DIALOGUES

Ladislav Csontos

Citizen society and Church in countries of the former Soviet block have to get accustomed to the plurality of opinions and to the need of mutual respect and reverence. Many facts cannot be seen as definitely separated into two contrary opinion groups, but should be seen as flow with many turbulencies, though there can be found positive flows in searching for truth. That demands a move from confrontation to dialogue, which is not always easy, often is very difficult and needs a lot of effort. It is evident that confrontation in social life endangers it and this dialogue is the only way to retain life and to further evolution of society. Also in Church in postcommunist countries that opens space for mutual influence of traditional and modern thinking, various forms of life, and also for better contact with the life of church in western countries, plurality increases. In some people it evokes fear and need for defence or confrontation, in others it leads to an effort at losing their identity. It is impossible to lose identity and to accept identity of somebody else without losing one’s own identity. Here is a need to respect identity of each person and to build bridges connecting different views in dialogue and thereby sustain the richness of variety and detail. In this spirit the teachers of the Theological Faculty of the University of Trnava, work on monographs in the edition series „Dialogues“.

Theology as dialogue

Dialogue can be defined as „meeting of persons and groups in aspiration to understand truth better or to improve human relations in atmosphere of mutual trust“.1

Although every dialogue has a competitive element, it should be always „loving fight“ (K. Jaspers). „If this dispute is not led about the partner and his viewing of truth but against him, then unfortunately the dialogue is shaped by completely different principles.“2 The dialogue becomes a weapon against some-

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body, it loses its objective or its objective is to compromise the opponent, defeat him and enforce oneself.

At present dialogues of this kind often fall into especially critical zone, if the general public, which is usually not enough qualified, takes part in it.\(^3\) Mainly by subjective misuse of mass media, dialogue can be easily distorted. Then only rarely it is spoken directly, only public notices are released to the address of the opponent.\(^4\)

With different opinions conflicts may arise. In Church, conflicts are rated as something unworthy of the clergy. Although conflicts are unwelcome, they bear evidence to the existence of some relations. The problem is not the existence of conflicts, but our frequent inability to solve them. Productive solution of conflicts need not result from the fifty-fifty model only: I shall fall back, you fall back. A much higher unity of participants of the conflict can be reached, when everyone can clearly explain his difficulties with the situation or with the experimental solution in a certain matter and the partner is able to listen to him.\(^5\) That needs bilateral candidness, not hiding oneself under impersonal statements of the type „we should“, but to explain why something is important for me, why I do not agree with a solution of something and what embarrasses me about it. Really productive solutions are possible when this first step to the determining of the actual problem is made.\(^6\)

Emil Krapka in his preface to the first volume of the series „Dialogues“ says: „In the way man’s shows his personality, his nature, and human works – cultural, scientific, religious – get their own «face», a personal profile, characteristic lines. I can see the profile of the Theological Institute of St. Aloysius of the Society of Jesus in developing theology and philosophy as a dialogue: dialogue with God in worship, dialogue with brothers and sisters in Church in friendship, dialogue with the present world in deliberation. Theology as meeting and dialogue with God gets its highest form in prayer. Theology as dialogue with brothers and sisters develops the knowledge of religion and in Church it has its place as deacony of word. Theology as a dialogue with the present world should fulfill: «Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.» (Mark 16:15) God entered into dialogue with people so that people should lead a dialogue among them and bring the whole world to this dialogue. Dialogue as working, pedagogical and formative method should show the way to the theology offered, developed and lived at the Theological Institute of St. Aloysius.“\(^7\) (Today the Theological Faculty of the University of Trnava.)

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\(^3\) See K. Lehman, *Dialog jako forma komunikace v církvi dnes*, p. 6.
First Dialogue

The Basic Anthropological Line in the Encyclicals of John Paul II

In the first dialogue we can hear the dialogue which John Paul II develops in his encyclicals concerning the secret of man, the importance of humanity, the freedom of human activity: Redeemed man stands face to face to God in personal responsibility. In the first part of his work the author indicates four starting points and sources of the anthropological stream in which the adequate anthropology of Karol Wojtyla also takes an honourable place. In the first place it is the biblical anthropology. He pays attention to its basic features, because during centuries this anthropology has formed Christian thinking, in which the deep sense of the concept of „person“ has its source. In the second place, it is a view into the modern philosophical anthropology, which deals with the problem of man as a person. In the third place, the author outlines the anthropology of Karol Wojtyla, who is the creator of the adequate anthropology. And finally, in the fourth place, he introduces the wide stream of the anthropology of Vatican II, which obtained an expressive form in the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes about the Church in the present world. These streams finally create the wide stream, which creates the basic anthropological line in the encyclicals of John Paul II. This stream sometimes ascends to the surface, but sometimes it is hidden as a girder in the depths of theological thinking.

In the second part, which is divided into seven chapters, the author aspires to give a synthesis of the basic anthropological line in the encyclicals of John Paul II, and how it is already announced in the program encyclical Redemptor hominis. The principal starting point for understanding man is the biblical picture of two reports on the creation of a human being and its analysis in the integral conception of man. The human being is created to live for God and for other people. The only possibility to understand man is in Jesus Christ. The basis of human dignity is in the reality that man is created in the image of God and in the redemption. In redemption man finds his very greatness, dignity and the value of human rights. Because of this the first and the most basic right is religious freedom. The right of the realisation of man’s relationship to God.

The focusing of man on God is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, because in him the perfect synthesis of anthropocentrism and theocentrism becomes true. Man finds in the mystery of Christ’s cross the answer to the most difficult human problems, the problem of sin and death, the problem of suffering and sorrow. God always stays on the side of those who suffer, Christ – the man of sorrows – is the revelation of Love which bears all, which endures all. Jesus Christ is the definitive

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answer to man’s painful problems. But man has his full and definite responsibility before God. Man is called to the fullness of life, which overcomes the dimensions of his earthly existence, because this life resides in the participation of the very life of God. This is vocation and commitment also, this is gift and duty, this is freedom and responsibility.\(^9\)

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Second Dialogue

The Personal Understanding of the Relation of Man to God in Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola

In second dialogue the author Ladislav Csontos SJ enters the dialogue concerning Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, he tries to uncover its original efficacy and to mediate it to a beginning exerciser.

The short description of what the spiritual exercises are and what they are not is followed by a small discourse about the origin and the history of theological research into spiritual exercises, and of the practice of Slovak Jesuits. The author pays special attention to the annotations of St. Ignatius, which are in a certain way the methodical introduction of the author and which provide basic instructions for giving these spiritual exercises. The annotations appear as the first and the most authentic directory that should be followed by the person who is giving the exercises. In this directory it is shown that in the relationship to God not only intellectual abilities have to be applied for but also the will, affections, imaginations, all ways of human activity, and the entire human being with the whole dynamics of this being.

The author observes that ways of prayer show their power and increase the abundance and completeness of man’s self giving to God. The ways of prayer are accompanied by general and particular examinations of consciousness, which is a special way of giving thanks in prayer. This way of prayer helps man to understand better what he is motivated by. The ways of prayer create one group of effective sources in the Christian’s way to perfection in the love of God and to their neighbour.

The weeks of spiritual exercises are not treated in the form of ready meditations, lectures or points, but in the form of an introduction, where the most important moments, which the person giving exercises cannot avoid, are emphasised. In the first week it is the principle and the foundation that lead to the clearing of the image of God and of man himself. The first five exercises of the first week aim to purify the man from sin and disordered affections. The first week presents the way of purification which ends in the joyful and calm consolation of the soul. This is the condition for the exercitant to continue into the

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\(^9\) See L. Csontos, Základná antropologická línia v encyklikách Jána Pavla II.
second week. The central and the most important point in the second week is the choice and the author is paying special attention to this part.

The third and the fourth weeks confirm the choice and they could be understood as a way of unification. This way culminates in the contemplation to attain love which creates the fluent transition to daily life.

The second part that wants to be a practical manual for the beginner in giving exercises is a mixture of suitable biblical texts for prayer in the spiritual exercises and of different models of retreats and also of exercises in the daily life. These models want to be the beginning for the work of the person giving exercises by composing his own course of the spiritual exercises according to the needs of the exercitants. Because of this it is important that the person giving exercises makes discourses with the exercitants individually or in a group so that the person knows their state and needs. The length of the spiritual exercises can differ, but should be at least three days at retreats. But the spiritual exercises according to the 19th annotation, i.e. in the daily life long courses, from two months, are better.10

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Third Dialogue

Parish Renewal through the Neo-catechumenate

In this dialogue Jozef Kyselica SJ associates his personal experience with neo-catechumenate in parish pastoralism and an introduction of this movement in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

The work elucidates the most important ideas associated with the catechumenate beginning with the first centuries of Christianity. Furthermore, it explores the important documents stemming from the Council and afterwards, which deal with the renewal of the catechumenate in the Church. Especially noteworthy is the liturgical document OICA (Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum). The fourth chapter of the OICA recommends the catechumenate after baptism – the neo-catechumenate.

For the many people who live in practical secularism, though they are baptized, institutions have arisen which enable the catechumenate for the baptized persons. One of these institutions is the way of the neo-catechumenate founded by Kiko Argüello, the Spanish convert and artist.

Because the author of this work was an active member who helped to introduce and see the flowering of the neo-catechumenate in Slovakia, a substantial amount of the work is dedicated to this experience.

The work is developed through nine chapters. The first chapter addresses the development, structure, principal issues and achievements of the neo-catechu-

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menate. According to the structure of the original catechumenate which is based on such fundamental issues such as the Word of God, the liturgy and community, the participant gradually grows to mature faith in several years. In its only thirty-year-long history, the neo-catechumenate has witnessed some amazing accomplishments through its itinerant-catechists and evangelizing families. Because of the numerous vocations to priesthood in the movement, the Holy Father established a seminary in Rome, Redemptoris Mater. Today there are more than thirty of them. The most significant fruit of this movement in recent days have been the popular missions in streets and squares of major cities.

Through his personal experience, the author highlights the role of the parish as the most appropriate setting for this initiative and re-evangelization. The work envisages the patterns of a newly reconstructed parish which is continuously evangelized and at the same time is a means of evangelization.

A general evaluation of the successes of the neo-catechumenate within the Church as a whole and particularly in Slovakia is presented in the concluding chapter.

The work can be useful from many points of view. First of all, it points to a new style of pastoral activity in the parish. The parish is conceived as a community of communities. The work describes the movement of the neo-catechumenate and highlights its fruit, authenticity and ecclesiality. It addresses the suspicions and prejudices of bishops, priests and the laity. It can be an effective aid for the search of fresh ways in the new evangelization.¹¹

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Fourth Dialogue
Euthanasia from the View of Catholic Morality

Aurel Štefko SJ in his dialogue uses his personal experience of doctor and priest, who is familiar with human pain.

Pain is an eternal problem of mankind. Not even the mostly perfect social systems have been able to eliminate it. Pain makes us face many questions – and finally we have to stop and bow before this secret. We are afraid to touch it and at the same time we try to break it in a naive desire to understand its existence. The most usual causes of suffering are: illness, old age, misfortunes and natural disasters. From different sources we know today that people who accept suffering with difficulty ask the doctors or the health-service specialists to kill them and so to stop their pain. This way of removing pain is called euthanasia.

History shows that several realities were indicated by euthanasia. In the beginning this word meant a prayer for a good, rapid and painless death. This is also the etymological meaning of the word, which has a Greek origin (eu – good,

Discussions on euthanasia are not at all new. The so-called "easy death" appeared in different cultures and in different ways. Today one talks much about the need of trained doctors and nurses who could treat and attend patients suffering from incurable diseases. There are also supporters of legalized euthanasia – i.e. those who want to stop life of people suffering from an incurable disease by an artificial intervention from outside.

The discussions are still going on. That is why also Catholic Church has to adopt an attitude towards euthanasia. Catholic morality stresses the value of human life, its dignity, integrity and inviolability. Therefore Catholic morality essentially refuses euthanasia as a forced stopping of life. It points to the fact that the life of man is a gift from God and that man is not an absolute owner of his life. This reality obliges us to protect this gift. Thus euthanasia means a refusal not only of the gift of life, but also of the Donor – of God and His plan. If one claims one’s right to live, one clearly exceeds one’s competence. It is like playing with fire. History of mankind proves that every evil – even the least intended one – gets reversed and becomes uncontrollable. Even euthanasia voluntarily accepted, would definitely turn against mankind and its negative consequences would exceed its expected benefits.

We regret to say that the sanctity of life – this amazing gift of God – is not accepted as an absolute value but as one which is discussed. Therefore it is even more necessary to construct a culture of life and to accept life as a *donum vitae*, as a *donum Dei*.

Author of the fifth dialogue, Andrej Filipek SJ, knows that culture is tightly connected to word, to human word, without which human dialogue is impossible. From the works of Professor Czesław Stanisław Bartnik he tries to stress the possibility of knowing the eternal plan of God. He attempted here to enter into the divine center, to gaze at the mystery of God, to contemplate the mutual self-offering of the three divine persons, to understand the mysterious reality of God’s openness to others and for others, an openness which realizes itself in the person of the Word. This eternal Word is therefore the beginning, because through the Word God shares himself. But this Word is also the End, because through the person of the Word, God gathers all together.

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It is not by chance that one of the most significant works of Professor Bartnik, and perhaps one of the best works published in the last few years in Central Europe, is dedicated to the study of the person. This work was published in Poland under the title „Personalism“. Precisely the understanding of the person is the key to understanding all created reality. God is revealed as a person, a Person dwelling in creation, a person addressing human beings as persons, calling them to existence. If a person is the highest category of existence, so then personhood is the meaning of everything, and that implies the person of God as well as human persons. According to Professor Bartnik, all creation is an expression of God’s openness as person to human persons. Created persons who are open to the eternal through the created world in which they exist are able to give a response to God himself. An interesting feature of the way in which Bartnik understands prehistory is the recognition of the significance of time and space in which created persons exist. In God’s eternity resides mutual eternal giving. For created persons the gift of themselves begins in time and is realized precisely in time and space. Time and space, though they are categories of creation, are at the same time a unique and unequivocal gift of created persons. This means that created persons are open to another „I“ only in time and space, and in these categories of time and space human persons develop and mature. Therefore, time and space form, as it were, the structure of the human person. They enable persons to realize that they are kairos, that they are a gift to themselves, and not only for themselves, but rather for others. In this way, the author understood and perceived in prehistory the richness, value and beauty of the thought of Professor Bartnik.

Precisely this thought of Professor Bartnik that the given kairos is a person who must grow through openness to another person, provided the second part of the thesis. As a historian of theology, Bartnik noticed that persons as kairos, namely as the highest category of existence on earth, are capable of shutting themselves off from each other. He shows us that this dynamic of created persons has become part of a drama of crisis. Bartnik called this drama of crisis antisalvation. It refers to a moment or an experience in which created persons do not achieve their fullness. Here we can notice the influence of the thought of Karl Rahner in the work of Bartnik, especially in the idea that in this drama of not realizing the fullness of the created person the need is born of an absolute Saviour. That is, the need arises for the Person of the Word, who through its power again opens the human „I“ to develop towards the eternal and to the created „I“.

This is how we discover in the works of Bartnik a very beautiful christological thought. Precisely as the mystery of Jesus Christ in humanity and in the person of the Word becomes part of the history of salvation, or rather, becomes the history of salvation, this way the person Jesus Christ, as the experience of a new kairos in history and for history, becomes the unique category which enables the under-
standing of humanity. At the point where human beings begin to understand themselves in Jesus Christ, there is born the social Jesus Christ, the Church, the Mysterious Body, as the Second Vatican Council says: „The place of unity between human beings and God and mutually among themselves“. The Church, as the society of Christ is revealed in the thought of Bartnik as a unique pleroma of creation, a christification, as the achievement of fullness, that is the gathering of everything again through the power of Christ, that is the power of his Spirit in the Person of the Word.

Jesus Christ in the works of Professor Bartnik and altogether throughout his thought is seen as the origin of the person in the uncreated Person, as the Incarnation in the midst of creation, as the Completion of all creation through the richness of the person of the Word.¹³

Sixth Dialogue

Professor Michal Lacko and his Relation to the Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia

Ján Babjak SJ leads the sixth dialogue with the work of a deceased professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, who died in 1982 amid fruitful scholarly and educational work.

He perused numerous Slovak newspapers and journals where Father Lacko published his articles. These were journals published abroad, such as: Mária, Hlasy z Ríma (Voices from Rome), Most (Bridge), Slovenský kňaz (Slovak Priest), Slovakia, Furdek Annual, Literárný almanach Slováka v Amerike (Literary Almanac of Slovaks in America), Posol Božského Srdca Ježišovho (The Messenger of Christ’s Divine Heart), Horizont (Horizon), Echo and many others. Among them also were Slovak newspapers such as: Jednota (Unity), Kanadský Slovák (Canadian Slovak), Slovák v Amerike (Slovaks in America), Slobodné Slovensko (Free Slovakia) and Katolícky Sokol (Catholic Falcon). He noted various available Calendars as well. Father Lacko as a Professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute published his papers also in the Orientalia Christiana Periodica and Orientalia Christiana Analecta; the author examined them too.

In addition to the library of this Institute he found many materials in the Slovak Institute of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, which owns possesses a rich library of Slovak books published abroad. Another area of the publishing activities of Michal Lacko he discovered in Slovak Studies, the chief editor of which Professor Lacko was for 19 years. Also other sources were encyclopedias, dictionaries and lexicons to which he contributed.

He published articles of importance also in journals, such as *Kirche in Not, Oriente Cattolico, Oriente Cristiano, Mondo Orientale, Oriente Europeo, Het chrstelijk Oosten*, and many others.

The *Bibliography of Professor Lacko SJ* includes also many contributions which were not signed, but we can assume almost with certainty, were written by him. There are three kinds of articles:

1. The first kind is found in the journal *Mária*, in the library of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, where Father Lacko worked for more than 30 years. He signed these subsequently with the initials M. L.

2. The other part of his unsigned contributions is referred to in his other works.

3. The third group consists of unsigned articles from which his authorship can be implied from their subject, content and form. Without these contributions we could not get a complete picture of the range of the publications of Professor Michal Lacko.

The thesis on Michal Lacko, the informant and reformer of Byzantine catholics, introduces Professor Lacko as a person, priest, Jesuit, professor, historian, Slovak and an outstanding personality of Byzantine church. The author tried to appraise some periods of Father Lacko’s life in his former work and in his doctoral thesis he would like to give even deeper insight into his life and work. Eight chapters describe the main activities of Lacko. Undoubtedly he was a great personality with universal interests. The thesis however is not meant to be the last word on assessment of Lacko’s life. The author would like to point out that the thesis should be only taken as the beginning of the search for the life and work of Father Lacko. It will certainly take considerable time until his whole work has been fully explained. This thesis will help others in their attempt to assess the life and work of Father Michal Lacko SJ.14

The author presents a complete bibliography of F. Michal Lacko SJ and so allows others to continue in their research and scholarly dialogue.

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**Dialogue does not end**

Even man’s death does not stop the dialogue, as we can see in the sixth dialogue, not only the delay of tens and hundreds of years is a new challenge to join the dialogue with history and also with individual historic personalities and with their spiritual heritage. The edition „Dialogues“ has only six volumes so far, but we hope that this number will increase soon.

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