

Circulus salutaris
**J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI about the Relationship
between Nature and Grace in the Art of Christian Life**

Summary

The author of “*Circulus salutaris*. J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI on the Relationship between Nature and Grace in the Art of Christian Life”, holds the view that there may not always be a simple and self-evident proportionality between the effort men put into tasks and the effects of their work. In particular, when existential or spiritual matters are concerned. J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI makes this somewhat depressing but common experience an axis for reflection on Christian virtues. It turns out to become crucial to understanding theo- and Christocentric character of Christian perfection. Salvation, which is the ultimate happiness, the final ‘success’ in the world and life, always remains the work of God and can be achieved only through His grace. The legitimacy of the acts of people, including failures, in the history of salvation, remains – to some extent – a mystery, though it involves an unquestionable argument: the Christ in person, His life, cross and resurrection. Consequently, either strength or weakness can become either a virtue or a weakness in the art of Christian life, since in these man gives space for God in his life and lets Him act, while sticking to truth and love.

Key words: Christianity, Christocentrism, nature, grace, virtues, faith, salvation, ethos, piety, the present.

Personalist character of human work

Summary

The discussions of work usually focus on its material and earthly dimensions. The Rev. Prof. Czesław S. Bartnik, the author of universalist personalism suggests two other dimensions that should be taken into consideration: moral and salvific. Work has personal value, since a human being is the subject, the maker, as well as the goal of work (John Paul II). Thus, work becomes not only the “source of income” but, more importantly, a factor that shapes, transforms, and develops a human being. This process is possible only when one relates human work to God as the first Worker, the Creator of the whole reality. Then, Christianity can use its theological language to discuss the three dimensions of work: creational, redemptional and soteriological.

Key words: work, Christianity, personalism, Jesus Christ, value of work, moral dimension of work, salvific dimension of work.

Prayer for healing in the light of Catholic dogmatics

Summary

In recent years Poland saw the growth of numerous prayer groups, which combine the charisma of healing with liturgical celebrations. From the pastoral point of view, the large number of the faithful involved in healing prayer could be viewed as a success. This achievement, however, should be examined in the light of the Catholic dogmatic theology. What truths of the Catholic faith does healing prayer in conjunction with healing charisma have to bear in mind? The healing prayer needs to be perceived comprehensively and universally rather than in isolation from the truths of faith. As sickness and health are part and parcel of the most important pillars in the salvation history (Adam's fall and his subsequent redemption by the New Adam), then the healing prayer must take into account the entire *lex credendi*. If Catholics undertake Pentecostal forms of healing prayer, they have to reinterpret them in the light of the Catholic *lex credendi* – from trinitology to eschatology. The Pentecostal forms of healing prayers must not be practised along with the Pentecostal theology. The Catholic *lex orandi* relating to the grace of healing in one Spirit must express the Catholic *lex credendi*.

Key words: healing prayer, liturgical celebrations, sickness, healing, dogma.

The Merciful Dimension of Pastoral Duties in View of Pope Francis's Bull, *Misericordiae vultus*

Summary

The article centres on the multi-faceted nature of pastoral-catechist ministry in view of the Year of Mercy officially inaugurated by Pope Francis with the publication of his bull, "Misericordiae vultus." The reflections on the fulfillment of the objectives delineated in the document could not but start with the definition of the nature of Divine Mercy. It is Divine Mercy that lies at the root of man's existence and constitutes the core of his / her earthly life. The proclamation of the nature of mercy paves the way for the analysis of the source of people's mercy toward their neighbours. This is succinctly expressed by Pope Francis in the bull: "We are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us by God." (MV 9) The manifestation of mercy reveals three pastoral implications indicated by Pope Francis in the bull. The first one involves the meditation on the Word of God while the second one consists in extending mercy toward others by forgiving their trespasses and actively supporting all those in need. Thirdly, the merciful attitude signifies preaching the Divine Mercy. These three forms of transmitting mercy constitute the most adequate way of living out the Year of Mercy, of giving glory to God and of renewing people's interpersonal relations.

Key words: Pope Francis's Bull *Misericordiae vultus*, mercy, meditation on the Word of God, exercising mercy, preaching the Divine Mercy, Christian ministry, pastoral-catechist ministry.

Freeing Hidden Attributes of Humanity

Summary

The subject of the hidden attributes of humanity acquires particular significance in the theological perspective. Deliberations on the Christian faith and doctrine lead one to believe that inner and hidden attributability as a hereditary value uniquely inspires all instances of man's sensitivity, dedication and solidarity. It enables a person to become involved in the aid and support of others in the least expected situations. Thus the growing number of hidden qualities making up human completeness are being revealed. As the Christian vision of personal attributability developed, it became naturally identified with the supernatural gift. This aspect of self-sacrificing human activity based on the inner and hidden disposition to cooperate with the Creator prevents a human being from the temptation of usurping what he / she is not entitled to.

Key words: freeing, attributes, humanity, sacrifice, dedication.

The Mystery of Jesus Christ in the Exposition of Faith of the Third Council of Constantinople

Analiza konstantynopolskiego wykładu wiary

Summary:

The last stage of the *Monothelite controversy* is associated with the Third Council of Constantinople. The resistance against Monothelitism growing since 640 in the Western Christendom originated in North Africa, where it was animated by Maximus the Confessor. Maximus largely contributed to the achievement of terminological clarity, which was to culminate in the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681). The Third Council of Constantinople assembled on 7th November, 680 as the sixth ecumenical council. Twelve papal legates arrived at the Council with Pope Agatho's letters and with the decisions taken at the previously convoked synod. After numerous debates, the doctrine included in Agatho's letters was accepted and a profession of faith was composed and signed by the participant bishops. Agatho's successor, Pope Leo II (682-683) not only personally approved them but also had them signed by all bishops of the west. The significance of the profession of faith of 681 consists in the commentary to the Chalcedonian doctrine of the two natures. While the Council of Chalcedon said that Christ is perfect in His divinity and in His humanity, the Council of Constantinople of 681 went on to conclude that Christ also possesses a perfect human will and perfect human activity.

Key words: the Council of Chalcedon, the Third Council of Constantinople, Monothelitism, Monoenergetics, two natures, two wills, two activities.

Jesus Christ and religions.

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council on religion in the biblical perspective

Summary

Cultural pluralism has become a major challenge for theological reflection on religions. It poses a difficult question from the doctrinal perspective, since it touches upon areas of vital concern connected primarily with Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology, that is, the sheer doctrinal foundations of faith and justification of the mission of the Church in the world. Therefore, we recommend a biblical reflection on the teaching concerning religion, the rudiments of which were prophetically defined by the Second Vatican Council mainly in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* and in the declaration *Nostra aetate* on non-Christian religions. The source of the reflection undertaken constitutes universalist Christology which enables us to comprehend and show theological appreciation of the religious question which incessantly manifests itself in the human heart. It appears as an expression and existential epiphany of man's ontic dependence and a call to reunion with Jesus Christ. Universalist Christology shapes the global attitude of the Church towards other religions, which may be described as preaching and dialogue. The Church cannot abandon preaching which is its essential mainspring and which reflects its historic mission. The Church has been called to the interminable and wide-spread preaching of *mirabilia Dei*, which occurred in the course of history and found their fulfilment in the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, at "the completion of time" (Galatians 4:4) and "once and for all" (Romans 6:10). The dialogue, on the other hand, appears as the preparation for the preaching. From this point of view, in Christian consciousness Jesus Christ becomes the beginning, the centre and the fulfilment of all religions, and he does so as the One who after having brought them into being, receives, purifies and evaluates them so as to lead them eschatologically to God, "so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Key words: Jesus Christ, Church, religions, dialogue, preaching.

The Merciful Love of Jesus (Lk 23:40-43)

Summary

The Penitent Thief endowed with Jesus' 'merciful love' may have predicted the future Kingdom of which Christ will be "Head" after His resurrection. Jesus' answer refers to a more magnificent reality than the one which the Penitent Thief had in mind. It is not in the future but 'today' that the Penitent Thief has to be with Christ. Jesus' reply acquires a greater value in the context of the third Gospel – the Good News about salvation and mercy (Jesus' merciful love). Jesus is looking for sinners (Lk 9:10) and He prepared true privileges for them (Lk 15:7-10:24.32). The Gospel according to St Luke is a divine message proclaiming marvellous acts of forgiveness: the pardon of a sinful woman – the woman caught in adultery (Lk 7:36-50), of Zacchaeus the tax collector (Lk 19:1-10), and authority wielding officials (Lk 23,43). Other words uttered by Jesus on the Cross sanction and crown the conversion of the Penitent Thief. According to Luke (Lk 23:45), the temple veil being torn in two is in itself a clear divine proclamation of the fulfilment of redemptive signals of breaking the Old Covenant and opening the paradise to the repentant sinners. Jesus' promise to the Penitent Thief constitutes a solemn announcement of the new economy in which the lost rights are re-established. God does not desert the one who rejects Him nor does He forget him. Jesus responded with patience and silence to all the harm and violence to which he had been subjected. God abundantly rewards the one who remains unshaken in his faith (*c.f.* Mt 10:32). The Penitent Thief unlike the infuriated crowd hurling abuse, addresses Jesus hanging on the Cross with respect, recognising him as the King and believing in the future reign of the one who is the object of derision at the moment. His courage and straightforwardness meet with the instantaneous promise of the noble reward.

Key words: The Old Covenant, The Gospel According to Luke: the Penitent Thief: love, mercy, promise, paradise, Jesus Christ, resurrection; today, sinner.

Antiochus IV's Expedition to the East of the Empire Reported in Theological Terms in 1 Mac 6:1-4

Summary

The episode described in the article focuses on the years preceding the king's death. The First Book of Maccabees portrays the king as the main power behind all the adversities faced by the Jews and as the one whose forcibly imposed anti-Jewish decree gave rise to the outbreak of the Maccabean Revolt. In its theological dimension, the contents of the Book is presented as the divine retribution in response to all the inequities perpetrated by Antiochus against the Israelites and in response to the king's persistence in doing evil. Many Old Testament texts bring up the problem, thus enabling the proper examination of the perspective as analyzed by the author of the Book. The brief presentation of the selected Bible periscopes makes it possible to outline the very theological intention of the hagiographer.

Key words: The First Book of Maccabees, the Old Testament, Antiochus IV, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Hellenism, the Maccabean period.

Unity through Diversity in the Church

Summary

The article consists of the following parts: 1. The Phenomenon of Jesus Christ; 2. The experience of the gift of the Holy Spirit; 3. The treasure in jars of clay; 4. Qualities of the Church 5. The concept of unity; 6. The conclusion. The beginning of the Church is founded on both the Paschal and the Pentecostal events. The former is carried to completion by Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. The latter constitutes the gift of the Holy Spirit given to the Church on the day of Pentecost. The life of the Church through the centuries has always been based on that dual event. The divisions and conflicts among Christians are an undisputable sign of sin in the Church. In the first centuries of the Church pagans could say: "Look how they love each other" and this testimony had more significance than any verbal declarations or ideas. The history of divisions and schisms within the Church is a painful anti-testimony of the calling of the Church to gather people in the unity that Jesus prayed for. For a long time the Ecumenical movement has been interested in integrating existing Church traditions with their local diversity. The intense ecumenical involvement has determined the model of "unity in reconciled diversity". Ecumenism, which is not an abstract reality has been given to us as a great life lesson. Far from being an abstract reality, it concerns the relationship of Christian communities with various traditions.

Key words: Christian event, Gift of the Holy Spirit, unity, sanctity, universality and apostolicity of the Church, ecumenical thinking, reconciled diversity, ecumenical dialogue.

Theological Reflection upon Apriorism and Apriorism in Theology

Summary

A priori assumptions are epistemological and ontological philosophical attitudes connected with agnosticism. Representatives of this trend like Immanuel Kant, maintain that human cognition is not capable of gaining cognisance of the world, but rather of its own interior. Cognisance of the world occurs a priori. A question arises whether this supposition stems from objective assumptions or whether it is an a priori presupposition itself. What is crucial at this point is the cognisance of being: the existence of the world apart from the cognising entity and the existence of the cognising entity.

The realistic philosophical trend, which assumes the existence of a real world has also an a priori cognisance that refers to the possibility of the existence of two types of being, not of one only. The a priori assumption refers to the existence of one type of being and the existence of two different types of being.

This author argues that all instances of cognisance are part of a general attitude that encompasses the whole personality including the intellect, the will and the emotions. The problem of a priori assumptions is greater than ontology; it is also the subject of philosophical and psychological anthropology. In theology, the spectrum of the subject is significantly broadened. The a priori assumption of the human being may be understood in two ways: either the human being shapes his assumptions and decisions independently and for no reason, or the human being has his assumptions and decisions determined by God. Theological reflections on various a priori assumptions in this paper are a mere sketch that calls for further elaboration.

Key words: a priori assumption, cognisance, axiom, will, decision, world view, God, atheism.

The Functions Held in St. Honoratius' Monastery on the Basis of the *Rule* of St. Isidore of Seville

Summary

The article presents the functions and tasks imposed on the monks of St. Honoratius' Monastery in Spain by the Rule of St. Isidore of Seville. It is not known whether the precepts were the same in the whole Visigothic Kingdom of Spain or whether they were observed exclusively in St. Honoratius' Monastery. This oldest Spanish *Rule* of St. Isidore of Seville written down in the first half of the 7th century outlines the details of the daily monastic life focussing on those relating to the organisational matters, where each monk is assigned a particular function. Although the abbot plays the most important role, the superiors and deans also carry out significant functions. It is hard to imagine the effective administration of a monastery without a porter, a treasurer, a sexton, a gardener or a miller. Each function should be viewed as indispensable since it helped to keep the law and order in the community and also enabled them to strive for holiness and perfection.

Key words: Rule, monk, St. Isidore of Seville, function, monastery.

The Inscription on Jesus' Cross in the Latin Patristic Exegesis

Summary

Almost every detail in the inscription placed by Pilate on Jesus' cross attracts the attention of ancient exegetes. Why were three languages used in *titulo damnationis*? One reason, as Augustine and the Venerable Bede argue, lies in the nature of the languages, which somehow represent the culture of all nations – *universitas omnium gentium*, with all their achievements in philosophy, law and political power. For Augustine and John Chrysostom the languages are akin to three witnesses to the truth. The multilingual inscription on the cross constitutes the proclamation of the truth about the kingship of Christ over all nations. A certain symbolism can also be discerned in the title being put at the top of the cross. It shows the transcendence of Christ as the Lord and God. In turn, the content of the inscription: *rex Iudaeorum* makes one reflect on the relationship between His rule over Israel and over other nations. Augustine refers to Paul's metaphor of a new branch grafted into an olive tree. The tree trunk is the chosen people into which the branch symbolizing the gentiles has been grafted. Augustine speculates on the typology of Pontius Pilate's inscription in the prologue to Ps 57-59. He uses a textual variant of the Psalms, which makes him understand the initial verse in the following sense: "Do not destroy the heading of the title". These words are meant as a prophecy referring to the inscription on the cross, which Pilate did not have removed despite the insistence of the Jews. *Titulus damnationis* indicated the immortal King, whose power never ends. The discovery of the Pilate inscription in the 4th century seems to embody the significance of the truth that the words expressed. Augustine is the leading western explicator of Mt 27: 37. His interpretation contains almost all the aspects of the ancient Latin exegesis of the aforementioned biblical fragment.

Key words: Latin patristic exegesis, Augustine of Hippo, Venerable Bede, Matthew 27: 37, Mark 15: 26, Luke 23: 38, John 19:19, Psalm 57:1, Pontius Pilate inscription on the cross, relics of the cross, the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews, salutary universalism.

Understanding as the agreement in the light of the hermeneutic thoughts

Summary

The article attempts to show the relationship between the categories of understanding and agreement, and to revisit the prerequisite for a real conversation as the basis of an agreement between the interlocutors in terms of contemporary hermeneutics (H-G. Gadamer, P. Ricoeur) in the context of contemporary debates about Europe's unity. A conversation cannot be regarded as a rule, which in itself (through the application of various procedures and techniques) will enable us to reach an agreement. Entrenched in man's existential structure, the categories of understanding and agreement are essential for his sense of being in the world (*Lebenswelt*) and as such relate to the sphere of self-understanding. Gadamer's hermeneutics of *understanding and agreement* is both a living process and a discourse characterized by an attitude of openness to and appreciation of the interlocutor. The experience of speaking includes the ability to get together and inspire each other towards the universal *logos* (sense).

Key words: hermeneutics, European Studies, philosophy of dialogue, theology.

Two homelands. About the literary oeuvre of the German Catholic priest Peter Dörfler

Summary

The author of the article, "Two Homelands: On the Literary Output of Peter Dörfler, a German Priest" points out that a characteristic feature of Peter Dörfler's literary writing is its frequent reference to the European tradition built upon the Greco-Roman and Christian cultures. This tradition is depicted in the form of universal motives symbolising the unity of the world and expressed not only by the categories of intellect and experience, but also by elements of the sacred. In his literary works, he reflects upon cultural, social and religious changes taking place in Germany in the first half of the 20th century. The aim of this paper is to detect the influence of both Bavaria (his family homeland) and Rome (his spiritual homeland) on the writings of Dörfler, classified as a *Renouveau Catholique* writer.

Key words: Catholic Church, kerygma, literature, religion, priest.

Towards the Marian Nature of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy

Summary

The Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy announced by Pope Francis (December 8th, 2015 – June 20th 2016) is supposed to aid the Church in contemplating and experiencing the Divine Mercy, and subsequently in being a witness to it, i.e. bringing the Gospel of mercy to every human being. Mary can play a crucial role in this undertaking. Thus it is worth introducing the Marian element into the Jubilee. The article, based on Francis's teaching, indicates why and how Mary deserves the title of the "Mother of Mercy". To begin with, she was once shaped by the Divine Mercy and she cooperated with Christ in revealing the fullness of mercy (point 1). Today, she reawakens the hope for God's mercy, leads us to the source of the Divine Mercy, and enables us to become faithful witnesses to mercy in the Church and in the world through her motherly assistance and example (point 2). As a result, each act of trust in Mary, being a demanding component of Christian life, is ultimately the trust in the Divine Mercy (point 3). Therefore, it is desirable for the Church to follow the path of mercy along with and like Mary.

Key words: the Divine Mercy, the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Mother of Mercy.

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The Character of Jewish Mysticism in the Thought of A. J. Heschel

Summary

The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate how Jewish mysticism is understood by Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose definition is nothing like the ones presented in Western thinking. Above all, Heschel rejected definitions, seeing them as the source of superficiality of cognition. One might say that the alternative to a definition is polarity. Such an approach provides some distance and reconciles the two, seemingly opposing, elements, excluding the need to ignore one or the other side of the same coin. And this is how one should look at the phenomenon of mysticism – which, according to Heschel, was never opposed to reason, science and philosophy. One might say that Heschel accepted various cognitive levels: scientific, philosophical, theological and mystical. In order to reach the truth, one must – according to him – acknowledge the biblical vision of reality, which the human mind can grasp neither in philosophical inquiries, nor even in the attempts of systematic theology. Hence, Heschel suggests practicing "depth theology". Depth is, for Heschel, a dimension available through mystic cognition. The reflexions above enable us to claim that for Heschel, mysticism is a struggle to know the foundations of the transcendent reality, whose character is impossible to grasp and express by scientists, philosophers or even theologians. He says explicitly that "in modern society, he who refuses to accept the equation of the real and the physical is considered a mystic".

Key words: mysticism, Judaism, cabala, Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Paul Evdokimov is one of the most important contemporary Russian Orthodox theologians

Summary

While propagating the learning and spirituality of the Christian East, Evdokimov remains a thinker and theologian open to inspirations coming from the western culture. In the spirit of ecumenical openness, he comes up with thought-provoking views upon the solution of the Filioque controversy and the origin of the Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian mystery. In addition to extremely interesting proposals, he propounds the unfortunate and ambiguous neologism, Spirituque, which meets with the righteous reservation of both Orthodox and Catholic theologians. His Trinitarian thinking draws on fundamental Gnostic premises characteristic of Orthodox thinking. Every true theology has its roots in the mystic cognition of God inherent in salvation history. It also attempts at articulating the communion with God that man experiences by means of a theological language.

Key words: Paul Evdokimov, Orthodox Christianity, Trinitology.

The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God as the Basic Criterion for Christians' Political Commitment

Summary

The coming Kingdom of God, announced by the Lord makes it possible to overcome not only the radical separation of the temporality and eschatological destiny of man. It abolishes the separation of politics from religion. Every instance of identification of the former with the latter is a grave error. Equally erroneous is their mutual detachment with the aim of depriving the political activities of the criterion, which is the objective truth, available only in the religious dimension. These are the values without which politics can easily become subject to the struggle for power and for its maintenance. Given no possibility of assessing the measures in this conflict, politics is far from serving the common good, generating, at the same time, injustice and harm. Jesus, preaching the Kingdom of God, was aware of the dangers related to the political context and the possibility of political provocation. The reign of the Lord Jesus is understood as the realization of God's salvation plan, which exists in the religious dimension and is directed against sin. Any compromise in this regard leads to the withdrawal of faith from the political commitment, which results in the domination of various interests and calculations rather than that of genuine values and truth.

Key words: The Kingdom of God, Church, politics, religion, truth, authority, common good, injustice, harm, the reign of God, sin, values.

The Name of the Child's Father in Birth Certificate and Book of Baptisms

Summary

The church legislator lays down the guidelines for entering personal details of the father of the child in the book of baptisms. This should be done on the basis of the data included in the public document which confirms them. Otherwise, the statement is made by the father in the presence of a priest and two witnesses. The abridged copy of a birth certificate is a common legal document that exists in Poland. This document does not always indicate the actual father of the child. Polish law uses mechanisms that seem to be unreliable and do not disclose the name of the actual father. For these reasons, an abridged copy of a birth certificate is not a very credible document for canon law. This is why the rector should be particularly cautious while entering the data in the book of baptisms and always ask about the personal details of the child's father.

Key words: book of baptisms, personal details of the father, public document, abridged copy of a birth certificate, statement of the father.

The Activities of the Society for Promoting the Moral Interests of the Polish People under the Prussian Rule for the Sake of Education in the Light of "The Toruń Newspaper"

Summary

The article deals with the Moral Society for Promoting the Interests of the Polish People under the Prussian rule in the light of the texts published in the "Toruń Newspaper" from 1869. The main role of the Society was to raise funds for educational purposes. The acquisition of the proper education by the Poles played a crucial role in maintaining the appropriately high status of the Polish element in the country's economy. This was part of the struggle for Poland's economic freedom. The article aims at providing an insight into the educational activities of the Society in the years 1869-1884 in what was then the province of West Prussia. The information included in the "Toruń Newspaper" supplies us with the details which are practically impossible to be found in other sources.

Key words: Society for Promoting the Moral Interests of the Polish People under Prussian rule, Prussian rule, "Toruń Newspaper", education.

It is right to reveal and publish the works of God. The significance of deed (*ergon*) in the Old Testament

Summary

A human being in his/her entire existence is oriented towards God. Thanks to His grace, not only is he/she *capax Dei*, but only in God does he/she feel fulfilled. Eternity is the communion of people and man has been invited to it. He/she enters it after the Final Judgement, delivered by God after a person's death. What will the result of the Final Judgement be? Who and what will survive it? The man deprived of everything or his/her deeds, as well? These were deeds thanks to which he / she achieved salvation, and thus it is possible that they will be preserved in God. This article aims at answering the question of what deeds can be preserved in eternity according to the authors of the Old Testament.

Key words: eternity, *ergon*, deed, payment, reward, punishment.

The Mystic Cross as the Tree of Life in Medieval Art

Summary

Mystic crosses are common in Gothic art. They present the deformed and tormented body of Jesus Christ. They are also interpreted as the Tree of Life. The cross of Christ as the Tree of Life is mentioned, among others, in the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch and of St. Bonaventure. The mystic cross – the Tree of Life has a form of a trunk with branches, leaves, knots and fruits. It frequently portrays the personifications of the Church (Ecclesia) and of Israel (Synagogue). The arms of the cross often display human hands (the Living Cross). There are also mystic crosses known as the fork-shaped ones. These have a form of two branches of a tree. The opposite of the mystic cross interpreted as the Tree of Life is the Tree of Death, that is the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Paradise.

Key words: Crucifix, the Middle Ages, the Tree of Life, the Living Cross, Crucifix iconography.

Hope that never fails

Summary

Much attention is paid to the issue of hope in contemporary theology. Today's man, affected by illusionary ideologies of the last decades, seeks the light of hope in order to discover a more profound sense of life amongst daily stresses and strains. What people strive for is not some form of trust inspired by shallow sentimentalism and naive optimism. It is Christian hope built upon the most profound theological foundations. Christian hope is primarily characterised by *verticality*. This indicates its upward direction, towards God, as the hope put in God. So conceived, hope is a pure gift of *God's grace* exceeding all human desires and preceding any human initiative. Human hope should be put above all in God. Seen in this light, hope never fails. It is oriented towards salvation, that is towards eternal life in unity with God and the community of the redeemed. As a theological virtue originating from God, Christian hope goes beyond the boundaries of the temporary world. This is not synonymous, however, with the escape from temporariness. On the contrary, it is the solidarity and responsibility for the world, the attitude which manifests itself in accepting and redirecting the mundane towards God, who prepared a place for all His creatures. Instead of evading the world history, Christian hope directs it towards eschatological fulfilment.

Key words: hope, verticality, horizontality, universality, eschatological fulfilment.

The Comparison of the Image of Abraham in the Book of Sirach to his Image in the Letter to the Hebrews

Summary

Abraham is an exceptional figure in the whole Old Testament and an important sign for the New Testament. He is not only the ancestor of Jesus Christ, but, spiritually, he is the father of "all believers". Every Semite, in whom there is no deceit, aspires for Abraham's qualities: generosity, magnanimity, selflessness and greatness. The Book of Sirach praises the wisdom of some great men among the Chosen People, but particularly that of Abraham, who is called the friend of God. According to Sirach, the image of Abraham is that of a great hope because of the promise that "Abraham's descendants would be a blessing to the whole human race" (Sirach 44:22). This future and the image of Abraham in the New Testament becomes more powerful owing to the power of Resurrection. In the encounter with Jesus, the image of Abraham revives. The hope to become a father of many nations becomes stronger. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews stresses Abraham's faith, which has been put to the test. The last and the most challenging test of his faith, namely the sacrifice of Isaac, reveals the greatest mystery: the faith in the resurrection. The children of Abraham are now the children of Jesus Christ. God's plan for the world's spiritual future concentrates on them.

Key words: Abraham, Isaac, the Book of Sirach, the Letter to the Hebrews.