced by the Church both *ad intra* and *ad extra* (introducing *communio* among all people, not just among the faithful)²⁰.

Basically *communio* signifies union with God brought about by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Hence, the *communio* of the Church is a gift of the Blessed Trinity. It is the fruit of God’s love to mankind which was accomplished by the Saviour in the Paschal Mystery and brought to completion by

¹⁷ Cf. C. F. Starkloff, *The Church as Covenant, Culture and Communion*, „Theological Studies” 61(2000)3, p. 426.

¹⁸ Cf. K. Wojtyła, *U podstaw odnowy. Studium o realizacji Vaticanum II*, Kraków: PTT 1988 (1st ed. 1972), p. 116-117; GS 24.

¹⁹ LG 13 and 32.

²⁰ Cf. Wojtyła, *U podstaw odnowy*, p. 120-125; LG 32.

the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It enabled the Church to share in the divine *communio* of love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. As St Paul says to the Romans: „God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (5:5). Consequently, the gift of *communio* brings about a double union – the communion of the believer with the Triune God (vertical) and the communion with other believers and the rest of mankind (horizontal). The vocation of the Church in her pilgrimage on earth is to preserve and strengthen communion with God and communion among those who believe in Him²¹.

It is the Word of God and the sacraments that make the communion present in the Church while at the same time it is essential to see *communio* in the proper relationship with the mystery of the Church as a sacrament. A person is introduced to the communion of the Church by faith and by Baptism. All three sacraments of Christian initiation play a fundamental role here. Baptism is the door to *communio*, it incorporates a believer into the Body of Christ. In Confirmation the Christian is more perfectly bound to the Church becoming a true witness of Christ and His communion of love with the Father. In the Holy Eucharist the Church sacramentalizes the communion between the Christian and the Triune God and the intimate bonds of communion among all the faithful (cf. 1 Cor 10:16)²². The Eucharist is „the supreme sacramental manifestation of communion in the Church”, the culmination and perfection of our „communion with God the Father by identification with His only-begotten Son through the working of the Holy Spirit”²³. The Eucharist, being a sacrament of Sacrifice, Communion and Presence, is the „living and lasting centre around which the entire community of the Church gathers”²⁴. Since it unites every Christian with Christ, the Eucharist is both the source and force of communion, it manifests and fosters communion (cf. 1 Cor 10:17). Following St Paul’s teaching to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:17-34) it becomes obvious that an authentic communion with Christ taking place in the Eucharistic celebration urges everyone to renew fraternal communion with brothers and sisters. This has made John Paul II emphasize the importance

²¹ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio nis notio*, The Vatican: LEV 1992, no 3; ChL 19; EiO 10.

²² Cf. LG 11; CN 1 and 5; ChL 19.

²³ J o h n P a u l II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, The Vatican: LEV 2003, respectively no 38 and 34.

²⁴ EiAm 35.

of Sunday Mass for every faithful to be a true witness and promoter of communion in daily life. The Sunday Eucharist is „the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured. Precisely through sharing in the Eucharist, the Lord’s Day also becomes the Day of the Church, when she can effectively exercise her role as the sacrament of unity”²⁵.

Ecclesial communion has both invisible and visible aspects. In the invisible dimension it is Christ himself who unites us to God in the Holy Spirit and among ourselves. In the visible dimension it involves communion in the teaching of the Apostles, in the sacraments and in the hierarchical order of the Church which are „outward bonds of communion”. Full and authentic communion needs both dimensions just as the Church is both an invisible and visible reality and the only sacrament of salvation. Additionally, the invisible aspect of communion extends also to the saints – those who belong to the heavenly Church, who have left this world in God’s friendship and His grace. It is on this foundation that the traditional devotion to the saints, and especially to the Blessed Virgin Mary has always been based in Christian piety. This also points to a mutual relationship between the pilgrim Church on earth and the heavenly Church and thus again reflects the mystery of the Church as a *communio* transcending the earthly reality²⁶.

Ecclesial communion, being an organic communion, is very diverse and complementary. Just like a living body, it is marked by a *diversity* and a *complementarity* of vocations, ministries, charisms and responsibilities. The Holy Spirit is the principle of diversity and unity in the Church because it is He who distributes His different gifts for the welfare of the one Church: He „gives life to, unifies and moves the whole body”²⁷ (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-11). According to John Paul II „the universality of the Church involves, on the one hand, a most solid unity, and on the other, a plurality and a diversification, which do not obstruct unity, but rather confer upon it the character of *communio*” (1989). This plurality is about diverse forms and ministries of life as well as traditions in liturgy and culture. All this does not contradict

²⁵ J o h n P a u l I I, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, The Vatican: LEV 2000, no 36; cf. EdE 40-41.

²⁶ Cf. EdE 35-36; CN 4-6; LG 14. „This Assembly [...] was of profound significance for the universal Church [...] because of the very nature of ecclesial communion which transcends all boundaries of time and space. In fact the Special Assembly inspired many prayers and good works through which individuals and communities of the Church in the other continents accompanied the Synodal process. And how can we doubt that through the mystery of ecclesial communion the Synod was also supported by the prayers of the Saints in heaven?”. EiAf 19.

²⁷ LG 7.

the unity of the one Church but rather enriches it. This *unity in diversity* needs to be safeguarded and fostered and the task belongs to the Pope universally, to every bishop in his local Church and to everyone as a member of the one Body in the daily life by means of charity²⁸.

In 1992 John Paul II devoted a series of catecheses to *communio ecclesialis* which can be seen as a review of the topic. First he states that in order to make this communion real and to accomplish the communion of all with Christ, Jesus gives a commandment which He calls *my commandment* – the commandment of love. Jesus speaks of himself not only as the living model of that love („as I have loved you”) but also as the source of that love being the *vine*: „The members of this community love Christ and in him they love one another. It is a love with which Jesus himself loves them, and it is linked to the source of the God-Man’s love – the communion of the Trinity”²⁹. In fact, it is the intimate *communio* between the Father and the Son which is the supreme model of the *communio* of the Church (and of any *communio*). This love, that Jesus teaches, is the same love with which Father loved His Son (cf. Jn 17:24) and which is the deepest need of man: ”Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it”³⁰. On this love the Church as *communio* is founded. This implies that she is to bear witness to this love, to practice it and make it visible. Finally, the Eucharist is the sacramental expression of this love and so the Church as *communio* is continually reborn and renewed in the Eucharist³¹.

The first image of the Church as *communio* after the Ascension of the Lord is the community devoted to prayer. The Holy Father says that prayer, especially prayer in common, was the basic feature of the Church’s *communio* in the beginning and so it will always be. The prayer expresses the spiri-

²⁸ Cf. ChL 20; CN 15-16.

²⁹ J o h n P a u l I I, Cat. *The Church Is a Communio of Love* (15 January 1992) (cf. www.vatican.va).

³⁰ RH 10.

³¹ „Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us (cf. Rom 5:5), to make us all ‘one heart and one soul’ (Acts 4:32). It is in building this communion of love that the Church appears as ‘sacrament’, as the ‘sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the human race’”. NMI 42.

tual communion, creates it and deepens, it produces spiritual unity. Worth noting is also the fact that „Mary was there”, thus she was at the origin of that communion of the Church. Since it is the Eucharist which is the supreme sacrament of the unity among the disciples of Christ, it is also the Church’s special prayer to the Father for His gift of the Holy Spirit who can make all „one body, one spirit in Christ”³².

Communio ecclesialis has Christ at its centre according to John (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-2). St Paul would point to „sharing in Christ’s sufferings” which in fact is sharing in His whole Paschal Mystery. Consequently, „communion in Christ’s Passover becomes a source of reciprocal communion: ‘If one part [of the community] suffers, all the parts suffer with it’ (1 Cor 12:26)”³³. In order to make the *communio ecclesialis* real, nourished and accomplished, the Holy Spirit must intervene, and the fruit is the „participation in the Spirit” (cf. Phil 2:1).

St Peter in his First Letter describes the Church as a „communion in God’s holiness”. As such the Church is realized through „spiritual sacrifices” which have their source in Christ’s own sacrifice and should be offered according to His example. The communion in God’s holiness brings about the sanctification accomplished in the faithful by the Holy Spirit in virtue of Christ’s sacrifice. On the part of the faithful the communion in holiness leads to a true commitment to the salvation of all men and women³⁴. Taking into account the importance of the sacrament of Holy Orders the Pope says the Church „is and functions as a priestly community”³⁵. In his several consecutive catecheses the Pope spoke about all the sacraments and their role in the Church as communion³⁶. Hence, Baptism brings us into the Church the Body of Christ, when we are baptized we enter the ecclesial community. The Sacrament of Confirmation brings to perfection the gift of the Holy Spirit already received in Baptism, so that the confirmed Christian is able to witness to Christ in speech and with his life. Ecclesial community comes to fulfillment above all in the Eucharist. If sin is a wound inflicted upon the

³² *The Eucharistic Prayer III*; cf. J o h n P a u l II, Cat. *The Church: A Communio of Prayer* (29 January 1992); EdE 43.

³³ J o h n P a u l II, Cat. *The Church Lives in the Mystery of Communio* (5 February 1992).

³⁴ Cf. J o h n P a u l II, Cat. *The Call to Holiness Is Essential for the Church* (12 February 1992).

³⁵ J o h n P a u l II, Cat. *The Church Is a Priestly Community* (18 March 1992).

³⁶ What follows cf. catecheses from 18 March through 6 May 1992.

Church and harms the ecclesial community, reconciliation with God is also reconciliation with the Church and heals the wound on the Body of Christ. At the same time in the Sacrament of Penance the Church shows that she is a priestly community of mercy and forgiveness. The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick brings not only the personal welfare of the sick person but also the spiritual growth of the whole Church. In this way the suffering members of the Church contribute greatly to the intimate union of the whole ecclesial community with Christ. Through the Sacrament of Matrimony the married couple participates in the unity and love between Christ and His Church and the whole family is called to bear witness to the life, love and unity which derive from the very nature of the Church as a sacred community: „The communion of love between God and people [...] finds a meaningful expression in the marriage covenant which is established between a man and a woman”³⁷. It is also worth noting that when teaching about the sacraments, the Sacrament of Holy Orders and of Matrimony are called in the Catechism of the Catholic Church „the sacraments at the service of communion”³⁸.

The Church being the witness to God who is *communio* of the Father with the Son in the Spirit, is to be a sign and instrument of that communion before the world. It is rooted in the truth that the members of the Church share the life of Christ just like branches remain part of the vine (cf. Jn 15:1-17). Communion is a part of the plan of God for all men and women. It is willed by God and destined for completion in the fullness of God’s Kingdom³⁹.

It is the bishops in the Church who hold a particular task as builders of ecclesial communion. Since each one of them is the visible principle and foundation of the unity of his particular Church, they are duty-bound to promote communion in their dioceses. Communion in the Church, signifying life, must constantly be nourished and increase. When the local Church is gathered around her bishop, the *communio ecclesialis* is expressed and lived in a special way. Hence, the bishops in their collegiality and in communion with the Successor of Peter are those who are called to safeguard and promote the

³⁷ J o h n P a u l II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, The Vatican: LEV 1981, no 12. Cf. EiAm 46.

³⁸ Cf. CCC 1533ff.

³⁹ „We must proclaim that this communion is the magnificent plan of God the Father; that Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Lord, is the heart of this communion, and that the Holy Spirit works ceaselessly to create communion and to restore it when it is broken”. EiAm 33. Cf. CCC 775.

ecclesial communion among all the faithful⁴⁰. The Eucharist, being the supreme manifestation of communion in the Church, when celebrated in a particular local community transcends its borders and participates and co-builds the universal *communio ecclesialis*. In fact, the endeavour of fostering communion needs priests as well as religious and lay women and men as its agents. While the role of priests and religious is rather clear, the lay faithful fulfil their vocation in the service of communion in two areas: intra-ecclesially where they are delegates of the word, catechists, group leaders etc. and in the secular world where they evangelize family, social, professional, cultural or political life⁴¹.

Communio ecclesialis among local Churches is thus based not only on common faith and the sacraments but also upon the unity of the episcopate – the unity of all the bishops united with the Bishop of Rome as the visible head of the Church⁴². The valid celebration of the Eucharist necessitates real communion with the Pope who is the source and foundation of the unity of all the bishops and of the faithful. Local Churches, under the guidance of their bishops, are Churches in which the Church of Christ – one, holy, catholic and apostolic – is present. However, the universal Church is not a sum or a federation of particular Churches. It is then possible to speak of one Church as a communion of Churches only in an analogous fashion. The one Church is not „the result of the communion of the Churches, but, in its essential mystery, it is a reality ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular Church”⁴³. When a believer is incorporated into the Church through faith and Baptism, it does not happen in a mediate way through a particular Church, but becomes a member of the Church in an immediate way. The *communio ecclesialis* between the universal Church and particular Churches is then rooted in the same faith and in one Baptism as well as in the Eucharist and in the Episcopate. The Church clarifies that „the universal communion of the faithful and the communion of the Churches are

⁴⁰ Cf. EdE 39 and 42; EiAm 36-38; NMI 44; EiO 9-11.

⁴¹ „The presence and mission of the Church in the world is realized in a special way in the variety of charisms and ministries which belong to the laity. [...] lay people are called to embody deeply evangelical values such as mercy, forgiveness, honesty, transparency of heart and patience in difficult situations. What is expected from the laity is a great creative effort in activities and works demonstrating a life in harmony with the Gospel”. EiAm 44.

⁴² „Gathered around the Successor of Peter, praying and working together, the Bishops of the Special Assembly for Asia personified as it were the communion of the Church in all the rich diversity of the particular Churches over which they preside in charity”. EiAs 25.

⁴³ CN 9. Cf. EiO 11.

not consequences of one another, but constitute the same reality seen from different viewpoints”⁴⁴.

The Church, being the universal sacrament of salvation (and thus sent to save all mankind) is not closed and cannot be closed on herself, rather it is open to „ecumenical endeavour”, sent to witness to the mystery of communion she had received from God in order to share it with all people and gather them into one God’s family. Though divided among themselves, there exist elements of communion between the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities. They should be nourished and promoted through dialogue, cooperation, promotion of justice, common prayer, sharing in the Word of God and in the experience of faith in Christ. Since the Catholic Church does not believe that „beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community there is an ecclesial vacuum”⁴⁵, a certain, albeit imperfect, communion needs to be acknowledged among all those baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity. An ecumenical commitment, being a „binding imperative” for all those incorporated in Christ, should lead to a new conversion to the Lord. Important priorities for all should be prayer, penance, study, dialogue and collaboration. Although it is not possible to celebrate the same Eucharist where there is no full communion in the profession of faith, in the sacraments and in ecclesiastical governance, all Christians should desire to join in celebrating the one Eucharist of the Lord thus fostering communion among those who are divided⁴⁶.

The Church, being a witness to God who is communion of love between the Father and the Son in the Spirit, is called to become „the home and the school of communion” for all. Having been sent to the world by the Lord, the Church is to share this gift with the world and thus to invite the world to the common home and the common school. But first, through contemplation and prayer, rather than her pastoral activity, the Church must continually receive the gift of communion from God Himself. In this context John Paul II points out a spirituality of communion which is to be promoted as a guiding principle of education for all who make up the community of the Church. This spirituality of communion indicates four more detailed issues

⁴⁴ CN 10. Cf. LG 23; EdE 39; EiAs 25. Every Eucharist celebrated in a local community is the one Eucharistic Sacrifice offered by Christ for all. The same applies to the unity of the Episcopate with its head – the Roman Pontiff being the head of the Body of College of Bishops. Cf. CN 11-14.

⁴⁵ J o h n P a u l II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*, The Vatican: LEV 1995, no 13.

⁴⁶ Cf. EdE 44; UUS 45; EiAm 49; NMI 48; CN 17-18.

like: „the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us”; thinking of brothers and sisters in faith as „those who are a part of me” (so we can share their joys and sufferings); seeing what is positive in others (which is also a gift for me); bearing each other’s burdens (and thus making room for others)⁴⁷. The spirituality of communion – being a gift as well as a task – is like blood in the Church’s veins which makes her live and bear fruits. Consequently, all the faithful who constitute the Church are invited to renew their baptismal commitments, to make room for the gifts of the Spirit. The spirituality of communion makes all the baptized active members of the Body of Christ and promoters of the Kingdom of God in the world „by their work for the evangelization and the sanctification of people”⁴⁸.

3. *COMMUNIO* BEARING FRUIT

The mystery of *communio ecclesialis* shows that the bond of communion between Christ the Bridegroom and all His disciples is at the heart of the mystery of the Church. Being members of the Lord’s Mystical Body they are all united to the Father which – as a consequence – brings about the communion among all Christians who share it with one another through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Church of Christ is the sacrament of a double union – of man’s *communio* with God and of the unity of the whole human race which flows from people’s union with God. Since it is in the Lord Jesus that the communion between God and His people finds its definitive fulfillment, the Church being Christ’s Body is where man can experience the loving presence of the Saviour Himself – the Incarnate Word who said He would remain with His disciples to the end of time (cf. Mt 28:20). The Church as *communio* is then a *place* of encounter of man with Jesus Christ so that He can „walk with each person the path of life”⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ Cf. NMI 43.

⁴⁸ „Therefore the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church’s life”. NMI 46.

⁴⁹ „The Church therefore sees its fundamental task in enabling that union to be brought about and renewed continually. The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life, with the power of the truth about man and the world that is contained in the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption and with the power of the love that is radiated by that truth”. RH 13. Cf. FC 13; EiAs 24.

For man this encounter is of indispensable significance. The Church proclaims a fundamental truth of man as being created by God and in His image and likeness. If „God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion”, the human person has the vocation of love and communion. It is his fundamental and innate vocation. Being created through love, man is called to love. In Jesus love is full and to the end (cf. Jn 13:1), without Jesus man cannot live nor love. Hence, the communion of the Church, where man is being incorporated in the communion of the Triune God’s love, is a life-giving mystery for all men and women. It is the task of the Church as *communio* to bear witness to the faith in God who is *communio* in love. This is the answer the Church offers to the world with all its problems and challenges and thus offers the world authentic hope⁵⁰. John Paul II expressed that in New York when speaking to members of the UN General Assembly: „We Christians believe that in his Death and Resurrection were fully revealed God’s love and his care for all creation. *Jesus Christ is for us God made man, and made a part of the history of humanity. Precisely for this reason, Christian hope for the world and its future extends to every human person*”⁵¹.

Authentic communion, revealing the true dignity of the human person rooted in God the Creator, shows that dignity and protects it in various circumstances of earthly life. It is truly at the service of human promotion and integral development. Authentic development of man and society „begins and ends with the integrity of the human person created in the image of God and endowed with a God-given dignity and inalienable human rights”⁵². The Redeemer took on human nature and died that all may be free, thus advanced and defended the dignity of man – God’s masterpiece which is common to all, without exception⁵³.

Living in communion with Christ – true God and true man, allows man understand better who he is and what is his final destiny: „[...] it is only in

⁵⁰ „The Church ‘is not entitled to express preferences for this or that institutional or constitutional solution’ for Europe, and for this reason she consistently desires to respect the legitimate autonomy of the civil order. Nevertheless, she has the task of reviving faith in the Trinity among the Christians of Europe, knowing full well that this faith is the herald of authentic hope for the continent”. EiE 19. Cf. FC 11.

⁵¹ J o h n P a u l II, *Address at UN Headquarters*, no 17.

⁵² „The various international declarations on human rights and the many initiatives which these have inspired are a sign of growing attention on a worldwide level to the dignity of the human person”. EiAs 33.

⁵³ Cf. EiAm 57.

the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear”⁵⁴. Referring many times to this expression John Paul II would strongly emphasize its importance to show the necessity of God-made-man for man to finally know the truth of himself. All the words and actions of Jesus, in a special way His suffering, death and resurrection reveal before every man depths of what it means to be human: „Jesus’ perfectly human life, devoted wholly to the love and service of the Father and of man, reveals that the vocation of every human being is to receive love and give love in return [...]. Jesus became once and for all both the revelation and the accomplishment of a humanity re-created and renewed according to the plan of God”⁵⁵.

The Church is to proclaim and transmit her own mystery of *communio* so that man, being „the meeting point of many conflicting forces” and experiencing in his heart symptoms „of the deeper dichotomy”, can find the way amidst „his real problems, his hopes and sufferings, his achievements and falls”⁵⁶. Therefore, the basic task of Jesus’ disciples is the proclamation of the Good News, that is, evangelization – the vocation proper to the Church and her profound identity. It is another fruit of the deep union – *communio* – with God achieved through Christ. In this sense to evangelize is to proclaim the Word of the Lord and share His gift of *communio* so that each man can enter into that communion and renew his life and hope. „Many are the paths on which each one of us and each of our Churches must travel, but there is no distance between those who are united in the same communion, the communion which is daily nourished at the table of the Eucharistic Bread and the Word of Life”⁵⁷.

The main purpose of evangelization is „transforming humanity from within and making it new”. The Church believes that the proclamation of the Word and sharing the Lord’s grace of *communio* will be able to transform all people of good will who are ready to open their hearts to the Holy Spirit. However, in order to fulfill her mission of evangelization with credibility, the Church must first evangelize herself and thus make constant conversion and

⁵⁴ GS 22.

⁵⁵ „In Jesus then, we discover the greatness and dignity of each person in the heart of God who created man in his own image (cf. Gen 1:26), and we find the origin of the new creation which we have become through his grace”. EiAs 13.

⁵⁶ Respectively GS 10 and RH 18.

⁵⁷ NMI 58. Cf. EiAm 66.

renewal her own path among the paths of the world. It will make the task of evangelization more profound and more fruitful⁵⁸.

When teaching about the tasks of the Church in the missionary context, the Holy Father would stress that the communion with the Lord is to bear fruit in mission. The communion is not something to accept and keep, rather, it is something to sow and share. The call to mission, rooted in the very identity and vocation of the Church of Christ, is addressed to all the faithful being participants of the ecclesial *communio*⁵⁹. Those who are united with Jesus through faith and Baptism should recognize the call to „go forth from Jesus in His power and with his grace”. The Church is being called by the Lord always anew to „share in His mission with new energy and creativity”⁶⁰. Spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ is a fruit of encountering Him in one’s life and then accepting His call to „cast the nets once more” (cf. Lk 5:1-11). „The way of Jesus is always the path of mission”. He invites His followers to proclaim the Gospel so that „culture and Gospel proclamation will meet in a mutually enriching way and the Good News will be heard, believed and lived more deeply. This mission is rooted in the mystery of communion”⁶¹. The more difficult and unpromising the times are, the clearer and unambiguous the call of the Lord is. The Church as a sacrament of unity is always open to missionary endeavour so all men and women may come to know Jesus Christ in whom the Father receives all into a communion of love and life⁶².

When according to St John’s Gospel Jesus tells the parable of the true vine (cf. 15:1ff), it becomes obvious that entering into the communion with Him is to bear fruit, while the opposite is also true – where there is no fruit,

⁵⁸ Cf. EiAf 55 and 47-48.

⁵⁹ „Some members of the Church are sent to people who have not heard of Jesus Christ, and their mission remains as vital as ever. But many more are sent to the world closer to home, and the Synod Fathers were keen to stress the mission of the lay members of the Church. In the family, in the workplace, in the schools, in community activities, all Christians can help to bring the Good News to the world in which they live”. EiO 13.

⁶⁰ EiO 3.

⁶¹ EiO 10.

⁶² „From this sacramentality it follows that the Church is not a reality closed in on herself; rather, she is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavour, for she is sent to the world to announce and witness, to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her: to gather together all people and all things into Christ; so as to be for all an ‘inseparable sacrament of unity’”. CN 4.

there is no real communion there⁶³. Hence, real fruitfulness depends upon the communion with Christ and its result which is communion with other people. It is then clear that there exists a crucial union between *communio* and mission: „They interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, so that ‘communion represents both the source and fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion’”⁶⁴.

In the perspective of an encounter of the Gospel and culture, there is an essential need for a true and balanced inculturation in order to preserve the integrity of the Gospel as well as to avoid cultural confusion. It is based on a double respect – both for the Gospel and for the culture. Hence, authentic inculturation becomes a significant fruit of the proclamation of the God given *communio* to all peoples and is in fact the way leading to the fullness of ecclesial *communio*. It is an insertion of the Gospel message into a particular culture. Inculturation has its roots in the mystery of the Incarnation when God chose a particular people with a distinctive culture in order to reveal to all humanity and all cultures His gift of love and life. It needs to discern carefully among all values of any culture to see what is of the Gospel and what is not. The Church accepts that a culture can offer its values and forms with which the Gospel can be preached more fruitfully, while at the same time the Gospel challenges and transforms some values or forms. It is in the light of the Mystery of the Incarnation and of the Redemption that all values and counter-values can be discerned and then those authentic values will be purified and restored to their full meaning. Thus every culture is to be renewed in the light of Christ’s Paschal Mystery⁶⁵.

Communio is strongly linked to dialogue, in fact they are both „two essential aspects of the Church’s mission which have their infinitely transcendent exemplar in the mystery of the Trinity, from whom all mission comes and to whom it must be directed”⁶⁶. In the above mentioned context of inculturation the dialogue makes the meeting of the Gospel and culture effective and

⁶³ Jn 15:5: „He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit”; Jn 15:2: „Each branch of mine that bears no fruit [my Father] takes away”.

⁶⁴ EiAs 24.

⁶⁵ „‘Every culture needs to be transformed by Gospel values in the light of the Paschal Mystery’. It is by looking at the Mystery of the Incarnation and of the Redemption that the values and counter-values of cultures are to be discerned. Just as the Word of God became like us in everything but sin, so too the inculturation of the Good News takes on all authentic human values, purifying them from sin and restoring to them their full meaning”. EiAf 61. Cf. EiAs 21-22; EiO 16.

⁶⁶ EiAs 31.

leads to identifying the deepest values in any culture. It is also necessary in fostering relations with the followers of other religions, particularly for the sake of peace. Dialogue has to „be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation”⁶⁷.

The salvific mission of the Lord has restored communion between God and people and at the same time established a new communion between all people, divided by sin, who can now live as brothers and sisters⁶⁸. This makes the disciples of Christ aware that they are called to serve and support one another in all needs. Consequently, solidarity and service are another fruit of ecclesial communion which is grounded in the mystery of Trinity and seeks the good of others, first of all of the poorest and thus most in need. In this Christian love is expressed in a „commitment to reciprocal solidarity and the sharing of the spiritual gifts and material goods [...], fostering in individuals a readiness to work where they are needed. Taking the Gospel as its starting-point, a culture of solidarity needs to be promoted”⁶⁹.

In the above mentioned concept of the spirituality of communion John Paul II would stress many particular tasks and effects it is expected to bring about. Among those he details: promoting vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life; promotion of various ecclesial associations and movements; pastoral care of the family and the promotion of the vision of marriage as „a mutual and total bond, unique and indissoluble”; an ecumenical task – fostering reconciliation and communion among divided Christians; respect for the life of every human being; a new commitment to charity and works of mercy with the awareness that „beginning with intra-ecclesial communion, charity of its nature opens out into a service that is universal”⁷⁰.

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To the humanity deeply hurt after the original sin, whose union with the Creator has been broken, God continues to offer His gift of a new and eternal

⁶⁷ J o h n P a u l II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, The Vatican: LEV 1990, no 55. Cf. NMI 54-56.

⁶⁸ „There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”. Gal 3:28.

⁶⁹ EiAm 52.

⁷⁰ Cf. NMI 46-51.

communion. Not disregarding all external individual and social signs of the lost communion John Paul II would see their root in man's heart implicated in sin. Thus the Church, being *communio* of all with the Father in His Son, is the response and the gift offered to the world in all the stages of its history.

When a new millennium was opening before the Church „like a vast ocean”, Blessed John Paul II called us all to go forward in hope. *Duc in altum!* The missionary mandate urges and impels us to start out anew and „our steps must quicken” as we cross the roads of the world we now live in. We believe that „there is no distance between those who are united in the same communion, the communion that is daily nourished at the table of the Eucharistic Bread and the Word of Life”⁷¹. When expecting the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that the door of faith is „open for us ushering us into the life of communion with God”⁷². This gift of *communio* with God we are to share with all men and women, because we believe all people were touched by God and thus made receptive to the mystery of *communio* offered to all in Christ⁷³. We do it by renewing our own faith and Christian life and bearing witness in the world to the Lord who is for ever the only *Redemptor hominis*.

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⁷¹ NMI 58.

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JANA PAWŁA II EKLEZJOLOGIA
COMMUNIO JAKO DAR DLA ŚWIATA

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

Wizja Kościoła jako komunii (łac. *communio*, grec. *koinonia*) jest wyraźnie obecna w dokumentach Vaticanum II i jawi się – według Jana Pawła II – jako wiodąca posoborowa koncepcja eklezjologiczna. Liczne wypowiedzi papieskie ukazują złożoną sytuację współczesnego świata, czemu szczególne świadectwo dają adhortacje, które ukazały się jako owoc zwoływanych przez Jana Pawła II synodów biskupów dla poszczególnych kontynentów. Zarówno te adhortacje, jak i kilka innych dokumentów Papieża pozwalają zrozumieć całość wizji eklezjologii komunii. U jej fundamentu jest komunია trynitarna Ojca i Syna w Duchu Świętym, czego owocem z kolei jest komunია ludzi z Bogiem i między sobą w Mistycznym Ciele Chrystusa. Ta komunია staje się udziałem ludzi przez wiarę i chrzest, a realizuje się stale szczególnie w Eucharystii. Według Jana Pawła II wizja Kościoła jako *communio* ma przynieść liczne owoce, jak pogłębione, integralne samorozumienie człowieka, misja i dialog Kościoła ze światem, co ma doprowadzić do głębokiej przemiany ludzkości. Dar komunii należy uznać za podstawowy dar Boga – Stwórcy i Zbawcy dla świata, który poprzez grzech utracił życiodajną więź z Bogiem i doznał głębokich podziałów wewnętrznych.

Key words: communion (*communio*, *koinonia*), ecclesiology, John Paul II.

Słowa kluczowe: komunია, (*communio*, *koinonia*), eklezjologia, Jan Paweł II.