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MISSIONARY. EXISTENTIAL. SPIRITUAL. PERSPECTIVES FOR THE WORK OF THE CHURCH AFTER THE PANDEMIC¹

KLARA A. CSISZAR²

Abstract: This article explores opportunities for Church action after the pandemic, from three different perspectives: missionary, anthropological and spiritual. The missionary perspective; using an existential-analytical approach, should contribute to the Church becoming less focused on herself and more committed to in its mission for the good life. From an anthropological perspective, Church work is directed to the human being as the image of God and pleads for anthropological aspects to be taken into account in the shaping of Church practice. With the spiritual perspective, the plea is made for Church activity after the pandemic to open up spaces in which human beings, in the experience of their worthiness to love, understand and learn to love themselves without measure and without conditions.

Keywords: church, missionary, existential, spiritual, pandemic, Missio Dei, Pope Francis, anthropological, logotherapy and existential analysis.

In recent years, the term ‘crisis’ has become synonymous with the Church, without suspecting that things can get even worse, and that the world in which the Church lives is also being overrun by crises caused by an epidemic. The pandemic has shown the world how fragile human life is, and also that the single means of salvation, when facing such extreme experiences – both theologically and spiritually speaking - is love of³ one’s neighbour. Every era has its crises that have to be overcome and these crises manifest themselves in various ways.

¹ This article appeared in German in the journal “Diakonia. Internationale Zeitschrift für die Praxis der Kirche“, issue 1/2022, 11-18.

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³ The manifestation of charity as humanity, solidarity, consideration, etc.

The Church has never been spared from the crises of the world and humanity, nor is it today. The crises (including the crisis of the pandemic) facing humanity affect the Church in two ways: 1. the crises do not stop at the Church door; their effects are also felt within the Church. 2. the crises can be interpreted as a call to action for the Church. Both in the pandemic and for the time following, the question arises as to what resources the Church can draw on for it to not deteriorate further, but remain active in a creative and healing way, as an advocate of the ‘good life’.

Three perspectives that can be of significance for the Church’s work after the pandemic are discussed below. In the first perspective, in an existential approach, the question of mission is presented. Secondly, the significance of the anthropological perspective is explained. Lastly, the spiritual perspective rounds off the discussion.

Missionary perspective

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis declares himself a fan of a “dented” Church that is “wounded and soiled because it has gone out into the streets” and not of a “sick” Church “which, because of its closedness and its comfort, clings to its own certainties”. (EG 49) For the pontiff, a Church that goes out into the world is a missionary Church, one that cannot become sick because it is always concerned with the with its own success, in the sense of its constituent (missionary) mandate and thus of its essence. The integral understanding of mission, which has crystallized step- by-step since the Second Vatican Council, and whose origin is the Trinitarian dynamic of love, brings about a missionary perspective for the work of the Church, even after the pandemic. If mission is understood as the existential *raison d’être* of the Church, and if church life takes place within a mission that “goes beyond-itself”, mission can also be understood as a self-transcendence of Church existence that protects the Church from becoming sick. Mission, in this act of going beyond itself, can be understood as the Church’s self-healing power that protects it from stagnation and hyper-reflection on its own sensibilities. If the Church loses sight of mission, and instead is only inward-looking, it starts on an existential slippery slope of self-centredness and sets itself up to be driven by purpose, not love for one’s neighbour. Self-promotion or recruitment, stagnating or mourning the its lost power, as well as attempts to convert people, are manifestations of a Church that is concerned only with itself, one living contrary to its missionary nature.

Pope Francis calls this self-centredness of the Church the source of evil of times past: “When the Church does not go out of herself [is not missionary] to proclaim the Gospel, she circles around herself. Then she becomes sick. The evils that developed in church institutions over time have their root in this self-centredness.”⁴ Being a Church, in inference to mission, means always pointing beyond herself to something that is not herself. Stephen Bevans, one of the best-known missiologists of our time, formulates how in this logic, Church and mission relate to one another:

“The church does not so much have a mission as that the mission has a church. The church is not about itself; it is about the Reign of God that is preached, served, and witnessed to, and this makes all the difference.”⁵

In his argument that it is not the Church that has a mission, but the mission (the *Missio Dei*) that has a Church, Bevans refers to the Decree on Mission of Vatican Council II, *Ad gentes*. In AG 2, the Decree on Mission defines mission as the essence of the Church. From this, the mission of the Church, its orientation, its purpose, can be developed.

The mission of the Church is established theologically through its missionary nature: In the trinitarian anchoring of the missionary essence, it becomes apparent that this essence is founded in the love dynamic of the Trinity; from this community of love, the creation-theological anchoring of the missionary essence takes place, whereby the addressees of the *Missio Dei* come into focus. The addressees of the divine project, humanity and the whole of Creation, become the addressees of the Church. The soteriological anchoring of the missionary nature of the Church points to the completion of Creation in a constant process of maturing into Christ.

The missionary nature of the church is about God’s self-communication, which is first revealed in Creation, then culminates in the incarnation of the Word and finally takes place in the resurrection of Christ. These moments of salvation history, represent the eventfulness of God’s creative and saving love for human beings, and at the same time establish themselves as the criteriology

⁴ Kardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Erzbischof von Buenos Aires/Argentinien im Prekonklave: <http://www.kath.net/news/40706>, Online Zugang: 22.05.2018.

⁵ Stephen Bevans, *The mission has a church, the mission has a ministers. Thinking Missiologically about Ministry and the Shortage of Priest*, in: *Compass* 3 (3/2009) 3, 3-14, 3.

of the missionary paradigm of being a Church that conforms to its nature.⁶ This missionary perspective has far-reaching consequences for Church practice, but at the same time frees it from a pathogenic self-centredness. A centering on the missionary perspective of Church activity also has a surprising yield, namely, it stabilizes the Church and makes it a socially relevant actor.

In the context of these practical ecclesiological reflections on the understanding of mission, the question, and thus also the struggle about what is mission, is put into perspective. Is charitable activity a missionary practice, or is it rather the proclamation the real mission? In the proclamation (martyria) “that mystery is revealed which man and the life of man basically always already is ... the history of the unswervingly faithful God (Dt 32:4) with every man”⁷ (per intentionem). This mystagogical gesture of proclamation of ecclesial as well as of Jesuan practice always also has (per effectum) a healing character, for it proclaims the salvation-land of the world.⁸ Such per effectum healing words that transform the heart are what Pope Francis desires not least of all ~~from the~~ sermons, but from all proclamation (EG 142-144).

But the reverse is also true. The healing actions of Jesus per intentionem in the Gospels are numerous. It is diakonia. The poor, the sick, the marginalized, the discriminated, are healed by him. In following the healing Christ, it is the mission of the Church to be an “advocate of the oppressed and damaged life”⁹. In healing, it could be said, God’s love for people becomes tangible. The Church’s turning to the poor and oppressed (frightened) is healing because it creates space for the experience of God’s love for people. The works of mercy (Mt 25) thus belong per intentionem to the healing actions of the Church, but per effectum they also contribute to the fact that man, being healed, becomes capable of more love and (re)discovers the meaning of life.¹⁰

⁶ Klara Csiszar, *Mission mit dem Lehramt integral (neu) denken*, in: *Verbum SVD* 57 (3-4/2016), 292–308, 295.

⁷ Peter Neuner / Paul. M Zulehner, *Dein Reich komme. Eine praktische Lehre von der Kirche*, Ostfildern 2013, 40.

⁸ *Ibid.* 45.

⁹ *Ibid.* 50.

¹⁰ Klara Csiszar, *Kirche in Liebesdynamik. Integrales Missionsverständnis mit praktischen Konsequenzen*, in: Klara Csiszar (Hg), *Missio-Logos. Beiträge zu einem integralen Missionskonzept einer Kirche bei den Menschen*, Regensburg 2021, 121-122.

Anthropological perspective

In light of the missionary perspective as presented above, it becomes apparent that the work of the Church after the pandemic also needs an anthropological perspective as a complement to the common and up until now well-researched social perspectives. In recent decades, the Church, and also theology, have made great efforts to explore the sociological, but also socio-critical context in which human beings live. In addition to a theologically common theory of the world¹¹, the theory of the human being and thus the anthropological perspective, offers a better understanding of the shapers of the context, the addressees as well as the actors of Church practice.

Consciously or unconsciously, Church practice is shaped by images of man. What Church actors think of people shapes the form of their practice. Wrong images of man lead to wrong dealings with people and to irrelevant Church practices. For example, it would be fatal to have an image of human beings that ignores the freedom of the human being's will and thus his or her spiritual abilities; such as the ability to love, the ability to act and the ability to suffer. A Church practice will be convincing if it works with the existentially available but inactive or partially active abilities.

The pandemic has confronted individuals and humanity as a whole - but especially Western societies - with suffering unprecedented in its scale and impact in recent contemporary history. As a crisis of life, the pandemic has put being human to the test, and tested its capacity for solidarity, consideration for others and cohesion. This time of crisis has shown how devotion, as the primary capacity of human existence, is the only constructive way to endure suffering and even to shape it according to his inner strength. The Viennese psychiatrist and philosopher Viktor Frankl explains what this primary capacity means: "Man is not here to observe himself and to reflect himself; he is here to surrender himself, to give himself away, to surrender in recognition and love."¹² The Hungarian systematic theologian János Vik emphasizes what is important in crisis management, also with regard to good coexistence: "it is about the how of suffering" and he con-

¹¹ Matthias Sellmann, „Zuhören – Austauschen – Vorschlagen“. *Einführung in die Pastoraltheologie, Manuskript für die Vorlesung*, Bochum 2017, 23.

¹² Viktor E. Frankl, *Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse. Texte aus sechs Jahrzehnten*, Berlin-München 1994, 73.

tinues “therefore it is a reference to pastoral care (...) to assume that the suffering person here today (...) wants to make his own need for expression heard.”¹³ Vik advocates that in human border-experiences, confessional pastoral care should develop into a care of meaning that supports people in activating their very own capacity for devotion and thus contribute to a good, responsible coexistence, despite the most adverse circumstances.¹⁴

Overcoming personal crises by going beyond oneself and taking a stand on one’s own fragility in the field of good mutual coexistence is also a key moment in the concept of humanism which is a constitutive part of the reflections of the Pontifical Council for Culture, especially in view of the time after the pandemic.¹⁵ In the future, it will as well be necessary for the Church to make an important contribution to the new humanism through its work. The idea of the search for the meaning presupposes pastoral-theological reflections that focus on the spirituality of the human being and explores ways in which this can be activated, and repeatedly reactivated in the constellation of the *mysterium humanum*.

Existential analysis, according to Viktor E. Frankl, regards human beings as spiritual beings. Their capacity for self-transcendence and self-distance as based on this spirituality. From these two abilities they make use of their physical and psychological conditions to face and take up the border-experiences: “Man is not free from his conditions, but free in how he wants to behave towards them.”¹⁶ In Church practice, a space could be created in which people can work on attitude modulation, i.e. on how they can freely take a stand on external and internal conditions and events (including the pandemic) through their behavior, for their own good and for the good of others. Thanks to such small spiritually gifted steps, humanity develops in the real sense.

“What is man, the human being?” is the question Pope Francis asks in his address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture in November 2021. With his question he pleads for a rediscovery of anthropology: “Today, a

¹³ János Vik, *Eine Analyse auf Existenz hin – gerade in der Corona-Krise*, in: ThPQ 169 (3/2021) 246-255, 258.

¹⁴ Ibid. 259.

¹⁵ Papst: Nicht nur Anti-Covid Pläne sondern Menschlichkeit nötig, in: <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2021-11/papst-franziskus-versammlung-kulturrat-humanismus-video-covid.html> Online Zugang: 24.11.2021.

¹⁶ Viktor E. Frankl, *Ärztliche Seelsorge: Grundlagen der Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse*, Wien 2005, 18.

revolution is underway - yes, a revolution - that touches the essential nodes of human existence and requires a creative effort of thought and action - it needs both. There is a structural shift in the way we understand generations, birth and death. The particularity of human beings in the totality of creation, their uniqueness in relation to others, such as animals, and even their relationship to machines, are being questioned. But we cannot always limit ourselves to denial and criticism. Rather, we are called to rethink the presence of the human being in the world in the light of the humanist tradition: as a servant of life and not as its master, as a builder of the common good with the values of solidarity and compassion.”¹⁷

The common good, solidarity and compassion build on the human experience that the capacity to love and the capacity to suffer are difficult to separate but necessary, for the good life. Every human being has these capacities, even if they are not always obviously active and functioning. In the human capacity for suffering and the capacity for love, that dimension of being of the human being is revealed, which in Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy and existential analysis - in distinction from the physical and psychological dimension - is called the spiritual dimension of the human being. In a three-dimensional view of the human being, the physis or the physical dimension of the human being - in contrast to the psychological and spiritual dimension of human existence - does not require any special explanation: All bodily phenomena can be assigned to it. Experts are more or less in agreement that the cognition (thinking) and the emotion (feeling) capabilities, which undoubtedly help to control our behaviour, are at home in the psychic area of the human being.¹⁸ Viktor Frankl, the father of logotherapy and existential analysis, distinguishes from these two human processes the third one of the psyche those processes that have to do with freedom, responsibility and value. He assigns the ability to love and the ability to suffer to this area of the human dimensions of being, because both abilities in the human being - beyond any romantic notions - are to be understood as clear products of the human being in a certain situation. “The physical is given through heredity. Mental is guided by upbringing. Spiritual, however, cannot be educated, spiritual must

¹⁷ Papst: Nicht nur Anti-Covid Pläne sondern Menschlichkeit nötig, in: <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2021-11/papst-franziskus-versammlung-kulturrat-humanismus-video-covid.html> Online Zugang: 24.11.2021.

¹⁸ Johanna Schechner / Heidemarie Zürner, *Krisen Bewältigen*, Vienna 2018, 39-44.

be accomplished: Spirituality is at all only in self-fulfillment, in the actuality of existence”¹⁹

The anthropological perspective directs the view of the Church’s activities to the mystery of the human being and at the same time prevents it from thinking in an ecclesiocentric way. With the anthropological perspective, the Church refrains from placing itself at the centre and instead shapes a missionary paradigm that focuses on the God-likeness of the human being and thus on the traces of transcendence. The integral missionary paradigm sees the human being in a responsible and free relationship with his Creator and with all creatures. For the work of the Church, from the anthropological perspective, that tiny gap in which human beings can and may act responsibly, but which has not been opened, but is discovered by them as a space for free action, becomes important. The exploration of such freedom of action in the most difficult conditions of life, presupposes “humility” and is the only way “to defy nihilism and prepare²⁰ the way for humanism”.

Spiritual perspective

The spiritual perspective points to the importance of spiritual processes in the work of the Church, which can also be understood as processes of maturing into Christ. For the work of the Church, the promotion of religious-spiritual competences of human beings is also the activation of their spiritual dimension. Spiritual opportunities enable more and more people to become loving beings, in the sense of being made in the image of God.

Spiritual processes can also be understood as processes of becoming. In the struggle to find optimal answers for oneself and for one’s environment, which one is willing and able to take responsibility for, the person grows in his or her humanity. Coping with ever-increasing and more complex tragic and sorrowful aspects in life, is a permanent spiritual challenge that can only be mastered selectively, *ad personam* and *ad situationem*, and not once and for all. Spiritual processes are of existential importance in situations of uncertainty, instability and permanent struggle. In the context of human existence, spiritual processes

¹⁹ Viktor E. Frankl, *Der Wille zum Sinn*, Bern 1996, 119.

²⁰ Elisabeth Lukas, *Frankl und Gott. Erkenntnisse und Bekenntnisse eines Psychiaters*, 2019 München-Zürich-Wien, 40.

train the human being's capacity for love. A shift of attention "to the inner state of being with its inner regulations"²¹ overcomes the pathogenic self-centredness²² of the human being and develops an attitude to life "in which he feels from his innermost being like praising God with all his heart"²³. What is experienced in a spiritually mature attitude to life is that which transcends the human: "that he is held, carried and guided by God, that he is repeatedly touched with life and inspired by God, that he lives as a unique creature of God, also carries divinity within himself and is loved by God".²⁴ Through this special form of inner approval, the human being will be able to grow in his affirmation of life, despite external circumstances. The experience of God's unconditional and measureless love provokes the person to not only receive love in order to be able to develop, but to be able to love himself, unconditionally, in order to make a good life possible for himself and for all others. Through the spiritual experience of his worthiness to love and in the practice of his ability to love, the human being becomes capable of relationships. In this spiritual process, man will be able to appeal to the spiritual dimension of his human existence, precisely in moments and circumstances of suffering, guilt and death.

A spiritually mature personality can decide for love in every situation, regardless of what they are experiencing or what impulses they are currently receiving from their environment. In this mature personal attitude, the claim to be loved is preceded by a first claim, namely that of loving. God-experienced people who gift their environment with love as their spirituality develops are charismatic and beloved personalities. Not because life has spared them suffering, guilt and death, but because they want to shape life lovingly. The possibility to realize love as an advanced way of being in the world is given to one, at any time and under all circumstances. The activation of the capacity to love manifests itself individually in everyday relationships in the world and with God, but it also has a collective face in a solidarity lived together. "The whole cosmos becomes wider and deeper in value for him [the loving one], it shines in the rays of those values

²¹ Alex Lefrank, *Umwandlung in Christus. Die Dynamik des Existenzprozessen*, Würzburg 2009, 80.

²² Ibid.

²³ Rainer Kinast, *Werteorientierte Führungskultur. Theorie und praktische Umsätzeungen*, Freiburg im Br. 2021, 150.

²⁴ Ibid.

which only the lover sees; for, as is well known, love does not make one blind, but makes one see, value-sighted.”²⁵

An ecclesial practice with this perspective, in which the meaning-oriented view of concrete human life gains in importance towards a new humanism, represents a kind of “guarantee” that spiritual processes do not lead to an escape from social and political responsibility, but on the contrary, make people open to the world in their recollection of transcendence.

Opportunities for church action after the pandemic

“Help people live!”²⁶ This can be the motto of Church action in the face of a missionary perspective after the pandemic. But the missionary perspective also helps the Church to live. Being Church in the logic of the incarnation means being constantly confronted with new situations, each of which is both a task and a gift. What Incarnation “gives” to the Church is the fulfilment of its purpose. And what the Church simultaneously “gives” to a concrete situation is the possibility of realizing herself through such fulfilments of meaning. Every situation is a call for the Church to listen, to obey.²⁷ The anthropological perspective promises that the Church will analyze the context of human life, in the face of being human and in the face of existential questions. The anthropological outcome of this analysis can be taken into account by the Church in the shaping of its action, as an agent of a new humanism. If it does so, it will again become of interest to people and in demand, even as a protagonist and expert in spirituality, without striving to being of interest or in demand. The mission must provoke the Church, not because it seeks affirmation from it, but because it cannot exist any other way. In the end, the Church is there so that people can increasingly experience life in fullness and

²⁵ Viktor E. Frankl, *Ärztliche Seelsorge*, 66.

²⁶ Klara Csiszar: *Mission mit dem Lehramt integral (neu) denken*, 307-308.

²⁷ Quotation transcribed by the author. Cf. Viktor Frankl quoted by János Vik in the introduction to the 5th volume of Viktor E. Frankl’s *Collected Works*. Cf. Batthyany, Alexander/Vik, János/Biller, Karlheinz/Fizotti, Eugenio (Hg.): Viktor E. Frankl, *Gesammelte Werke. Psychotherapie, Psychiatrie und Religion. Über das Grenzgebiet zwischen Seelenheilkunde und Glauben*, Wien – Köln – Weimar 2018, 12.

create a meaningful life, so that - in the spirit of the resurrection and as we learn from the mystery of Christ - it is not death but life that has the last word.²⁸

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²⁸ Klara Csiszar, *Kirche in Liebedynamik. Integrales Missionsverständnis mit praktischen Konsequenzen*, 123.

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ANTI-GENDERISM AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION IN CZECH MEDIA

ADELA MUCHOVA¹

Abstract: As ratification of the Istanbul Convention commenced in Czech society, the Catholic representatives attacked the document claiming it was promoting “gender ideology”. The explosive statement, in the form of a liturgical homily in September 2018, initiated a novel exchange among conservative and progressive groups within the church. By examining a follow-up debate in mainstream and Christian media, this study explores the media image of the church and establishes that while most hierarchy took a conservative stand and opposed ratification, clergy and church members supported it. It also shows that the opponents diverted the discussion in another direction; instead of addressing violence against women and children, they challenged alleged gender ideology as such. Analysis of gender and equality, fear and power, authority and hierarchy, as well as poor communication styles, reveals problematic issues in the way the church communicates its teaching and structures. The way the church presents its mission, however, is undoubtedly connected with its inner coherence and credibility; theological redefinition and system changes must therefore precede any media strategy.

Keywords: Catholic Church, gender, media, Istanbul Convention, church structures, authority, power, equality

1. Introduction

This research article explores the heated anti- ‘gender ideology’ debate in the Czech Republic within the Catholic Church following the scheduled ratification

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of the Istanbul Convention in 2018.² Up until then, church representatives had made a few statements on the topic; however, it was a homily of Petr Piřha in 2018, on Czech Statehood Day (September 28), that actually brought the issue to the attention of the general public. In the backdrop of the national cathedral and the main religious feast celebrating St. Wenceslas, the respected priest, educator and former politician Piřha delivered an unprecedented speech in Czech religious discourse. His warning against the ratification of the Convention portrayed disturbing images of children being taken from their parents, families torn apart, and opponents put into concentration camps.³ The speech caused a sensation both within the church and among the public; however, major Catholic representatives did not distance themselves from its content. Instead, they continued to espouse anti-gender rhetoric and penalized priests who disagreed with their views.

This study examines the general debate that followed in mainstream and Christian media after the event, not gender argumentation in particular. By providing a contextual exploration of the problem, this paper aims to portray an image – with regard to gender issues – that the Catholic Church provided in mainstream media after the homily against the Istanbul Convention in 2018. More specifically, it asks what important themes emerged and how they were treated. What level of competent argumentation, transparency and evidence, for instance, was included in the discussion? And what challenges do these results pose to church communication for the future?⁴

² The Istanbul Convention (2011) is the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Each country signs and ratifies separately. The Czech Republic signed the document in May 2016; ratification was expected in 2018 but has yet to be done.

³ PIŘHA, P. “Kázání v katedrále sv. Víta, Václava a Vojtěcha ve svátek sv. Václava.” 28.9.2018. <http://kapitulavsv.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Mons.-Petr-Pi%C5%A5ha-K%C3%A1z%C3%A1n%C3%AD-o-sv%C3%A1tku-sv.-V%C3%A1clava-L.P.-2018.pdf> [25.1.2021]

⁴ This is an adaptation of a paper presented at the “Anti-Genderism in Central and Eastern Europe – A Question of Religion?” conference organized by the German Association for East European Studies in April 2021. Of primary concern is the Roman-Catholic Church, referred to as the Catholic Church or simply the church throughout the text. Moreover, somewhat indefinite “church” and “churches” are used without further specification.

2. Research Method and Results

With reference to practical theology methodology, an interdisciplinary approach to the topic is taken following the ‘see-judge-act’ method. First, the empirical data were gathered and analyzed qualitatively (‘see’) as it is presented in this section; the results were then evaluated normatively (‘judge’) and possible solutions were delineated (‘act’)⁵ in the following sections.

For a qualitative study, about 30 articles, statements and press releases were collected and examined with their relation to the sermon. Their styles and genres varied, from official church statements, newspaper articles, and interview material to opinion essays, or blogs. Their choice was based on the character of the media in which they were published and preference was given to mainstream media with general reach into public. The tabloid media, disinformation websites, and extremist religious websites were not examined. Social media were not consulted either apart from a few exceptions when no other sources were available. Research of social media and private commentaries would demand comprehensive study material which was not in the scope of this qualitative study and did not comply with the accessibility criteria.

Research on online material was conducted in early 2021, with both printed and online texts included. The search was restricted to texts directly relating to the sermon by Petr Piřha, not the Istanbul Convention in general. All examined material could be categorized under these groups: mainstream media of public service (*Česká televize, Český rozhlas*), mainstream private-owned media (*Aktuálně.cz, DTV, Hospodářské noviny, idnes.cz, Lidovky.cz, Respekt*), official church media and blogs (Czech Bishop’s Conference website), and Christian private-owned media and blogs (*Christnet.eu*).⁶ With relevance to the given homily, the time period was restricted to publishing between October 2018 and January

A recent media image of the Catholic Church, for instance, was discussed in KOUDELKOVÁ, P., ed. *Obraz církve v českých a slovenských médiích v letech 2015-2018*. Karolinum, Praha, 2021.

⁵ KLEIN, S. *Erkenntnis und Methode in der Praktischen Theologie*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 2005. Fuchs, O. “Relationship between Practical Theology and Empirical Research.” *Journal of Empirical Theology* (2001), no. 2: 5-19.

⁶ For Czech Catholic media, see MORAVEC, P., and L. LACKOVÁ. “Denial and Fear: Psychological Analysis of Covid-19 Information in a Czech Fundamentalistic Catholic Journal.” *Open Theology*, no. 7 (2021): 475–90, p. 478.

2019 with some exceptions marking an important aftermath in early 2020. The public character of this research did not require data anonymization; all authors are listed with their full names.⁷

The chosen texts were examined using the content analysis method; in particular, it explored the content, text producers and their positions in the debate and established the following as research results: a) building a timeline of 30 relevant articles; b) describing key actors and their communication strategies; and c) identifying key themes. During this inductive analytical process, I tried to ensure transparency of the process and meet intersubjectivity standards. The method used allowed for a flexible research process but could not guarantee the full relevancy and representativeness of examined material.⁸

The study revealed, for example, that there was disproportionately more pro-ratification than anti-ratification material. This was especially observed in mainstream media, which seemed to provide more space to the pro-Convention position. How to interpret such a difference? Was this due to supporters' ability to provide statements, or rather to opponents' distaste to defend their position publicly? Or was this related to distrust towards mainstream media in general? Or could this be attributed to the alleged liberal tendencies of Czech mainstream media, which dissuaded anti-gender ideology supporters from avoiding publicity? Research details follow after a regional contextualization.

The Czech Republic has low religious affiliation; the country is believed to be among the most secular European countries, with about 20% religiously affiliated

⁷ Petr Hruška summarized various contributions on parish website; this list initiated my research interest. HRUŠKA, P. "K diskuzi o Istanbulské úmluvě a problematice genderu." 20.12.2018. <https://www.farnostsokolov.cz/aktuality/k-diskuzi-o-istanbulske-umluve-a-problematice-genderu> [8.4.2021]. Introducing himself as a white heterosexual who his happy in his priestly celibacy, Hruška claimed that the sermon was demagogical, Cardinal Dominik Duka's support scandalous, the protest of Aneta Petani sympathetic and appropriate, the Convention good though not perfect, and further scientific study necessary. From his own church, he expected a profound revision of sexual scandals rather than a new crusade against gender ideology. Hruška, P. "Můj istanbulský coming out." *Facebook*, 22.10.2018. https://www.facebook.com/petr.hruska?__tn__=-UC*F [15.4.2021]

⁸ MAYRING, P. *Qualitative Content Analysis. Theoretical Foundation, Basic Procedures and Software Solution*, Beltz, Klagenfurt, 2014.

and 10% churchgoers monthly,⁹ so the role and prestige of churches are low in the society today.¹⁰ In the public popularity polls, for instance, churches take bottom place together with politicians as was the case in 2017.¹¹ The Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia was one of the most persecuted groups during communism; as a result, it developed open, ecumenical and pro-democratic positions. A shift to nationalist conservatism such as the anti-Convention campaign where the Catholic hierarchy took a stand alongside right-activists is therefore striking.¹² Similar tendencies have been observed in other Eastern European countries as well, where a shift from secular communism to religious nationalism has been lately observed.

Timeline

The examined texts were published between October 2018 and January 2019, with a few additional responses added later in 2020, see “Media articles” diagram below.

anti-ratification	Date	pro-ratification
Pířha (sermon), Kázání v katedrále	9/28/2018	
	10/5/2018	Cemper (website), Petr Pířha šířil ve sváteční den v katedrále sv. Víta poplašné zprávy

⁹ In 2018, the Pew Research Center indicated 11% visiting monthly, specifying that 8% of adults are “highly religious” in the country, J. EVANS and C. BARONAVSKI, “How Do European Countries Differ in Religious Commitment?” Pew Research Center, 5.12.2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/05/how-do-european-countries-differ-in-religious-commitment/> [4.10.2019]

¹⁰ HAMPLOVÁ, D. *Náboženství v české společnosti na prahu 3. tisíciletí*, Karolinum, Praha, 2013, p. 46-51.

¹¹ According to polls in 2017, for instance, churches were ranked the least-trusted institutions of public life, with only 25% of respondents expressing confidence in them. CVVM. “Důvěra k vybraným institucím veřejného života.” 10.4.2017. https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4279/f9/po170410.pdf [22.4.2022]

¹² ČERNOHORSKÁ, V. M. “Who’s Afraid of Istanbul Convention? Resisting „Gender Ideology” Narratives in the Age of Digital Feminism.” In *Feminist Circulations Between East and West*. Edited by Annette Bühler-Dietrich, 91–108. Frank & Timme, Berlin, 2019. p. 97.

anti-ratification	Date	pro-ratification
	10/10/2018	Česká ženská lobby (website), Česká ženská lobby podává trestní oznámení
	10/13/2018	Halík (Lidovky.cz / Christnet.eu), Homosexuálové budou vládnout / Prodavači strachu
	10/17/2018	Petani (Respekt), Museli se ozvat řadoví křesťané
ČBK (website), Proč ČBK nepodporuje ratifikaci tzv. Istanbulské úmluvy?	10/18/2018	
	10/19/2018	Petani (DVTV), Piřha lhal, církve straší lidi, říká aktivistka
Balík (DVTV), Svět ovládnou homosexuálové šokoval v kázání Piřha	10/23/2018	
	10/31/2018	Halík (idnes.cz), Piřhovo kázání byla hororová fikce
	10/22/2018	Hruška (Facebook, website), Můj istanbulský coming out
Duka (website), K cause svatováclavského kázání P. Piřhy	10/11/2018	
Piřha (website), Sdělení k diskusi o Istanbulské smlouvě	undated	
	11/1/2018	Petráček (Hospodářské noviny), Piřhovo kázání o vládě homosexuálů byl agresivní bulvár
	11/2/2018	Malý (Český rozhlas), Z Istanbulské úmluvy kritici vyčítají víc, než v ní je
Duka (Blog Aktualně.cz), Léčba genderu papežem Františkem	11/6/2018	
Prohlášení Arcibiskupství pražského	11/12/2018	
	11/16/2018	Holub (Respekt), Nezávislost genderu na pohlaví

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anti-ratification	Date	pro-ratification
	11/22/2018	Cemper (website), Mons. Petr Piřha vysvětluje své kázání dalšími nepravdami
Piřha (Mf Dnes) Vaše rodiny budou roztrřeny, kritizuje dál kněz	11/26/2018	
	11/27/2018	Soukup (Christnet.eu), Pomýlené tažení proti Istanbulské úmluvě
	11/27/2018	Kolářová (Christnet.eu), Pohlaví si nevybíráme
	11/29/2018	Holík (Proglas), Obchodníci se strachem
	11/30/2018	Holub (website), Gender: Je třeba odlišovat, ale ne oddělovat
Duka (letter), Official Letter to Tomáš Petráček	12/3/2018	
Kročil (website), Křesřanská antropologie a genderová teorie	12/4/2018	
	12/10/2018	řotola (Christnet.eu), Gender je i pro křesřany
	12/11/2018	Halík (website, Aktuálně.cz), Prohlášení k písemnému napomenutí ze strany Dominika Duky
	12/14/2018	Beránek (Universum), Kouřová clona Istanbulské úmluvy
	12/20/2018	Hruška (website), K diskusi o Istanbulské smlouvě
	1/3/2019	Smyčka et al. (website) Otevřený dopis s otázkami na p. kardinála Dominika Duku
Duka (letter), Odpověď arcibiskupství	1/22/2019	
Petráček released from the Chapter	3/1/2020	
	3/25/2020	Mohelník et al. (website), Podpora člena redakční rady Tomáše Petráčka

anti-ratification	Date	pro-ratification
	4/17/2020	Petráček (Reflex), Stárnoucí Zeman a Duka úporně brání svět, který mizí
	5/1/2020	Petráček (Respekt), Církev s nakazila přesvědčením, že na lidi je potřeba dohlížet

Diagram 1: "Media articles"¹³

Key actors

In this case study, three different players were examined, the conservative anti-Convention group, represented mainly by Catholic hierarchy; the progressive pro-Convention group, represented by Catholic priests and church members; and media providing space for both opposing groups. I treated texts from authors outside of the Catholic Church as secondary sources.

Cardinal Dominik Duka, the serving President of the Czech Bishop's Conference (ČBK), represented the opponents. During his political attempt for the restitution of church property, he repeatedly demonstrated closeness to politicians with nationalist and far-right tendencies. The highest church office provided him with a strong public voice and influence, so he became a major representative of the anti-Convention group, overlooking at the same time misuse by calling it hysteria or hesitating to meet victims of sexual abuse by clergymen. Josef Beránek observes that the Petr Piňha sermon was soon supported and cited by various disinformation media.¹⁴ Some other church representatives were also involved in the anti-Convention campaign. The ČBK issued a pastoral letter in May 2018 warning against the ratification; the bishops claimed concerns about its content and that existing Czech law was protecting men and women enough.¹⁵

¹³ Author's name is followed with used media within brackets; "website" stands for the author's homepage, either private or official.

¹⁴ BERÁNEK, J. "Kouřová clona Istanbulske úmluvy." *Universum*, 14.12.2018. <http://www.krestanskaakademie.cz/universum/4-18.pdf> [22.4.2022]

¹⁵ Česká biskupská konference. "Istanbulska úmluva není posilou přátelství muže a ženy, píšou biskupové." *Pastýřský list*. 13.5.2018. <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/180513istanbulska-umluva-neni-posilou-pratelstvi-muze-a-zeny-pisou->

In her feminist study, Vanda Maufras Černohorská describes church activities in this matter as disinformation campaign spreading mainly through religious gatherings, social media, mail chains, and disinformation blogs.¹⁶

The supporters were represented by Catholics who opposed both the format and content of the sermon.¹⁷ Although from various backgrounds, most were Catholic priests and public figures (such as Tomáš Halík, Tomáš Petráček and Petr Hruška), while two were bishops (Václav Malý and Tomáš Holub). In Czech media, Halík usually takes a prominent position due to his appealing way of communicating; he appears often in public media and speaks engagingly on given issues. His voice, therefore, was particularly sought-after by the journalists during the case.

Czech mainstream media are seen as trustworthy and high-quality sources in the post-communist space. The public service media *Czech Television* and *Czech Radio* have for long been rated as independent and objective. There has been a slight tension between mainstream media (independently controlled institutions) and the church (a hierarchical established organization with its own agenda). Generally, there were no serious conflicts in past decades; the public service media provide, for instance, significant broadcasting time to religious news and programs. Recent financial, gender, and sexual issues somewhat increased the distance between church and media. In an attempt to protect its ethical worldview, as well as its organizational structures, the church has often responded with distrust and resistance, as was the case with the Istanbul Convention.¹⁸ In gener-

biskupove [25.1.2021]. The anti-Convention campaign included representatives of other six churches as they appealed to the Parliament against ratification, Česká biskupská konference. “Církve ke schvalování tzv. Istanbulské úmluvy v ČR.” 25.6.2018. <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/180625cirkve-ke-schvalovani-tzv-istanbulske-umluvy-v-cr> [22.4.2022]

¹⁶ ČERNOHORSKÁ, “Who’s Afraid,” p. 98.

¹⁷ Daniel Soukup, for instance, demonstrated false argumentation by the anti-ratification campaign, SOUKUP, D. “Pomýlené tažení proti Istanbulské úmluvě.” *Christnet.eu*, 27.11.2018. http://www.christnet.eu/clanky/6153/pomylene_tazeni_proti_istanbulske_umluve.url [25.1.2021]

¹⁸ The major tension between the Catholic Church and Czech Television came in 2020 when the Czech Bishops’ Conference nominee Hana Lipovská became a member of the Czech

al, the media image of the Catholic Church is rather negative for which journalist and academic Denisa Hejlová holds both the church and the media responsible.¹⁹

Key themes

Although the initial idea of this project was to explore the argumentative positions and ideological backgrounds of pro- and anti-groups with regard to the Istanbul Convention, I realized that the document and its political efforts were not, ironically, a main issue of the debate. In Czech society, the Petr Piřha sermon against the Convention was indeed a trigger; however, it disclosed a major division within and between church groups with different social and political positions, and revealed forms of communication in expressing philosophical world-views and psychological insecurities. Gender violence is not therefore a primary theme of this work; rather it is a set of themes that emerged during the research and outlined more general questions of gender and equality, fear and power, authority and hierarchy, as they were communicated – intentionally or not – during the debate in Czech media. These will be examined and discussed normatively in the following part of this paper.

It should be noted nevertheless that the Istanbul Convention was challenged from various sides across Europe. While in Western Europe it underwent standard public and political debate, the experts in Central and Southeast Europe maintain that the text came under significant attack from far-right and nationalist conservative forces, which claimed it was primarily promoting “gender

Television Council. The controversial Catholic economist challenged the very existence of the renowned public broadcaster and strived for removing the director general during her time in office (2020-2021). Despite facing massive opposition from different Christian circles, Dominik Duka personally supported Lipovská. She was dismissed for running in the parliamentary election in September 2021. Český rozhlas. “Poslanci odvolali Lipovskou z Rady České televize.” *irozhlas.cz*, 17.9.2021. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravodomov/hana-lipovska-snemovna-rada-ct-lubomir-volny-volny-blok_2109171543_ere [19.4.2022]

¹⁹ HEJLOVÁ, D. “Církevní public relations: proč má u nás církve tak špatnou pověst?” In *Obráz církve v českých a slovenských médiích v letech 2015-2018*. Edited by Petra Koudelková, 11–17. Karolinum, Praha, 2021, p. 11-12.

ideology” and attacking traditional family values.²⁰ The “Istanbul Convention in Europe” diagram below shows a clear disproportion: most Western countries have ratified it (dark blue), many Central and Eastern countries have not ratified it (light blue), and Turkey withdrew as of 2021 (red).

3. Analysis and Discussion

Invisible Gender

Besides a few individual voices, two significant responses from church public were registered after the sermon. First, Aneta Petani, a 22-year-old Catholic mother, undressed herself during the liturgical service in the cathedral. She later commented it was her personal protest against the sermon, as well as the follow-up from church hierarchy; she revealed it was a lack of discussion with different opinions within the church and frustration which initiated her unusual protest.²² Second, a group of Christians released an open letter on 3.1.2019 asking the Cardinal to respond to several questions in this matter. It was initially signed by 360 people; later some petitioners joined.²³ In a response letter on 22.1.2019,



Diagram 2: “Istanbul Convention in Europe”²¹

²⁰ BUYUK, H. F., et al. “Domestic Violence Treaty Falling Victim to Political Obtuseness.” *BalkanInsight*, 4.8.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/08/04/istanbul-treaty-falling-victim-to-political-obtuseness/> [16.4.2022]

²¹ KARAKAS, B. “Turkey to Pull Out of Istanbul Convention on Violence Against Women.” *Deutsche Welle*, 30.6.2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/turkey-to-pull-out-of-istanbul-convention-on-violence-against-women/a-58114681> [16.4.2022]

²² PETANI, A., and DRTINOVÁ D. “Píthá lhal, církev straší lidi, říká aktivistka po svém polonahém protestu před Dukou.” *DVTV*. 19.10.2018. <https://video.aktualne.cz/dvtv/dvtv-19-10-2018-zdenek-hrib-aneta-petani/r~00e124f2d3cb11e890ecac1f6b220ee8/r~c9e3e400d39b11e89de10cc47ab5f122/> [8.4.2021]

²³ SMYČKA, D., et al. “Otevřený dopis s otázkami na p. pardinála Dominika Duku v souvislosti s jeho napomínáním oponentů církevní antigenderové kampaně.” 3.1.2019. <https://>

Dominik Duka only referred to a previous official statement without elaborating his positions in detail.²⁴

The gender representation among involved players is striking in this research; except for Petani's appearance in mainstream media, no other significant initiative from a Catholic woman was registered.²⁵ Although many women signed an open letter to the bishop, no women published a text against the Petr Piřha sermon in argumentation, either representing supporters or opponents. Prior to the sermon, some women were concerned about anti-gender rhetoric by the church, such as Veronika Jeřková,²⁶ Pavla Holíková,²⁷ Marie Kolářová,²⁸ and Růřena Matěnová,²⁹ who confronted the position of hierarchy to the Convention or addressed the problem of domestic violence in general. The follow up debate nevertheless was dominated by men and priests, out of 34 examined texts only four were presented by women.³⁰ On the contrary, many women got involved in

www.petice.com/oteveny_dopis_s_otazkami_na_p_kardinala_duku_v_souvislosti_s_jeho_napominanim_oponent_cirkevni_antigenderove_kampan [15.4.2021]

²⁴ DUKA, D. "Odpověď arcibiskupství." 22.1.2019. <https://www.petice.com/a/220373> [15.4.2021]

²⁵ Theologian Magdaléna Šipka only briefly referred to her experience with domestic violence, Šipka, M. "Proč církvím vadí boj proti násilí na ženách?" *Alarm*, 23.10.2018. <https://a2larm.cz/2018/10/proc-cirkvim-vadi-boj-proti-nasili-na-zenach/> [2.4.2021]

²⁶ Jeřková, V. "Istanbulská úmluva pohledem právníčky." *Proglas*. 12.5.2018. <https://zpravy.proglas.cz/komentar-tydne/komentar-tydne-istanbulska-umluva-pohledem-pravnicky/> [22.4.2022]

²⁷ HOLÍKOVÁ, P. "Úvaha nad smyslem pastýřského listu biskupů ke schvalování tzv. Istanbulské úmluvy." *Christnet.eu*, 15.5.2018. https://www.christnet.eu/clanky/6063/uvaha_nad_smyslem_pastyrskeho_listu_biskupu_ke_schvalovani_tzv_istanbulske_umluvy.url [15.4.2021]

²⁸ KOLÁŘOVÁ, M. "Domácí násilí v křesťanské rodině." *Christnet.eu*, 25.5.2018. https://www.christnet.eu/clanky/6069/domaci_nasili_v_krestanske_rodine.url [22.4.2022]

²⁹ MUTĚNOVÁ, R. "K Istanbulské úmluvě: reakce na článek v informacích farnosti katedrál sv. Ducha v Hradci Králové." *Christnet.eu*, 28.9.2018. https://www.christnet.eu/clanky/6120/k_istanbulske_umluve_reakce_na_clanek_v_informacich_farnosti_katedraly_sv_ducha_v_hradci_kralove.url [22.4.2022]

³⁰ Hruška noticed this in his "coming out" anecdotal: though introducing himself as a white heterosexual man who his happy in his priestly celibacy he claimed that the sermon was demagogical, Duka's support scandalous, Petani's protest sympathetic and appropriate, the Convention good though not perfect, and further scientific study necessary. From

secular part of the society, such as women lobby organizations, women lawyers and journalists contributed to discussion after the sermon.³¹

For church this is an alarming call. It raises serious questions about character of gender equality in church, as well as church structures, management and distribution of power. Why did not Catholic women participate in a debate concerning them personally? Was it a rigid hierarchical structure that prevented them in raising their voice? How about their position as lay and non-clerical members? To what extent did women feel being full members of church organization without holding any offices? If women were not involved in the Istanbul Convention discussion – which was not theological but social and cultural matter – how can they contribute to more general gender discourse?

Technically, it brings an image of church where exclusively men – clerical authorities such as priests and bishops – represent the church organization in both opposing groups. Women, on the other hand, speak from their secular expertise position as lawyers, journalist, and activists. How much is this image of church as men's club false? Women are represented in social and charity work, however, when it comes to leadership roles in management, theology, or a particular policy – such as the Istanbul Convention – women representatives somewhat disappear from public discourse.

A striking difference between women's representation in Western and Eastern European churches, for instance, has been observed. While women in Western Europe hold important positions on various levels of church life (dioceses, parishes, chaplaincies, universities), in post-communist countries they make their careers primarily in education (catechesis) and social work (charity organizations). Is this due to their gender or rather to their lay status? Are not lay men actually in a similar position without access to professional church engagement? Two possible explanations emerge, one economic and the other cultural.

Churches in post-communist Europe are indeed financially less capable to employ lay men and women than their counterparts in the countries that receive somewhat stable income due to church taxes and social responsibility standards. Since the political change in 1989, each recognized religion has gone through a

his own church he expected a profound revision of sexual scandals rather than a new crusade against gender identity. Hruška, Petr. "Můj istanbulský coming out." *Facebook*, 22.10.2018. https://www.facebook.com/petr.hruska?__tn__=-UC*F [15.4.2021]

³¹ The Czech Women's Lobby filled a lawsuit against Petr Piřha for providing misleading information to churchgoers, Černořorská, "Who's Afraid," p. 98.

transformation process that included also a financial aspect. In the Czech Republic, for instance, churches were provided for from the state budget until 2013 when a new law was passed: financial and property compensation for the confiscation of property under the communist regime was settled.³² Among others, this new situation led to significant economic changes within the church, one of them being a reduction in the number of lay employees, both men and women. If they are unable to engage professionally in church, they simply withdraw from the official church space. Their position as a “powerless majority” prevents women from being active even in specifically women’s issues, such as gender and family violence.

A second concern is the different cultural conditions in Western and Eastern Europe. Since cultural revolutions in the 1960s, societies in the West have been challenged by social progress in many areas – political, cultural and sexual. This long-lasting exposition to pluralism and liberalism affected also churches in both regions. While Western Europeans show some degree of open and inclusive communication,³³ Eastern Europeans are far more conservative today.³⁴ Post-communist societies still have not fully discussed, accepted and implemented many new phenomena into their juridical systems and cultural practice.³⁵ Different responses to recent global problems, such as the financial, migration and Covid-19 crises, newly revealed this differentiation.

This is true also for churches and their ability to respond to new situations, such as the gender identity debate. While equality between men and women has for long been theologically treated, the pastoral practice is more problematic. The lack of women in leading positions such as parish managers or spiritual ministers constitutes an identity problem as well. If women are missing as role models,

³² “Dokonáno jest. Klaus nechal projít církevní restituce.” *Česká televize*, 22.11.2012. <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/1133098-dokonano-jest-klaus-nechal-projit-cirkevni-restituce> [20.4.2022]

³³ A Synodal Path started in Germany in 2019 could serve as a representative example.

³⁴ ANIC, J. R. “Doch es ist auch wahr, dass das Männliche und das Weibliche nicht etwas starr Umgrenztes ist.” In *Pastoraltheologie in Mitteleuropa*. Edited by Klara A. CSISZAR, Johann POCK, and János VIK, 35-50. Grünewald, Ostfildern, 2021.

³⁵ HALMAN, L. and E. van INGEN. “Secularization and Changing Moral Views: European Trends in Church Attendance and Views on Homosexuality, Divorce, Abortion, and Euthanasia.” *European Sociological Review* 31, no. 5 (2015): 616–27.

protectors and counsellors, no other women are inspired to confront the male-dominated hierarchy on issues such as gender.

While gender was somewhat invisible in church, sexuality has on the contrary been an important theme. Sexual ethics, for instance, constituted a major theme for John Paul II in his anthropological theology, which was not – according to Anic and Šiljak – questioned later by Pope Benedict XIV or Pope Francis.³⁶ Recent cases of sexual abuse within the church have revealed how resistant the church is in its structural defense. Sexual morals have to some degree become a main focus of media that cover the church today, be it sexual abuses (worldwide), the violation of sexual minorities' rights, contraception restrictions (Africa), or the fight against abortion (the United States). To what extent is this only a media image and to what extent does it mirror reality? Legalistic sexual ethics seems critical in contemporary pastoral practice as it is seen, for instance, in discussion about the Holy Communion for divorced Catholics. For outsiders, the church without comprehensible communication and respectful dialog may not only become old-fashioned and unattractive in the Western societies but also contribute to the violation of human rights and serious health problems in other regions of the world.

Pope Francis demonstrates interest in gender themes as Casanova observes “a change in tone and the relegation of issues of gender and sexual morality from the core to the periphery of church teaching.”³⁷ Although following his predecessors theologically in outlining gender complementarity,³⁸ he has recently introduced some practical and structural changes in this matter. In practical ministry, Francis invited women to acolytate, appointed the first women for altar ministry in 2022³⁹ and opened a debate on the diaconate of women – until now the first

³⁶ ANIC, J. R., and ŠILJAK, Z. S. “Secularization of Religion as the Source of Religious Gender Stereotypes.” *Feminist Theology*, May (2020): 1–18. p. 11.

³⁷ CASANOVA, J. “A Catholic Church in Global Secular World.” In *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*. Edited by Charles Taylor, 67–84. Washington DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016, p. 82.

³⁸ ANIC and ŠILJAK. “Secularization,” p. 11.

³⁹ “Pope Francis: Ministries of lector and acolyte to be open to women.” *Vatican News*, 11.1.2021. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-01/pope-francis-opens-ministries-lector-acolyte-women.html> [20.4.2022]

step to priestly ordination – by establishing a study commission on the topic.⁴⁰ Structurally, the number of women employed in Vatican offices has increased and in 2021 reached a milestone with the appointment of a woman to a senior synod post, which made Nathalie Becquart the first woman with voting rights.⁴¹ The Synodal Path in Germany and the Synod on Synodality follow a similar direction by identifying the role of women in church as their top priority.⁴²

Visible Enemy

The Petr Pitha sermon against the Istanbul Convention, above all, provoked fears of alleged ideology; it used exaggerated images to address listeners emotionally. The speech, without ever mentioning violence against women, warned against “gender ideology”⁴³ which he charged contributes to destabilizing families, undermining traditional heterosexual marriages, and the upbringing of children.⁴⁴ The preacher later issued an elaborated document in which he rejected violence against women and children but at the same time presented peculiar legal cases worldwide which he thought were problematic.⁴⁵ This text was chal-

⁴⁰ ZAGANO, P. “New Women Deacons Commission to Meet with Unclear Agenda.” *National Catholic Reporter*, 31.8.2021. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/just-catholic/new-women-deacons-commission-meet-unclear-agenda> [20.4.2022]. More on this topic in MACY, G., D. T.WILLIAM, and P. ZAGANO. *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future*, Paulist Press, New York, 2011.

⁴¹ “Number of Women Employees in the Vatican on the Rise.” *Vatican News*, 6.3.2020. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-03/number-of-women-employees-in-the-vatican-on-the-rise.html> [21.4.2022]; “Pope Appoints Woman Under-Secretary at Synod of Bishops.” *Vatican News*, 6.2.2021. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-02/pope-appointment-under-secretaries-synod-bishops-woman.html> [21.4.2022]

⁴² Der Synodaler Weg, <https://www.synodalerweg.de/> [16.4.2022]; the Synod on Synodality, <https://www.synod.va/en.html> [16.4.2022]

⁴³ This term is used to encompass all forms of activism, policy proposals, and debates connected to sex, gender and women’s rights that are problematic for the Catholic Church, see ANIC, J. R., and Z. S. ŠILJAK. “Secularization of Religion as the Source of Religious Gender Stereotypes.” *Feminist Theology*, May (2020): 1–18. p. 16.

⁴⁴ ČERNOHORSKÁ, “Who’s Afraid,” p. 98.

⁴⁵ PÍŤHA, P. “Sdělení k diskusi o Istanbulské úmluvě.” (undated) <http://kapitulavsv.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Mons.-Petr-Pi%C5%A5ha-Sd%C4%9Blen%C3%AD-k-dis>

lenged as treating data inaccurately, using alarming fake news, and building on satirical material.⁴⁶ By doing so, Piřha ironically disapproved of a possible hyperbolic character of the sermon – the supreme argument of his supporters.⁴⁷

Martina Prejdoová observes that while the supporters addressed primarily the issue directly related to the document, which is domestic violence and violence against women, opponents of ratification addressed mostly gender and social traditions, and by doing so, shifted the discussion in a different direction using language as “perverted law and dictatorship.”⁴⁸ Representatives of both sides responded: Kolářová, a progressive church officer herself, referred to Pope Francis and his solidarity with transsexual people claiming that people cannot choose their sexual orientation; she did not mention the Convention in her text though.⁴⁹ Interestingly, an exchange followed between two Bishops: while Tomáš Holub briefly outlined gender as problematic,⁵⁰ Vlastmil Kročil replied with elaborate arguments to reject “gender ideology”,⁵¹ which was then challenged by the sociologist Jaroslav Šotola.⁵² The opponents of the Convention later admitted usage of expressive language in that particular homily but also claimed that allegoric

kusi-o-Istanbulsk%C3%A9-%C3%BAmluv%C4%9B.pdf [8.4.2021]; also published later in PIŘHA, P. “Vaše rodiny budou roztrženy, kritizuje dál kněz Piřha Istanbulskou úmluvu.” *idnes.cz*, 26.11.2018. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/komentar-petr-pitha.A181126_150236_domaci_zaz#space-a [22.4.2022]

⁴⁶ CEMPER, J. “Mons. Petr Piřha vysvětluje své kázání dalšími nepravdami.” 22.11.2018. <https://manipulatori.cz/mons-petr-pitha-vysvetluje-sve-kazani-dalsimi-nepravdami/> [19.4.2021]

⁴⁷ MOLÁČEK, J. “Kněz Piřha rozmetal argumentaci... svých obhájců.” *Deník N*, 26.11.2018. <https://denikn.cz/26559/knez-pitha-rozmetal-argumentaci-svych-obhajcu/> [22.4.2022]

⁴⁸ PREJDOVÁ, M. “Kontroverzní Istanbulská úmluva: Co na ni říkají politické strany a zájmové skupiny v ČR?” <https://www.centrumlidskaprava.cz/kontroverzni-istanbulska-umluva-co-na-ni-rikaji-politicke-strany-zajmove-skupiny-v-cr> [7.4.2021]

⁴⁹ KOLÁŘOVÁ, M. “Pohlaví si nevybíráme.” *Christnet.eu*, 27.11.2018 https://www.christnet.eu/clanky/6152/pohlavi_si_nevybirame.url [22.4.2022]

⁵⁰ HOLUB, Tomáš. “Gender: Je třeba odlišovat, ale ne oddělovat.” 30.11.2018. <https://www.bip.cz/cs/novinky/2018-11-gender-je-treba-odlisovat-ale-ne-oddelovat> [7.4.2021]

⁵¹ KROČIL, V. “Křesťanská antropologie a genderová teorie.” 4.12.2018. <https://www.bcb.cz/krestanska-antropologie-a-genderova-teorie/> [22.4.2022]

⁵² ŠOTOLA, J. “Gender je i pro křesťany.” *Christnet.eu*, 10.12.2018. https://www.christnet.eu/clanky/6159/gender_je_i_pro_krestany.url [22.4.2022]

and apocalyptic language is a legitimate preaching hyperbole.⁵³ Was a shift in navigating the debate also intentional rhetorical strategy, or was it rather a play with politically attractive anti-Western cards?

The need for enemies often serves as a cheap political and religious tool; a well-defined danger shall enforce ideologies easily. No matter if a potential threat is legitimate or not, raising fear in the population is an effective instrument for strengthening power and eliminating diversity. Černožorská claims, for instance, that the church demonstrated anti-Brussels rhetoric and anti-EU sentiments in this particular case.⁵⁴ If some Christians maintain that secularization is a major danger for churches today, then decreasing religiosity leads to confusion especially in established churches and, as such, has a manipulation potential. Tomáš Halík observes that the church, which had survived a “hard secularization” during communism, faces a “soft secularization” in democracy. This shock pushes many people to look for a new enemy and the “corrupt West” serves this role perfectly: “In frequent sermons in post-communist countries, lamenting jeremiads on the ‘tsunami of secularism, liberalism and consumerism’ have proliferated, unacknowledged copying the anti-Western rhetoric of communist ideologues. These ecclesiastical circles were seized by vertigo and fear of freedom, agoraphobia – a fear of open space, literally: fear of the market.”⁵⁵

Similarly, José Casanova observes that “denouncing modern development as a reversion to paganism or rampant relativism is to misunderstand modern historical developments.” The traditionalist and defensive anti-gender position of the Church, moreover, leads to new social phenomena, such as female secularization and erosion church authority on sexual teaching. His solution lays in a renewed Church without clericalism and focus on the poorest and weakest, especially women; and his hopes are in greater participation of women in administrative and ministerial authority.⁵⁶

Who or what plays the enemy in a given time is of minor importance. In this case, a gender progressive worldview was portrayed as dangerous, threatening the social and cultural position of the majority population. The official

⁵³ DUKA, D. “Official Letter to Tomáš Petráček (Č. J.: S/2018/505).” 03.12.2018; DUKA, D. “Léčba genderu papežem Františkem.” *Blog Aktuálně.cz*. 6.11.2018. <https://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/dominik-duka.php?itemid=32760> [15.4.2021]

⁵⁴ ČERNOŽORSKÁ, “Who’s Afraid,” p. 96.

⁵⁵ HALÍK, T. *Odpoledne křesťanství: Odvaha k proměně*, NLN, Praha, 2021, p. 114-115.

⁵⁶ CASANOVA, “A Catholic Church,” p. 80.

church, which sees its role as an authority on moral issues, campaigned against the Istanbul Convention and sought for experts with similar views to approve its theological argumentation. The state office suggested that their competence and expertise was not tested carefully enough; it listed several texts from church-related organizations and politicians as disinformation and unreliable sources.⁵⁷

Churches need expert opinion in relevant fields, but their credentials must be guaranteed both professionally and morally. Operating with unreliable data may not only mislead opponents but misbalance the public debate. The way churches enter into and operate in the public space is therefore critical. If the main concern of churches is ethical influence within a particular public debate, sooner or later they are confronted with the fragile lines between democratic rule (state), religious teaching (church) and individual responsibility (personal coherence). Recognizing these lines delineates important ethical questions regarding civil juridical standards, religious consciousness and personal context.

The established religious organizations tend towards conservatism; their inclination to tradition and structures justifies their very existence. It is striking nevertheless if such rhetoric is used in secular and liberal society to appeal to the general public. What kind of audience, for instance, was the Czech church trying to address with its conservative and political-right language? In Croatia, Jadranka Rebeka Anic observes that anti-genderism is a part of the church mainstream; she sees church documents as the main reason for supporting anti-gender discourse in the Croatian church.⁵⁸ It is similar in Poland, where Elzbieta Adamiak notes that the Catholic Church takes a mostly conservative position

⁵⁷ The state office identified, for instance, texts of Tomáš Zdechovský, Member of European Parliament for Christian People's Party, the Moravsko-slezská křesťanská akademie, and the Byzantine Catholic Patriarchate, alongside disinformation websites, such as Protiproud, Vlastenecké noviny and nationalist Konzervativní listy and Pravý prostor, see Úřad vlády ČR. "Úmluva Rady Evropy o prevenci a potírání násilí vůči ženám a domácího násilí: mýty a fakta. září 2018. https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/Projekt_OPZ/Vystupy_projektu/brozura_IU.pdf, p. 15 [7.4.2021]

⁵⁸ ANIC, J. R. "Anti-Genderismus in Kroatien – Kontextbezogene Besonderheiten." In *Anti-Genderismus in Europa. Allianzen von Rechtspopulismus und religiösem Fundamentalismus. Mobilisierung - Vernetzung – Transformation*. Edited by Sonja A. Strube et al., 161–172. Bielefeld, 2021.

on these issues.⁵⁹ Unlike in Croatia and Poland, however, the Czech church does not dispose of a strong cultural capital. Vanda Maufras Černohorská argues that despite usually having a peripheral voice in the Czech Republic, by adopting the anti-Western rhetoric the church actually attracts the interest of diverse political supporters.⁶⁰ Some maintain that anti-gender initiatives provide the Catholic Church with a desired public and political influence.⁶¹ András Máté-Tóth speaks about European post-communist countries as a region with a “wounded collective identity” and argues that people and societies look back with nostalgia without ever overcoming the feeling of being victims.⁶²

Could this be true also for churches? Could not their nostalgia be a symptom of a fearful attitude which eventually prevents churches from adapting to a pluralistic and diverse society? The Czech Primate contextualized the problem by demonstrating that the Presidents of the Bishops’ Conferences in the Visegrad Group as well as most Bishops’ Conferences in Eastern Europe rejected the Istanbul Convention.⁶³ Why did the bishop use such a political and geographical distinction here? Petráček emphasizes that seeing Christianity as identity ideology is strong in conservative circles and functions towards mobilizing political and social forces which can work only temporarily. At the same time, the church loses credibility and authenticity in its fight while the state, on the contrary, “strengthens as an institution and gains credit weakened by the neoliberal critique of recent decades.”⁶⁴

Use of media can provide some key to these questions. What kind of media did the groups use as their communication means? The research showed that the supporters, who can be characterized as progressive, used mainly mainstream media and liberal Christian websites, such as *Christnet.eu*. The opponents, char-

⁵⁹ ADAMIAK, E. “Erfundene Invasion.” In *Anti-Genderismus in Europa. Allianzen Von Rechtspopulismus Und Religiösem Fundamentalismus. Mobilisierung - Vernetzung - Transformation*. Edited by Sonja A. STRUBE et al., 133–46. Bielefeld: 2021.

⁶⁰ ČERNOHORSKÁ, “Who’s Afraid,” p. 96.

⁶¹ ANIC, J. R. “Anti-Gender Bewegung: Ein Beitrag Zur Bewertung Des Phänomens.” *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research*, no. 24 (2016): 13–29, p. 21.

⁶² MÁTÉ-TÓTH, A. 2020. “Wounded Words in a Wounded World: Opportunities for Mission in Central and Eastern Europe Today.” *Mission Studies*, no. 37 (3): 354–373.

⁶³ DUKA, D. “Official Letter to Tomáš Petráček (Č. J.: S/2018/505).” 03.12.2018.

⁶⁴ PETRÁČEK, T. “Církev v karanténě: konec iluzí.” *Christnet.eu*, 26.7.2020. http://www.christnet.eu/clanky/6432/cirkev_v_karantene_konec_iluzi.url [22.4.2022]

acterized as conservative, used mostly official church websites for communicating their message. While referring to other similar church controversies, Petráček for instance observes that choice of identitarian media as the privileged communication channels of some Czech hierarchs instead of mainstream secular and church media shows the inclination of many conservative Catholics towards the extremist political and ideological groups.⁶⁵

The choice of media sends an important message; by preferring controversial or disinformation media over respected journalism, an organization indicates its distrust to state and society in which it operates. While controlling one's own media content is a reasonable and acceptable communication strategy, avoiding critical confrontation from mainstream media may signalize insecurity and an inability to face argumentative opposition. The problematic relation is mutual though. Hejlová maintains that the Czech media image is mostly negative when referring to church issues; the reasons can be found in both incompetent church communication and church prejudices in general society.⁶⁶

Authority and Power

A third important issue was the exercise of power within the church: two priests who publicly confronted the hierarchy about the Petr Piřha sermon claimed being punished with church disciplinary actions afterwards. Tomáš Halík and Tomáš Petráček challenged both the content and format of this particular homily as “misleading, not argumentative enough, emotional, spreading irrational panic, etc.” Both of them respected professors as well as Catholic priests, asked for re-statement of the extreme parts of the speech and called for critical argumentation.

Both men were eventually affected with personal disciplinary actions: Halík was received an admonition from the Archbishop in November 2018 for media appearances where he “challenges the opinions issued by his bishop on various

⁶⁵ PETRÁČEK, T. “Církev v karanténě: konec iluzí.” *Christnet.eu*, 26.7.2020. http://www.christnet.eu/clanky/6432/cirkev_v_karantene_konec_iluzi.url [22.4.2022]

⁶⁶ HEJLOVÁ, D. “Církevní public relations: proč má u nás církev tak špatnou pověst?” In *Obráz církve v českých a slovenských médiích v letech 2015-2018*. Edited by Petra Koudelková, 11–17. Karolinum, Praha, 2021, p. 11.

aspects of public life.”⁶⁷ Petráček got an admonition in December 2018 for his critical article and for not being respectful of church teaching and hierarchy.⁶⁸ Later, Petráček was also released from a prestigious priestly organization in March 2020.⁶⁹ Both priests maintained that their punishment was handed down with the direct involvement of Cardinal Duka.⁷⁰ The archbishop denied these accusations as irrelevant, claiming it was not for their disagreement on the Istanbul Convention but for their problematic media behavior. Indeed, both Halík (Archdiocese of Prague) and Petráček (Diocese of Hradec Králové, now residing in the Archdiocese of Prague) had already had conflicts with Duka prior to this case, challenging him on various political and social issues, so the tension over the Convention was not their first quarrel with him.

Perceiving such actions through media resemble authoritarian church management; relevant discussion and communication seems to be missing. Exercising clerical power in this way seems disturbing within the church especially when it was accompanied with inconsistency in dating the documents, citing the Canon Law, and phrasing on the side of the Archbishop, as both Halík and Petráček claimed. Challenging the sermon was neither a theological issue nor a violation of church discipline. Rather the priests were criticized for addressing their concerns through public media, their natural space for raising awareness. A common pastoral argument would be to challenge – if ever – the church hierarchy in privacy. But is there a safe space in church to bring one’s own concerns transparently and to be listened to? This case suggests that sometimes there are no other means for believers – both lay persons and priests – than bringing the issues into the public.

⁶⁷ “Duka dal Halíkovi písemnou důtku, ten reagoval prohlášením.” *Christnet.eu*, 20.12.2018. https://www.christnet.eu/zpravy/29427/duka_dal_halikovi_pisemnou_dutku_ten_reagoval_prohlasenim.url [15.4.2021]

⁶⁸ DUKA, D. “Official Letter to Tomáš Petráček (Č. J.: S/2018/505).” 03.12.2018.

⁶⁹ “Kardinál Duka odvolal Tomáše Petráčka z kapituly Všech svatých, kritizoval Piňhovo kázání.” *Christnet.eu*, 20.3.2020. https://www.christnet.eu/zpravy/30052/kardinal_duka_odvolal_tomase_petracka_z_kapituly_vsech_svatych_kritizoval_pithovo_kazani.url [21.4.2022]

⁷⁰ “Moje odvolání nepochybně souvisí s kritikou Piňhova kázání, potvrdil Petráček.” *Christnet.eu*, 17.4.2020. https://www.christnet.eu/zpravy/30122/moje_odvolani_souvisi_s_kritikou_pithova_kazani_potvrdil_petracek.url [21.4.2022]

Some argue that a power solution is exercised to keep faith unity and church coherence, as it is often true for state structures and corporations. How is power used in churches today? How is it related to authority and church hierarchy? The recent sexual abuse cases showed that misuse of power brings fear, resistance, manipulation, and control in both secular and religious environments. Churches are not immune to misuse of power and neither are state structures, non-profits or corporations. That women in church did not raise their voices for the Convention, for instance, was most probably due to insecurity and the fear of confronting church hierarchy.

Large organizations handle with disproportional power their individual members, both in democratic and religious intuitions. In secular environments, various control mechanisms were developed to protect individual members and their rights. So, while the church hierarchical system with its post-Vatican II concepts of ecclesiology and human dignity recognizes individuals and their position within the system, it should also review similar cases with serious concerns when addressing problems such as clericalism and hierarchicalism.⁷¹

Befriending Civil Society

This research attempts to characterize the media image of the Catholic Church after a provocative homily against the Istanbul Convention ratification. It has revealed that while the initial impression was strong and somewhat shocking, it was later moderated by church members with different opinions who were vocal in the mainstream media. By doing so, they manifested some degree of ideological pluralism within the church.

By its misleading rhetoric and one-way communication with little argumentation as well as by employing controversial media means, the church nevertheless showed characteristics of an established organization somewhat paralyzed in contemporary social debate when it comes to current gender issues. In an endeavor to promote its anthropological and theological viewpoints, it shifted the direction to a gender agenda instead of addressing a particular social problem of the Istanbul Convention, violence against women and children. This attitude therefore reinforced the image of the church as incompetent partner for serious social discussion.

⁷¹ KEENAN, J. F. "Hierarchicalism." *Theological Studies* 83, no. 1 (2022): 84–108.

At this point I can identify three different themes coming from this research, namely church teaching, church structures, and the church in the media. Though this research explored primarily the media image of church teaching and its communication performance, it also suggested that there are problematic internal themes, such as the use of authority, power, fear, and manipulation. And although the media image cannot capture the full reality, it should outline a possible direction for further theological and ecclesiological reflection. What does, for instance, this image tell the church about its teaching, structures and ways of communication? How important are these results for the church? How would churches like to be presented in society? And – above all – what is the coherence level between media image and church reality?

First, having examined this particular case-study, it seems that a local church needs to review the communication of its agenda, i.e., church teaching. It shall not be possible to address issues of gender and sexuality, for example, with simplified theological argumentation. Church should consult experts in social science and recognize their competence in a respective field. When promoting its worldview, the church should therefore avoid discrediting communication partners, labeling social minority groups, as well as isolation from public debate if it wants to strengthen trust in society. Although expertise is today somewhat disregarded in general society, the church striving for truth shall explore new ways how to enhance communication between faith and reason.⁷² Could not, for instance, a concept of human rights – the very attribute of Christian society – be newly redefined also for the church itself?

Second, redefinition of church structures is not new in church debate as the recent synod on synodality confirms. It was outlined earlier that the existing church system – similarly to all other systems – contributes to the misuse of power and fear, and therefore, some new controlling mechanisms will be necessary to apply. If churches wish to cope with proceeding secularization and individualization, they need to respond with a modernization process in management, leadership and office keeping. Churches should carefully examine, for example, the borderline between defending an organization and defending an individual.

⁷² In studying contemporary gender initiatives, Roman Kuhran outlines that the church is secularizing its discourse in order to clericalize society by adopting civil rather than biblical language, Kuhran, R., “Playing with Science: Sexual Citizenship and the Roman Catholic Church Counter-Narratives in Slovenia and Croatia.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 49, March-April (2015): 84–92.

In this context, I hold the phenomenon of fear as truly pastoral challenge for the church of the future. If the church re-focuses on existential questions of people today⁷³ and maintains the central Christian message of love, then personal crises and fears shall constitute a relevant subject to address, not an instrument to exploit.

Third, a relationship between church and society – represented by the media in this case – is an ongoing process too. With the growth of new phenomena such as social and disinformation media, however, churches need to constitute their position newly; they need to train people in media literacy and communication to keep pace with general society. The mission of the church cannot be fulfilled without modern communication means, so a reasonable cooperation with respected public media is desirable. From the church this will require gaining some education, expertise and, above all, the trust of other democratic institutions, ensuring professional quality.⁷⁴ As Pope Francis maintains, journalism today is a mission, not a mere profession. In this disinformation age, observes Tereza Zavadilová, the pontiff does not propose a new communication strategy but rather calls for using language responsibly – “to inform people means also to form them.”⁷⁵

4. Conclusion

As ratification of the Istanbul Convention commenced in Czech society, the Catholic representatives attacked the document claiming it was promoting “gender ideology”. The explosive statement, in the form of a liturgical homily, initiated a novel exchange among conservative and progressive groups within the church. By examining a follow-up debate in mainstream and Christian media, this study explored the media image of the church and described a particular division between conservative and progressive worldviews on gender issues in the Catholic Church. While most hierarchy took a conservative and reluctant

⁷³ CSISZAR, Klara A. “Missionarisch. Existenziell. Spirituell.” *Diakonia* 53, no. 1 (February 2022): 11-18.

⁷⁴ KOUDELKOVÁ, P., ed. *Obráz církvě v českých a slovenských médiích v letech 2015-2018*, Karolinum, Praha, 2021.

⁷⁵ ZAVADILOVÁ, Tereza. “Pravda evangelia a jed fake news.” In *Obráz církvě v českých a slovenských médiích v letech 2015-2018*. Edited by Petra Koudelková, 26–36. Karolinum, Praha, 2021, p. 34.

position, it was representatives of the clergy and lay persons who promoted a progressive way and favored ratification. More importantly, it showed that conservatives diverted the discussion in another direction; instead of addressing violence against women and children, they challenged alleged gender ideology as such. Normative analysis of gender and equality, fear and power, authority and hierarchy, as well as communication styles therefore revealed problematic issues in the way the church communicates its teaching and functional structures. With accordance to the ongoing synod on synodality, it suggested a communication enhancement in three specific areas: church teaching, church structures, and media literacy. The way the church communicates its mission, however, is undoubtedly connected with its inner coherence and credibility; theological redefinition and system changes must therefore precede any media strategy.

Future theological research on how the church communicates its values should focus on gaining more understanding of its communication mechanisms as well ethical coherence. By a fearless positioning of the church in a secular society, it would be insightful to examine its relation to modern science and democratic institutions with consideration to both human dignity and transcendental imperatives. Furthermore, both quantitative and qualitative studies are required to better understand the religious character of conservative and progressive positions on topics of gender and sexuality. A comparative study among different European regions, for instance, could explain cultural and political conditions for vigilant and suspicious attitudes toward gender in post-communist churches.

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EFFECTS OF THE SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT ON SAINT AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGY¹

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Abstract. The present study aims to explore the sociopolitical background of Augustine's theology by way of analysing three of his letters. Augustine's letters contain a number of elements that contribute to our understanding how changes in the social conditions influenced the bishop's views concerning issues such as free will, sin, or freedom. In addition, we can also observe that Augustine was preoccupied with social issues still relevant today such as migration, taking care of refugees, death sentence, or the relationship between state power and freedom.

Keywords: Augustine of Hippo, Donatism, Pelagianism, Numidia, Matron, Human Trafficking, Ethnic conflict, Migration, Council of Diospolis, Antonius of Fussala.

Introduction

Each of Saint Augustine's letters³ represent a window into the Church Father's time: the Bishop of Hippo does not only address the topical religious issues, but the historical age he lived in is also revealed to us. By reading the letters, we can see more clearly that his attention being focused on one or the other theological question was not incidental, but the practical issue to be resolved was intrinsically linked to the development of the religious subjects.

However, the letters make no reference whatsoever to these volumes rather, they focus on his *Confessions*. This paper is centred on three of his letters in an

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³ SAINT AUGUSTINE: Letters. Vol. VI. In: HALTON, Thomas P. (1989): *The Fathers of the Church*. Vol. 81. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press. In Hungarian version: *Szent Ágoston levelei* (2004): Máriabesnyő – Gödöllő: Attraktor. Transl. by Hajnal Óbis [Original publication: *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin, Lettres 1–29* (1987). Paris: Études Augustiniennes].

attempt to present the social vision emerging from them and to look for connections between the social situation and Augustine's views. Throughout the selection process, the aim was to single out letters that are not limited to a few incidental remarks on Augustine's public role. Having this in mind, I have chosen the letters numbered 4, 10, and 20. Being absolutely unrelated, each of these will report on a different aspect of the first third of the 5th century.

Some Characteristics of Augustine's Age

History usually defines this age as a period of transition when the fall of the Western Roman Empire triggers a gradual transition in the Mediterranean area from antiquity into the early Middle Ages, the most prominent feature is Christianity taking up an increasingly powerful position in the social fabric, the constant movement of nomadic peoples, and the dissolution of conventional state/political structures. An emblematic event of the era took place just before writing his letters and his book *De Civitate Dei*: led by Alaric I, the Goths invaded and destroyed the city of Rome in the year 410. Byzantologist Ostrogorsky calls our attention to the fact that the root causes of this event are to be looked for in the Balkan region, where a general anti-Gothic stance becomes prevalent in the wake of the policy pursued by Constantinople, subsequent upon which the Goths migrate further away once having passed through Rome.⁴ I find this worth mentioning because more interethnic divisions will be unfolded as we move on with our story. As it is common knowledge that the concept of political nation in the present-day sense was inexistent in those times, we can most probably talk about differences patterned along linguistic and religious lines. The disaster that has befallen Rome made everyone wonder why it had happened. Non-Christians of the age and put the blame on Christianity for ushering in a new, dark age;⁵ but Augustine rejects this view and sees a natural course of the events, a God-ordained process: "Although the Roman empire is afflicted rather than changed,-a thing which has befallen it in other times also, before the name of Christ was heard, and it has been restored after such affliction,-a thing which even in these

⁴ OSTROGORSKY, Georg (2003): *A bizánci állam története. [Byzantinische Geschichte]* Budapest: Osiris. 66.

⁵ KLANICZAY GÁBOR (ed.) (2005): *Európa ezer éve: a középkor [A Thousand Years of Europe: The Middle Ages]*. Vol. I. Budapest: Osiris. 88.

times is not to be despaired of. For who knows the will of God concerning this matter?"⁶ The only question left for him is who would be reckoned among those who belong to the city of God. Many consider Augustine to be pessimistic in this regard thinking that there will be only a few finding salvation and the masses (*massa damnata*) will suffer eternal damnation. Nevertheless, the letters – e.g. the soon-to-be-discussed Letter No. 4 – indicate that he was of a much less radical mindset.

Letter No. 4: The Synod of Diospolis

This letter was sent in response to Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, who had inquired whether Augustine was the author of the book entitled *De gesti Pelagii*. The Bishop of Hippo confirms that he wrote the aforementioned work and goes on to narrate the developments of the debate with Pelagius, who, following their debate, left Carthage and headed for Palestine.

There, the Synod of Diospolis acquitted Pelagius in 415, as the monk, propagator of false doctrines, took advantage of the Greeks' modest knowledge of Latin and presented himself as a true Catholic.⁷ At this point, a brief analysis will follow of what we know about the Synod of Diospolis and the Greek–Latin differences.

The full name of the city was Colonia Lucia Septimia Severa Diospolis, named Lydda in Byzantine times and presently known as Lud. Its name reveals that it was founded and dedicated to the gods by Emperor Septimius Severus on the site of an earlier settlement. It became a Christian city relatively early in its existence, but it remains unclear as to who was the incumbent bishop at the time of writing the letter and during the synod held there, as the one mentioned by Saint Jerome, Dionysius, had already passed away.⁸ The synod took place at the end of July 415, with Iberian Orosius first conveying the African bishops' condemnatory position concerning Pelagius and then announcing the decisions of the 411 Conference of Carthage. Several participants quoted Jerome's anti-Pelagianist writings as well. Finally, Pelagius, having delivered a successful speech, convinced the majority

⁶ AUGUSTINE of Hippo (2004): *The City of God*. Transl. Marchs Dods, Edinburgh: T&T Clark. 254. [Original work: AUGUSTINUS: *De civitate Dei* IV. 7].

⁷ Saint AUGUSTINE: *Letters* (1989), 41.

⁸ ZELINGER, Y. – DI SEGNI, L. (2006). A Fourth-Century Church near Lod (Diospolis). In: *Liber Annuus*. 50/2006. 464.

of those present that he had been wrongfully convicted in Carthage, and consequently the synod would declare him a true Catholic.⁹

Bishop Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, did his best to stay away from this debate, considering it an internal matter of the Latin churches. In the aforementioned Letter No. 4, thus, Augustine briefly outlines the essential ideas of the debate: Pelagius takes the view that he who is good will find salvation right after his death, but who has even the slightest sin – at the time of his death – will be damned. By contrast, Augustine makes reference to 1 Cor 3:13–15 and speaks about purification, as everyone is sinful, but it is inconceivable that everyone will suffer eternal damnation. The fire of purification is a metaphor for the painfulness of repentance, and it occurs either before death or immediately following it. The other point of the debate is discussed in some of his further letters: according to Pelagius, unbaptized children who die at a young age have no need of redemption, which Augustine finds unacceptable as we all inherit Adam's –sinful – nature. As postulated by the Bishop of Hippo, this dispute is incomprehensible for the Greek bishops because they do not have a good command of the Latin language.¹⁰ We can gain a more accurate understanding of the prevailing cultural conditions if we consider to the fact that at the university founded in Constantinople in the 5th century by Emperor Theodosius II, there were ten Greek and three Latin as well as five Greek and three Latin professors teaching grammar and rhetoric respectively.¹¹ This indicates clear that Latin did not have a prestigious status in the eastern parts of the empire, and most scholars did not even speak the language.

Eastern theologians had difficulty understanding the debate that ensued between Augustine and Pelagius also because they see grace closely interlinked with the person of the Holy Spirit: good deeds are the manifestation of the Holy Spirit('s energy) in life.¹² Many tended to view the Greek/Orthodox position as semi-Pelagianism, as outwardly people of faith can do good and lead a sinless life without any external assistance, but when understood correctly, the Greek conception also takes the grace of the Holy Spirit as the essential source of all good

⁹ PIER FRANCO, Beatrice (2014): Chromatius and Jovinus at the Synod of Diospolis: A Prosopographical Inquiry. *Journal of Early Christian Studies*. 22. 3. 438.

¹⁰ SAINT AUGUSTINE: *Letters* (1989), 43.

¹¹ OSTROGORSKY (2003), 66.

¹² STĂNILOAE, Dumitru (1997): *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology], vol. II, Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune. 144.

deeds.¹³ In any case, there is a perceptible difference in emphasis in this matter between the Orthodox and the Catholic position.

Letter No. 10: Migration and Human Trafficking

Let us now pass on to Letter No. 10, which Augustine addressed to his long-time friend and his fellow bishop from Thagaste, Alypius, around 422-423.¹⁴ He describes a phenomenon that has several aspects still relevant today: a major issue in the province of Numidia was human trafficking. Traffickers going by the name of mangos among the locals and identified as Galatians by Augustine enslaved people from outside the imperial borders as well as Numidians and packed them on ships to sell them as slaves. Even barbarians give a better treatment to slaves, recounts Augustine, since one can buy the slaves out from them, but human traffickers are only driven by profiteering. Emperor Honorius made efforts to put an end to it by enacting a law, but Augustine refrained from administrative procedures given that those convicted of human trafficking were practically sentenced to death, an act he did not agree with. The bishop himself and several members of the church have already freed hundreds of prisoners by way of buying them out, but this has exceeded the church's capabilities, and the human traffickers were threatening the latter with legal proceedings at that. It is not unlikely that these were the very events that urged Augustine in writing about enslavement to sin in his *De civitate Dei* to use expressions alluding to this sort of captivity: "Better, I say, is war with the hope of peace everlasting than captivity without any thought of deliverance."¹⁵ For Augustine, man's social dimension must always be inherent to ideal human existence and the value of human life, while active solidarity must be part of the path towards perfection.¹⁶

Who were the Galatian traffickers and barbarians mentioned by Augustine? It should be first noted that Augustine's description does not refer to classic slav-

¹³ ZĂGREAN, Ioan – TODORAN, Isidor (2009), *Dogmatica Ortodoxă* [Orthodox Dogmatics], Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea. 214–221.

¹⁴ SAINT AUGUSTINE: Letters. (1989), 88.

¹⁵ SZENT ÁGOSTON (2005), XXI/15. 408. „Melius est, inquam, bellum cum spe aeternae pacis, quam sine ulla liberationis cogitatione captivitas.” S. Aurelii AUGUSTINI, *De civitate Dei*. MPL 41. 729.

¹⁶ CORCORAN, Gervase (1990): Prayer and Solidarity in Saint Augustine. In: *The Downside Review*. 108. 372. 160.

ery. Slaves in the conventional sense were often seen as members of the owner family,¹⁷ whereas these captivated or sold people received no favourable treatment whatsoever, as Augustine describes it in detail in his letter. Although there were prisoners coming from other regions too, the report leads us to conclude that the vast majority of them were inhabitants of the Numidian province taken away or sold on some pretext or another. This is also corroborated by research claiming that no movement of African slaves could be traced from the sub-Saharan region towards Numidia.¹⁸ Accordingly, liberating them was not against the law, yet the injured party could initiate a lawsuit for having lost his property. These slaves were entitled to apply to Constantine's law under which anyone who could take refuge in a church would be given sanctuary.¹⁹ For Augustine, this is more than simply a matter of providing asylum – it should be rather proven to the world that slavery in Christian teaching is a consequence of sin: not the sin of the slave but that of the society; it is upsetting the order of creation and violating the laws of nature since man as the carrier of the image and likeness of God cannot possibly be the property of another creation.²⁰

As far as human traffickers are concerned, Augustine identifies them as Galatians from Phrygia. What is known about them is that they are the descendants of certain Celtic tribes that migrated from Gaul to the central parts of Anatolia in the 4th-3rd centuries BC, where they preserved their tribalism, military leadership, and warrior lifestyle. In the process of Hellenization, their language came under the influence of Greek, yet in the early 5th century AD Saint Jerome was still unable to demonstrate its relatedness to the Gallic dialect of the Trier region. The province of Phrygia came to be incorporated into the Roman Empire while retaining its characteristic features and high degree of independence. Providing

¹⁷ SALLER, Richard P. – SHAW, Brent D. (1984): Tombstone and Roman Family in the Principate: Civilians, Soldiers and Slaves. In: *The Journal of Roman Studies*. 74/1984. 124.

¹⁸ SCHEIDEL, Walter (ed.) (2008): *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 740.

¹⁹ BRADLEY, Keith R. (1994): *Slavery and Society at Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 158.

²⁰ DEANE, Herbert A. (1963): *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*. New York–London: Columbia University Press. 113–114.

mercenary troops for wars waged in foreign lands and slave trading accounted for a considerable part of their income.²¹

Augustine repeatedly notes that human traffickers do not belong to the group of barbarians, who often treat their slaves more humanely and are also present on the territory of Numidia. The Term Barbarian should be understood as a collective term used mostly for various Germanic tribes living on the territory of the empire already from the 4th-5th centuries, many of them even joining the Roman army. Looking at the situation on the ground in North Africa, the Vandals were of the greatest significance, while other Germanic tribes were also present in the region. In the light of relevant research, it appears probable that there were some Vandal groups in the Hippo Regius area of Carthage even prior to the great invasion of 429. Archaeological evidence linked to the Vandals suggest that their lifestyle was not too different from that of the Romans. Another notable group of barbarians were the Moors, who made a more significant contribution to transforming the image of North Africa.²²

Letter No. 20: The Issue of the Punic Christians

The final letter to be discussed herein features Augustine narrating a quite lengthy story to matron Fabiola. The way the story goes, through his intercession, Antonius, a barely 20-year-old monk whom Augustine had taken care of since he was a child, was appointed the Bishop of Fussala, a town near Hippo Regius. As time went on, however, the young man grew into an arrogant person and gathered around himself a gang formed of presbyters and deacons with whom he would go on regular looting expeditions against the neighbouring Punic villages. These were Donatist settlements whose inhabitants had come back into the folds of the Catholic Church as a result of Augustine's activities. Now they felt betrayed because of Antonius and blamed Augustine for the resulting situation. An increasing number of them began to leave the church in frustration. Aurelius, Primate of Numidia and Bishop of Macomades, and Augustine convened several councils to review this matter and listen to the complaints. Antonius was relieved

²¹ DARBYSHIRE, Gareth – MITCHEL, Stephen – VARDAR, Levent (2000): The Galatian Settlement in Asia Minor. In: *Anatolian Studies*. 50/2000. 94.

²² VON RUMMEL, Philip (2010): The Archaeology of the 5th-Century Barbarians in North Africa. In: Delogu, Paolo – Gaspari, Stefano (eds.), *Le trasformazioni del V secolo: L'Italia, i barbari e l'Occidente romani: Atti del Seminario di Poggibonsi*. Turnhout: Brepols. 157–181.

of his diocesan leadership duties in Fussala, but, by way of compensation, eight nearby villages were given into his care, where the young bishop had several estates, and Thogonoetum became his designated residence. However, neither the villagers nor the local matron was willing to accept Antonius as their bishop. The local people rightfully revolted against the decision considering that Antonius and his companions had repeatedly sacked their villages and acted violently towards them. The matron admitted, however, that she said no at Antonius's request because this was the way the young man wanted to have the Council of Tegulata reinstate him as Bishop of Fussala, where he had his largest estate. When both the Primate Aurelius and perhaps Augustine himself seemed inclined to fulfil the request, the Punic locals as well as the Latin settlers expressed their disappointment and threatened to leave the church and the region altogether. The council eventually rejected Antonius's request, who then planned to submit the case to the Holy See, to Pope Boniface. Antonius had written to the Pope before, and his letter indicated that he had good relations with Rome, one of the addressees being matron Fabiola. Augustine asks the matron to join forces in protecting the results of the struggle against the Donatists, as the region has already suffered from it, and now everything seems to be falling apart. In concrete terms, he asks Fabiola to dissuade Antonius from appealing to the pope when in Rome.²³

I find this a very intriguing letter that gives us a first-row view of the structure and functioning of the contemporary Numidian Church, improves our understanding of the local social conditions and the sociocultural background of Donatism, and, last but not least, provides insight into how some women had considerable ecclesiastical and political influence.

The institution of matrons was a reality throughout the Roman history. Its representatives were distinguished and learned women who lived as single ladies and disposed of a large fortune at a certain point in their lives. As a rule, they had a good command of several languages, knew their way around politics, and were generous supporters of artists.²⁴ Once Christianity was adopted by the Roman Empire, they became prominent supporters of the church, thus gaining an increased influence and getting to have a say in who should be holding the various ecclesiastical offices pertaining to the parish churches situated on the territory

²³ Saint AUGUSTINE: Letters. (1989) 134–149.

²⁴ HEMELRIJK, Emily A. (2004): *Matrona Docta. Educated Women in the Roman Élite from Cornelia to Julia Domna*. London–New York Routledge. 177.

of their estates. During the migration period, entire villages would voluntarily place themselves under the protection of a matron in their hope of better living conditions.²⁵

It becomes apparent from Augustine's letter that the aforementioned villages seeking protection from the matron were inhabited by Punic people who used to be Donatists and had only recently entered the Catholic Church. Henry Chadwick writes in his book, *The Early Church*, that there was no sociopolitical difference whatsoever between the Donatists and the Catholics, the only thing setting them apart being the colour of their churches and the atmosphere of their feast days. A difference can be spotted in the case of the Circumcellions, a fanatic, martyristic terrorist group.²⁶ Nevertheless, neither Augustine's letter nor other sources confirm Chadwick's position.

The reason for this division can be traced back to the Roman colonizations in North Africa and the church policy pursued by Constantine the Great. Roman colonization efforts involved a relatively small number of Latin-speaking population and affected in particular major cities such as Carthage, Hippo Regius, Thagaste, etc. The population of the villages remained entirely Punic, and even a large proportion of population of the earlier mentioned cities continued to be made up by native inhabitants. Apart from them, a significant Berber population also inhabited the area. The Romans deliberately oppressed the Punic population and systematically ousted them from the cultural, economic, and political life, which became a constant source of tension in the Numidian society.²⁷ In the beginning, Punic people willingly joined Christianity in large numbers, but the Constantinian shift made them change their position because the Catholic Church made common cause with the state starting from the year 313. Punic inhabitants could not accept this, as Rome for them was the embodiment of oppression, which is why they broke away from the Catholic Church and called them traitors (*traditores*)²⁸ for abandoning the martyristic attitude, as per their perception, and cooperating with Rome. By all appearances, the vast majority of the North African population sided with the Donatists, relevant data indicating that 55% of the bishops were Donatists during the 411 Conference of Carthage.

²⁵ KLANICZAY (2005), 90.

²⁶ CHADWICK, Henry (1973): *The Early Church*. Penguin Books. 219–220.

²⁷ BEAVER, R. Pierce (1935): The Donatist Circumcellions. In: *Church History*. 4. 2. 124.

²⁸ TILLEY, Maureen A. (1996): *Donatist Martyr Stories. The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. IX.

Numerically speaking, there were 331 Donatist and 273 Catholic bishops.²⁹ Changes in terms of proportions should not be attributed to Augustine's and other Catholic bishops' activities alone but to the often aggressive interventions of Emperor Honorius, justified by the actions of the Circumcellions.

The Circumcellions were a radical Donatist group named after their prayers performed by martyrs' graves, which is why Augustine had a moderate approach to the issue of paying respect to places of worship. Members of this group came from the southern parts of the province, from the desert lands and committed terrorist attacks against the Catholics, destroying several churches and parishes. Augustine himself came under threat from these extremists prior to the 411 Conference of Carthage. Further, the present letter reveals the bishop's reticence to enter the rebels' village. The document also shows that he probably did not speak the Punic language unlike Antonius, who had caused the problem, a fact that could be of great weight in the reluctance of the eight villages to join Fussala. There is also reason to believe that Antonius was of Punic origin. Albeit the upper echelons of the local church were Latin speaking, they paid careful attention to providing mother-tongue pastoral care for the Punic people – the Primate Aurelius held liturgies also in the Punic language. Thus, we can witness the local church going to great lengths to integrate the one-time Donatist Punic people, and Augustine saw the result of these efforts being compromised by the actions of Antonius and other inconsiderate clergymen. Research has also brought to light that following the 411 council, Donatists living in urban areas were the ones leading the way in joining the Catholic Church, while many of the rural inhabitants continued in their old faith, especially in those parts where the radical Circumcellions remained more influential.³⁰ For some researchers, this explains why Augustine raises the issue of having someone – even – forcefully join the church. At any rate, the Catholic Church was in great need of political support in order to put an end to the Donatist supremacy in the region. However, despite all efforts, the Donatist Church would survive – albeit on a much smaller scale – up until the 672 occupation of Carthage by the Arabs.

²⁹ WHITEHOUSE, John (2016): *The Scholarship of the Donatist Controversy*. In: Miles, Richard (ed.), *The Donatist Schism. Controversy and Context*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. 17.

³⁰ FRIEND, W. H. C. (1952): *Donatist Church. A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 291.

Conclusions

Overall, it can be said that placing Augustine's letters in a socio-political context can help us better understand the great Church Father's theological frame of reference. We have provided herein but a small selection of examples with a view to offering a broad picture of the diverse society characterizing the golden age of the North African province of Numidia. In Augustine's era, the Hippo Regius area of Carthage played a determining role in the life of universal Christianity and made a significant contribution to clarifying fundamental questions such as the relationship between sin and free will or the church and the sacraments. Also, this is the period when an increasing importance is attached to the role of papacy in the wake of the highly esteemed Augustine's regular seeking the Holy See's approval for his decisions. This study demonstrated that when speaking about Latin Christianity we do not refer to a unified organization but to a "work in progress" taking place with the substantial contribution of the Greeks, the Celts, the Punic people, and others. On the other hand, we must also take cognizance of the impact of the tensions between the various social classes as reflected in the contemporary works of theology. For me, all these tend to confirm the fertile breeding ground of Christian theology.

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“THE ULTIMATUM BEFORE THE ASSAULT
ON THE «STRONGHOLDS»” –
A STUDY ON METAPHORS IN 2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11

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Abstract: The scenario of the assault on some strongholds, used in 2 Corinthians 10:1-11, attracted the attention and admiration of the readers of this Pauline Epistle, as it imprints a fast pace as well as a certain gravity to the whole section. By its means, the Apostle Paul announces a decisive intervention on his part in the community of Corinth where a series of tensions have arisen. However, the reader immediately remarks that the vocabulary used by the author is a metaphorical one. That is why it is all the more interesting to see what Paul wanted to express by its means. Therefore, taking into account the way in which the philosophy of language and linguistics define metaphor nowadays, I propose in this article to highlight the way in which the Apostle expresses his intention to defuse the situation in the community of Corinth.

Keywords: Military metaphor, 2Cor 10 – 13, knowledge of God, obedience, collect, Paul.

Introduction

While doing some research on the military metaphorical language of the Bible, a research that materialized in a doctoral thesis published with the title of *Military Metaphor in the Bible...*², one of the main concerns was this: Is metaphor just a figure of speech meant to “decorate” the delivery of a speech, or is it more than that? A foray into the field of linguistics and philosophy of language revealed that “metaphor is not an ornament of discourse: it conveys *new information*, in other words, metaphor says something new about reality”³. This perception

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² Șerban, T.H., *Metafora militară din Biblie – Aspecte lingvistice, teologice și etice*, Ed Universității “A.I. Cuza”, Iași, 2011.

³ See *Metafora militară din Biblie*, p. 38.

crystallized from the analysis of works such as those of Ivor Amstrong Richards⁴, Max Black⁵, Paul Ricœur⁶, George Lakoff⁷ or, more recently, those of Thibault Roy, Stéphane Ferrari, and Pierre Beust⁸. In their quest to define what metaphor is, all these authors reach formulations close to or inspired by Paul Ricœur's that "metaphor consists of talking about one thing in terms of something else that resembles it"⁹. Therefore, if the metaphor expresses "something" of God's Word, it means that it also has an important theological stake. More specifically, by appealing to images inspired by spheres of human life and activity (agricultural, pastoral, architectural, military, sports, etc.), several biblical authors, including the Apostle Paul, have expressed things related to divine revelation and/or aspects that concern divine Persons.

In this article I propose to make an exegetical analysis of the pericope of 2 Corinthians 10:1-11 to discover what the apostle Paul is trying to convey to the members of the Christian community in Corinth through the series of metaphors he uses. In their approach I will use the suggestions for analysis of biblical metaphor made by Daniel Bourguet in his book *Des métaphores de Jérémie*¹⁰, suggestions that I have systematized into a possible method of analysis¹¹.

⁴ Richards, I.A., *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1936,1971.

⁵ Black, M., *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*, Corenell University Press, Ithaca, 1962.

⁶ Ricœur, P., *La métaphore vive*, Seuil, 1975.

⁷ Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M., *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980; Lakoff, G., *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987; Lakoff, G., & Turner, M., *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989.

⁸ Thibault Roy, Stéphane Ferrari, and Pierre Beust, "Étude de métaphores conceptuelles à l'aide de vues globales et temporelles sur un corpus", in *Actes de la 13ème conférence sur le Traitement Automatique des Langues Naturelles. Posters*, Leuven, Belgium, 2006, pp. 580-589.

⁹ Ricœur, P., *La métaphore vive*, Seuil, 1975, p. 250.

¹⁰ Bourguet, D., *Des métaphores de Jérémie*, Gabalda, Paris, 1987.

¹¹ See "O definiție operațională și o metodă de analiză", in *Metafora militară din Biblie...*, pp. 43-49.

2 Corinthians 10:1-11¹²

I. Identification of metaphors

a. Delimitation of the text

In the final part of 2 Corinthians, more precisely in chapters 10–13, the Apostle Paul develops an apology regarding his status and especially his authority within the Christian community he has founded (together with his collaborators, cf. *Acts* 18:1-18a).

A situation of conflict takes shape at the beginning of chapter 10 (vv. 1-11), when Paul, resuming the accusatory insinuations of certain people in the community of Corinth, feels compelled to put things in place. The way in which the Apostle intends to solve the latent conflict arising within the Christian community is expressed in terms of a scenario of siege and conquest of a city, followed by the submission of its inhabitants to the true Master.

We shall therefore refer to that pericope for at least two reasons:

1. In this literary subunit Paul brings up the challenge coming from some members of the community, shaped as an irony; in fact, ironies open and close the section (v. 11 being a conclusive comment of such an irony): *I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold to you when I am away!* (v. 1b) and *His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account* (v. 10).

2. In order to indicate how he intends to respond to such accusations, the Apostle appeals to a metaphorical ensemble of military and architectural isotopies, respectively.

¹² See similar articles written before: “Pentru o nouă înțelegere a metaforelor biblice – Studiu de caz, Ier 1:17-19” in *Globalizare și Comunicare*, The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, Washington & Institutul Teologic Romano-Catolic “Sfânta Tereza”, București, 2004, pp. 148-179; “Când metaforele sunt o șansă de convertire – Studiu asupra metaforelor din Ier 9:1-8”, in *Caietele Institutului Catolic* (8), Ed ARCB, Bucharest, 2005, pp. 63-73; “Funcționalitatea metaforei militare în textele Bibliei”, in *Studia Hebraica* (8), The Goldstein Goren Center for Hebrew Studies, 2008, pp. 206-214; “O teofanie inedită: Is 59,15b-20”, in *Studia in honorem – Ioan Robu, cu ocazia împlinirii vârstei de 75 de ani*, Ed ARCB, Bucharest, 2019, pp. 419-432.

b. The text

10¹ Αὐτὸς δὲ ἐγὼ Παῦλος παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς διὰ τῆς πραΰτητος καὶ ἐπεικειᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃς κατὰ πρόσωπον μὲν ταπεινὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀπὼν δὲ θαρρῶ εἰς ὑμᾶς· ²δέομαι δὲ τὸ μὴ παρῶν θαρρῆσαι τῇ πεποιθήσει ἢ λογιζομαι τολμῆσαι ἐπὶ τινὰς τοὺς λογιζομένους ἡμᾶς ὡς κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦντας. ³Ἐν σαρκὶ γὰρ περιπατοῦντες οὐ κατὰ σάρκα στρατευόμεθα, ⁴τὰ γὰρ ὄπλα τῆς στρατείας ἡμῶν οὐ σαρκικὰ ἀλλὰ δυνατὰ τῷ θεῷ πρὸς καθαίρεσιν ὀχυρωμάτων, λογισμοὺς καθαιροῦντες ⁵καὶ πᾶν ὕψωμα ἐπαιρόμενον κατὰ τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντες πᾶν νόημα εἰς τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ⁶καὶ ἐν ἐτοίμῳ ἔχοντες ἐκδικῆσαι πᾶσαν παρακοήν, ὅταν πληρωθῇ ὑμῶν ἡ ὑπακοή.

⁷Τὰ κατὰ πρόσωπον βλέπετε. εἴ τις πέποιθεν ἑαυτῷ Χριστοῦ εἶναι, τοῦτο λογιζέσθω πάλιν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ, ὅτι καθὼς αὐτὸς Χριστοῦ, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς. ⁸Ἐάν [τε] γὰρ περισσώτερόν τι καυχῆσωμαι περὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας ἡμῶν ἢς ἔδωκεν ὁ κύριος εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν ὑμῶν, οὐκ αἰσχυνηθήσομαι. ⁹ἵνα μὴ δόξω ὡς ἂν ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν. ¹⁰ὅτι αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μὲν, φησί, βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραί, ἡ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενῆς καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος. ¹¹τοῦτο λογιζέσθω ὁ τοιοῦτος, ὅτι οἰοί ἔσμεν τῷ λόγῳ δι' ἐπιστολῶν ἀπόντες, τοιοῦτοι καὶ παρόντες τῷ ἔργῳ.¹³

10¹ I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ – who am humble when face to face with you but bold toward you when I am away! – ²I ask that when I am present I need not show boldness by daring to oppose those who think we are acting according to human standards. ³ Indeed, we live as humans but do not wage war according to human standards, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments ⁵ and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. ⁶ We are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

⁷ Look at what is before your eyes. If you are confident that you belong to Christ, remind yourself of this, that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we. ⁸ Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be

¹³ This text is taken from *The Greek New Testament*, K. Aland, M. Black, B. Metzger, A. Wikgren, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft / United Bible Societies, Stuttgart, 1966, 1968, 1975, 1983, 1993.

ashamed of it.⁹ I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you with my letters.¹⁰ For someone says, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.”¹¹ Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent we will also do when present.¹⁴

c. Clues to the presence of metaphors

Several phrases in our text belong to the military and architectural isotopies, respectively. Thus in:

10:3b: οὐ κατὰ σάρκα στρατευόμεθα – *do not wage war according to human standards*

10:4a: ὄπλα τῆς στρατείας – *the weapons of our warfare*

10:4b: καθαίρεσιν ὀχυρωμάτων – *to destroy strongholds*

10:4c-5aα: λογισμούς καθαιροῦντες καὶ πᾶν ὑψωμα ἐπαιρόμενον – *we destroy arguments and every proud obstacle*

10:5aβ: κατὰ τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ θεοῦ – *against the knowledge of God*

10:5c: αἰχμαλωτίζοντες πᾶν νόημα – *take every thought captive*

10:5d: εἰς τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ – *to obey Christ*

10:6a: ἐκδικῆσαι πᾶσαν παρακοὴν – *to punish every disobedience*

10:8b: εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν ὑμῶν – *for building you up and not for tearing you down*

d Metaphorical topics and the process of metaphorization

At the heart of this metaphorical ensemble are the images of *the destruction of strongholds* and *the conquest of a city*.

The noun καθαίρεσις (*tearing down, destroying*) accompanied, in v. 4b, by the genitival attribute ὀχυρωμάτων (*strongholds*) appear as a generic presentation of an action that the Apostle and his collaborators undertake, using, according to v. 4a, the ὄπλα τῆς στρατείας (*weapons of our warfare*). The clarifications added in vv. 4c-5 indicate what they are aiming to destroy with these weapons: λογισμούς... καὶ πᾶν ὑψωμα ἐπαιρόμενον (*arguments... and every proud obstacle*). In other

¹⁴ This translation is taken from a *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)* published in 1989.

words, referring to *the strongholds* they seek to destroy, the author metaphorically identifies them in the following sentence (by simple juxtaposition), with the *arguments and every proud*. This means that the *strongholds* they seek to destroy are nothing other but the “concoctions of the mind” and “any conceit” of some of the members of the Community of Corinth.

The Resistance / Opposition of these *arguments and every proud*... is expressed by the participle form of the verb ἐπαίρω (*to stand up / to prevent*), more precisely ἐπαιρόμενον (*obstacle*), of v. 5a α, and manifests itself towards τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ θεοῦ (*the knowledge of God*), of v. 5aβ. In other words, the members targeted by the author tend to oppose *their arguments and every proud obstacle* to the *knowledge of God*.

The whole approach of the Apostle and his collaborators is expressed, in v. 4b as στρατευόμεθα (*warfare*). It follows, in principle, an unfolding expressed through the present participle of the verb περιπατέω, more precisely περιπατοῦντες (*we walk / live*), fully ἐν σαρκί (*as humans*), that is, having an approach related to the human way of behaving (the analysis of the metaphorized statement will give us further details in this regard). Speaking, however, in v. 4aα, about ὄπλα τῆς στρατείας (*the weapons of warfare*) we understand that “the combatants” appeal to “means” which, although they retain the human form, have a special nature, more precisely οὐ κατὰ σάρκα (*not merely human*), where it is used, according to v. 4aβ, of ὄπλα... οὐ σαρκικά (*the weapons... not merely human*).

The presence of the verb αἰχμαλωτίζω (*to take captive*), in its present participle form αἰχμαλωτίζοντες next to the noun νόημα (*the thought*), of v. 5 c, suggests the existence of a metaphorical construction (in which two terms of different isotopies are joined) that creates a second stage of the approach of the “fighters”. The finality of this new approach is expressed metaphorically, in v. 5d, by the phrase εἰς τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ in which the noun τὴν ὑπακοὴν is related to the action evoked in the previous sentence that suggests *bringing under obedience to Christ those whose “strongholds” have been destroyed*. In addition, a second purpose of this approach is expressed as an eventuality, in v. 6a, in the phrase ἐν ἐτοιμίῳ ἔχοντες ἐκδικῆσαι πᾶσαν παρακοὴν (*being ready to punish every disobedience*), where the infinitive verb ἐκδικῆσαι (*to punish*) expresses the treatment applied to those who, even if the submission of the whole community has been completed, manifest any act of disobedience. After all, the whole v. 6 suggests that the established order does not admit any deviation from *obedience to Christ*.

The noun καθαίρεισις (*tearing down*) reappears, in v. 8b, accompanied by its antonym οικοδομή (*building up*) to provide a key to understanding the Pauline approach towards the members of the Corinth community: εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεισιν ὑμῶν (*for building you up and not for tearing you down*). Using the term καθαίρεισις (to which he joins its antonym οικοδομή), the author makes a link with the metaphorical set of vv. 3-6, with a view to clarify his intervention in the community.

II. Delimitation and study of the metaphorized statement

In trying to restore the reality to which the metaphorizing statement gives meaning, we will essentially have to reconstruct the situation in the community at Corinth as it results from the context of the epistles addressed to them. More specifically, in addition to the elements provided by the immediate context of the pericope, we will also need to appeal to the broader context of the 2 Corinthians and even to that of 1 Corinthians. The approach will be a rather synchronic one.

So, in the first two verses of chapter 10, Paul brings to the attention of the members of the community the malicious ironies that circulate in their midst, according to which he would be *humble when face to face with you, but bold towards you when I am away* (v. 1). Against such insinuations that indirectly undermined his authority (13:10), the Apostle feels compelled to take an energetic attitude, an attitude that he considers that he must nevertheless reserve for those in the community who suspect him and his collaborators¹⁵ that *they act according to human standards* (v. 2b).

In fact, those who formulate such insinuations would most likely be members of a faction within the community, grouped around those whom the Apostle calls *super-apostles* (11:5; 12:11) and who show an increasingly aggressive hostility towards him. Their hostility may have been generated by suspicions¹⁶ about the organization of the collection for the Jerusalem community (Ga. 2:9-10), since Paul and his collaborators never asked to be paid for their work (11:7b), as did

¹⁵ The use of the personal pronoun, the first person plural, suggests that the accusations are directed at the entire founding missionary team.

¹⁶ It would not be excluded that these suspicions were awakened and fuelled by the *very super-apostles* who are, according to the Apostle, *false apostles, the deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ... disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness* (11:13.15b)

the super-apostles. That is why the Apostle and his collaborators are suspected of cunning (12:16), more precisely that they intend to appropriate the entire collection. However, the other members of the community know very well how Paul organized this collection (1Cor 16:1-4) and how it took place: *I urged Titus to go and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves with the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same footsteps?* (12:18; see also 8:6.18.23). Moreover, they know very well how the Apostle and his collaborators obtained the necessary for everyday life: *I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the brothers who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way* (11:8-9). But the most explicit statement of good intention towards his recipients is expressed by the Apostle in 12:14 where he states: *I do not want what is yours but you*.

As for the accusation from his detractors that his behaviour and that of his collaborators is *according to human standards* (v. 2b), it would like to suggest that they, unlike the super-apostles¹⁷, are purely human beings, devoid of the power and, above all, of the knowledge of God.

To this accusation, the author believes that he must respond by making a distinction beforehand: *we live as humans but do not wage war according to human standards* (v. 3). In other words, the Apostle recognizes, in the first part of the sentence, that he and his collaborators *live as humans* (ἐν σαρκὶ περιπατοῦντες) – words by which he recognizes and assumes the condition of human weakness. However, this statement must be understood in the logic of the theology of the cross to which the author often refers in the epistles addressed to the Corinthians (see already 1Co 2:1-5 in 1Co 1:17-3:4)¹⁸. According to this Pauline theology, the

¹⁷ What would have impressed the few members of the Community of Corinth who were on the side of the *super-apostles* would be their science and eloquence (11:6) as well as the accounts of their amazing miracles (12:11). And yet, the Apostle's performance is nothing less than that of his opponents. The community itself is a brilliant proof: *The signs of an apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works. How have you been worse off than the other churches* (12:12-13a).

¹⁸ It should be emphasized, however, that the explicit reference to the cross is missing in 2 Corinthians (see in this regard M. A. Chevallier, "L'argumentation de Paul dans II Corinthiens 10 à 13", especially p. 12, referring to article of E. Käsemann: "Die Legitimität des Apostels. Eine Untersuchung zu II Korinther 10 – 13", especially pp. 53-55).

liberating power of God’s grace is revealed in the Apostle’s weakness¹⁹. More precisely, the Apostle’s weakness is but the means by which God reveals the liberating power of apostolic preaching²⁰. Therefore, if Paul were to claim any merit or reason for praise for the deliverance brought by him to the Christians in Corinth by preaching the gospel, they can only come from the Crucified One.

That being the case, we better understand what the author meant in the second part of the verse: *do not wage war according to human standards* (v. 3b). After all, throughout the preaching activity of the Gospel, the Apostle and his collaborators are aware that the gospel is the power of God that makes one contemporary with the transforming power of the revelation of the cross. That is why the power of apostolic preaching lies not in their human power, but in the power of the gospel they transmit.

The conjunction γὰρ at the beginning of v. 4 prolongs the statements in the previous verse by providing further explanations regarding the activity that preoccupies the Apostle and his collaborators, an activity that he defines metaphorically with the term *warfare*. The author states that *for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds*.

It should be noted that, making use of the term *warfare*, the author of the epistle gives a combative profile to his intervention and that of his collaborators. In other words, the confrontation that is about to take place will aim to achieve a fundamental change of the present situation. To this end, they envisage the use of means adapted to the situation, means metaphorically defined with the term *weapons of warfare*. To understand what kind of *weapons* the apostle refers to, and especially what that *divine power* refers to that makes it different from *worldly weapons*, we will have to remember that in 6:4-7 he highlights an important aspect of their missionary activity. More precisely, they appear *as servants of God* who, in the most difficult situations of *great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, count on truthful speech, and the power of God*, as well as on *the weapons of*

¹⁹ See, in this regard, C. Reynier, “Le langage de la croix dans le corpus paulinien”, especially, pp. 371-372.

²⁰ An important plea in this regard is given to us, for example, in chapter 12:9b-10: *I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

*righteousness*²¹ to achieve the expected successes. The effectiveness of the means used in preaching the liberating gospel is also evoked in 1 Co 2:4-5. The author says: *And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my proclamation were made not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.* In other words, the condition of modesty and weakness of the Apostle and his collaborators, as well as the lack of a convincing rhetoric based on human wisdom, best allows the manifestation of the wisdom and power of God, a manifestation supported by the demonstration of the Spirit. It is only under these conditions that the truth and justice on which they rely prove to be formidable in the confrontation with the opponents.

Having, therefore, on their side the truth and justice supported by the power of God and the action of the Spirit, Paul and his collaborators know themselves in a position, according to vv. 4b-5a, to prove the falseness of the insinuations, the wickedness of the accusations and contestations, as well as the egotistical claims of superiority of the detractors, directed against them and through them against God, who acts in them. Moreover, the undeniable force of the arguments as well as the determination of the intervention of the Apostle and his collaborators are able, according to v. 5b, to convince their challengers in the community to obey Christ as it has been preached to them since the beginning of the evangelizing activity. In any case, this is Paul's main expectation. In this sense, we remember the insistence with which the Apostle drew the attention of the Corinthians regarding what exactly they should not lose from sight: *I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified* (1Co 2:2). Such a statement fits well into the logic of *God's wisdom* because it expresses how He chooses to reveal His liberating power and work.

Once things have been clarified and the submission within the community has been restored, the Apostle warns, in v. 6, that in the future he will sanction *every disobedience* (πᾶσαν παρακοήν) coming from any member. In other words, appealing to his authority as an Apostle, he will adopt the most resolute attitude to keep the community in a perfect state of obedience. And we know all too

²¹ Regarding those *weapons of righteousness*, the author specifies their role by saying that they are *for the right hand and for the left*, that is, they are attack and defence weapons knowing that, as a rule, the right hand wielded the sword, and the left hand held the defence shield.

well that such an attitude on Paul’s part is not just a timid threat. In the past, he did not hesitate to denounce and sanction the outrageous deed of one of the members who had committed the serious sin of incest and whom the community tolerated as something unimportant (see 1Co 5:1-5). Moreover, in 1Co 5:6-8, the author explains his attitude as a “purifying”, and therefore salutary, intervention on behalf of the whole community.

Therefore, even in our case, if the Apostle makes use of the authority that the Lord has given him, it is for at least two reasons:

1. According to v. 7, he sees himself an apostle of Christ as much as any of those who have disturbed the community (*If you are confident that you belong to Christ, remind yourself of this, that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we*). Paul gained such a conviction both from his experience of receiving the revelation from the Son himself in order that he may announce Him to the heathen (Gal 1:15-16) and from having been recognized by those considered to be the pillars, who acknowledged that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been entrusted to him, thus recognizing for him the grace of the apostolate (Gal 2:7-9).
2. He is convinced that his intervention, according to v. 8b, relies on *the authority, which the Lord gave him, for building you up and not for tearing you down*.

Paul confesses, in v. 8a.c, that he would have no cause for shame for the sense of pride that he feels when he evokes his authority as an apostle, committed to restoring order in the community. He, however, does not offer any explanation for this “spurt” of pride, natural enough. We suspect, however, that such a feeling has to do with what he had told them earlier to clarify his unique and privileged position among the Corinthians: *For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I fathered you through the gospel* (1Co 4:15).

In order to conclude the idea of the tonality gap – *His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible* (v. 10) –, the Apostle wants to emphasize, given his status in the Corinthian community, that: *I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you* (v. 9). In addition, in v. 11, Paul assures the one who makes such speeches that, when he is present, he will prove in act the firm attitude he manifests in the letters.

III. Delimitation and study of the metaphORIZING statement

With the help of the military and architectural isotopy vocabulary, the following metaphORIZING statement can be formed:

The phrase, *we live as humans but do not wage war according to human standards* suggests Paul and his collaborators' involvement in a combative action against his challengers in the community of Corinth (v. 3b). The Apostle's action aims *to destroy strongholds, to conquer the mind like a city, to take... captive to obey* and they are *ready to punish every disobedience* (vv. 5-6a). The combative action, however, has one peculiarity: it is not a *worldly war*. That's why *the weapons of warfare themselves are not merely human but have divine power, necessary to destroy particular strongholds* (v. 4b).

The statement in v. 8, which expresses in summary terms the meaning of the whole Pauline approach and the value of the authority with which he and his collaborators intend to carry it out, is a positive one, since the replacement of *the arguments and every proud* with that of *the knowledge of God* proves to be beneficial for the entire community as it makes it possible *to submit to Christ, the absolute Master*.

What emerges, as a characteristic "touch", from such a metaphORIZING statement is the fact that the mission that apostle Paul and his collaborators carry out acquires the features of a confrontation. The replacement of those beliefs that are the fruit of "the concoctions of the mind" and of "conceit" needs real confrontations. In these confrontations, missionaries enjoy the support they are given. It is divine support.

Conclusions

The situation that comes to life in our pericope, corroborated by the details offered in the context of chapters 10 – 13, but also in that of both Epistles addressed to the Corinthians, seems to be a tension that requires an energetic attitude on the part of the Apostle. The situation seems to be generated by the arrival in the Christian community at Corinth of certain persons who, having legitimized themselves by letters of recommendation (3:1; 10:12) as "Jews, Israelites, descendants of Abraham" (11:22), apostles just like Paul and his collaborators (11:12), and "took greater pride" (10:13) in their knowledge and ability to perform marvelous deeds, they begin to criticize the gospel that has

been preached to them, replacing it with another (11:4), to arouse suspicions about the honesty related to the collection that the Apostle initiated (11:7-8 and 12:16-18) at the suggestion of “those considered to be pillars”, James, Chefa, and John (Gal 2:9-10), and even to challenge his authority (3:1). Now, since the unity of the community is endangered by challenging his authority, the gospel he preached and the honesty with which he intervenes in the life of the community he founded with all the love of a parent (11:11) and with the toil of the days and nights dedicated to each individual member (11:27-29), Paul feels compelled to intervene so that his performance / “praise” in Achaia should not be taken away from him (11:10). His intervention is all the more necessary because he had had several times to postpone his return to the community (1Cor 16:5-6; 2Cor 1:15 – 2:4) arousing disappointment among the members of the community and allowing his detractors to launch a series of malicious ironies meant to discredit him once and for all: *His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible* (10:10; see also 10:1).

So such a situation can no longer last. Its extension risks to seriously damage the entire performance of Paul and his collaborators. There is a need for the Apostle to intervene firmly – an intervention that the author does not want, according to v. 2, to be *boldness by daring to oppose those who think we are acting according to human standards*. That is why the Apostle launches, through the pericope we deal with, a kind of *ultimatum* to the members of the community who have hastened to embrace the ideas, insinuations and accusations of his detractors that he considers as *arguments*, more precisely pretentious reasonings, and *proud obstacle*.

Since they rise up against *the knowledge of God*, the Apostle announces that he is ready “to conquer them”, that is to prove their falsehood and wickedness and to bring back those who profess them to submission to Christ. In this sense he relies on *the weapons that are not merely human, but have divine power to destroy strongholds* – referring to the indisputable truth and justice of God on which all his missionary activity as well as of the collect for the Christians in Jerusalem are founded. Therefore, with the restoration of obedience to Christ, Paul will reinstate his full authority as he will prove *that Christ is speaking in him* and that *He [Christ] is not weak in dealing with them, but is powerful among them* (13:3).

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THE RELIGIOUS POLITICS OF THE BYZANTINE EMPERORS IN THE 4TH-9TH CENTURIES

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Abstract: After the official recognition of Christianity in 313, Emperor Constantine the Great became the most important protector of Christian dogma and discipline, always present among the bishops, intervening in all matters of the Church, legislating and judging for it. The Byzantine emperors proclaimed the Christianity as a State religion by multiplying and increasing the immunities, but also the privileges of this new religion, which they defended in all situations through their protection. Within religious politics, the Byzantine emperors will be the ones organizing, directing, convoking, and presiding over all the councils, who wanted to clarify and crystallize the teachings of faith of the Church, dictating the oaths of faith. These new relations created by Emperor Constantine the Great between the Church and the State, were continued and maintained by all his successors, whether they were Orthodox or Aryan. Unfortunately, throughout the history of the Byzantine Empire, there were also some emperors who brutally intervened in the Church's life, trying to subordinate it to them, thus increasing the imperial authority over it. All these abuses led to great unrests and schisms in the life of Christianity and sometimes caused ruptures between emperors, patriarchs, and the papacy.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, Christianity, the Edict of Milan, the Henotikon, the Ektesis, the Typos, icons.

Introduction

One of the most important events in universal history is the cultural and religious crisis that the Roman Empire went through in the fourth century. Thus,

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the ancient pagan culture clashed with Christianity, which during the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337) received the official recognition in 313, and Emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395) will declare Christianity the dominant religion in the state, in 381. During this period, the Christianity and the pagan Hellenism gradually interfered, forming an Eastern Greek-Christian culture, which would later be known as Byzantine, and its center was Constantinople, the new capital of the Roman Empire.²

Emperor Constantine the Great wanted to strengthen his imperial authority as much as possible and, this way, he proclaimed Christianity as a state religion by increasing the immunities and privileges of this new religion, which he defended in all situations. Therefore, he became the most important guardian of the Christian dogma and discipline, being always present among the bishops, interfering in all the issues of the Church, legislating and judging on its behalf. He was also the one who organized, directed, convoked, and presided over all the councils that wanted to clarify and crystallize the teachings of faith of the Church, dictating the oaths of faith. These new relations which Emperor Constantine the Great created between the Church and the state were continued by all his successors, whether they were Orthodox or Aryan. This despotic authority of the emperor over the Church was called the Caesaropapism³.

The religious politics of Emperor Constantine the Great

Enlightened by divine grace, Emperor Constantine the Great realized that in order to be able to ensure the unity of Christianity, first he had to help and promote the Church, and from this unity to ensure the element of life and resistance of the Empire. Related to what the emperor Constantine the Great did for the Church, his merits are quite special, because he had to make the Christian Church, which was the most despised and persecuted, the most important institution of the Empire by the freedom it granted it to it, especially through the support and privileges that Christianity enjoyed during this period.

Two personalities of the Western Church, Hosius de Corduba (256-357/358) and Miltiades, Pope of Rome (311-314) joined the entourage of Emperor Constantine the Great. Hosius de Corduba managed to become one of the most

² A. A. VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, Iași, 2010, 89.

³ C. DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, Craiova, 1999, 22-23.

important advisers of Emperor Constantine the Great throughout his entire life. They guided and supported him in all the issues facing the Christian Church. Emperor Constantine sent Hosius de Corduba as his representative with a letter to Cecilian, Bishop of Carthage, to provide aid to the entire African Church.

The kindness of Emperor Constantine the Great was also shown to Pope Miltiades. Thus, during his sojourn in the capital, Constantine had the opportunity to meet the bishop of Rome. The emperor heard that the Pope was considered the successor of St. Peter the Apostle, and the leader of the entire Catholic Church: the emperor thought that the Pope should have a residence according to his rank and thus conceded to him the Lateran Palace, which was in imperial ownership. Concerned about the unity of the Church, it was Emperor Constantine the Great who wrote a letter to Pope Miltiades to call for a council in Rome to resolve the problems emerged within the African Church.

As can be seen from this letter to Pope Miltiades, Emperor Constantine the Great dedicated special importance to the Christian Church, wishing that within it be peace, unity, and harmony, a concern which he had throughout his entire supremacy.

The Edict of Mediolanum / Milan / Milano

Emperor Constantine the Great ought to be appreciated in a very special way for his love for the Christian Church, which was especially evident in the Edict of Milan. Thus, on February 313, he met Licinius in Milan, and reconfirmed the winter agreement of 311-312. They shared the empire and Constantine offered his sister, Constantia, to marry Licinius. On this occasion they also wrote to the governor of Asia a letter - later called the Edict of Milan, and this text achieved exceptional historical prestige because it gives Christians the right to freely practice their worship.⁴

This is the text of the Edict of Milan of March 313, and as we could read, we noticed that two pagans gave full freedom of expression to the Christian Church, and not only: they demanded that all the properties that belonged to it, churches, likewise other goods “*to be returned without any opposition to Christians*”. Moreover, from the text of the Edict we see that the return of the goods was

⁴ T. CHRISTENSEN, *The so-called Edict of Milan*, Classica et Mediaevalia, Kopenhagen, 35, 1984, 129-175.

not conditioned by the number of Christians; actually, they had to be returned as soon as possible and in full: “*all those places are, by your intervention, to be immediately restored to the Christians*”.

Thus, this Edict voided all previous acts of persecution against Christians. From now on, they will be able to profess their faith in public fearlessly. Nevertheless, all their properties confiscated previously were returned to them, and from that moment Christianity began to become increasingly visible and present in the Empire. The Edict becomes law, posted, and notified to all, therefore enforced. It is very important as the Christian Church receives legal personality, allowing it to receive donations, inheritances, likewise, to achieve assets for the practice of worship: lands and buildings.

Another innovation brought by the Edict of Milan was the freedom of choice of religion, recognizing a plurality of cults. From now on, the individual was the decisive factor in choosing religion and not the group, as it was formerly. The great importance of this Edict lies in the fact that it not only allowed Christianity to exist, but above all, it placed it under the state protection.⁵

Emperor Constantine the Great was the first one to implement the provisions of this Edict, so he began to favor the Church with financial aid, and with other legal privileges. He understood that the help he gave to the Christian Church must be extended to those who served this cult, and the clergy received special attention⁶. In a letter he sent to proconsul Anullinus, he asks him to relieve the clergy of public duties.

The privileges that the emperor Constantine the Great granted to the Christian clergy did not seek to restrict the practice of other confessions, nor did they contribute to the compulsion of pagans or Jews to convert to Christianity⁷. From now on, every citizen could leave his property as a legacy to the Church, and it acquired the right of patrimony. Also, very important privileges were given to the episcopal tribunals, and decisions of the episcopal court had to be sanctioned by civil judges. Unfortunately, these additional duties led to too many worldly interests in the lives of the bishops. During this period the Church became materially enriched by landowning properties, gifts, or donations of money and

⁵ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 97.

⁶ C. DUPONT, *Les privileges des clers sous Constantin*, RHE, 62, 1967, 729-752.

⁷ P. CHUVIN, *Chronique des derniers paiens: la disparation du paganisme dans l'Empire romain, du regne de Constantin a celui de Justinien*, Paris, 1990, 37-39.

grain, which came from state resources. Moreover, Christians could no longer be compelled to attend pagan holidays.

During his supremacy, Emperor Constantine the Great was also an important founder of churches in all parts of his vast Empire. In Rome, he built in the Roman Forum the so-called Basilica of Maxentius and shortly after the battle of Milvian Bridge, possibly in 313 began the construction of the church of St. John in Lateran, on the slope of Caelian Hill, southeastern Rome. Construction progressed promptly, so the church was inaugurated in 318. The Church of St. John Lateran had a central nave of one hundred meters long, ending with an apse and two naves on each side of the nave, with a total width of over fifty-three meters. From its inauguration in 318 to the present day, the Basilica of St. John Lateran would set the standard, which was followed by most Christian churches in the East and the West⁸. Also in Rome, Emperor Constantine the Great promptly completed the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, which was the size and shape of the Basilica of St. John Lateran. Until its reconstruction during the Renaissance (1506-1626), St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican was to be one of the most important centers of Christianity⁹.

In Constantinople, the new capital, Emperor Constantine the Great, built several churches, the most important of which are the Church of the Holy Apostles, the Church of St. Irene. He began the construction of the church of St. Sophia in 330, which will be completed in 360, by his son and successor Constantius (337-361). In Jerusalem, on the place where the Savior Jesus Christ was buried, he built the church of the Holy Sepulcher, on the Mount of Olives, the place of the Ascension of the Savior, he built the church of the Ascension, and in Bethlehem, the place of His birth, he built the church of the Nativity. Also, during his supremacy, Emperor Constantine the Great built several churches in other parts of the Empire, as well as in Antioch, Nicomedia, and North Africa¹⁰.

The attitude of Constantine the Great towards the Church was based on a strong faith, which did not have a decorative role – unfortunately, we see it displayed today by those who lead the world both politically and religiously. In the same way, Emperor Constantine the Great dealt with Christianity. He succeeded in transforming the Christian Church from a minority cult, persecuted for about

⁸ T. E. GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, Iași, 2013, 73-75.

⁹ GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 77.

¹⁰ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 98.

three hundred years, into a religion that would become the majority in the Empire. The legal privileges and material benefit that Constantine the Great and his successors bestowed on the bishops of Rome helped them to become popes of the Catholic Church and thereby play an important role as spiritual leaders of Christianity from ancient times to nowadays¹¹.

If the Church had not had this support from Emperor Constantine the Great, Christianity would have suffered greatly because of the Christological heresies that arose during its lifetime, and these heresies would have divided the Church, while the paganism that enjoyed State aid and support, would have lasted a long time. Mohammedanism would also have found a Christianity devoid of the protection and help of a large and powerful State. Thus, the Christian Church entered a “golden age”¹², helped by Emperor Constantine the Great.

The *Henotikon*

During the sovereignty of Zeno (476-491) the most important issue, which caused a lot of unrest, was the religious one. Since in Egypt, Syria, and to some extent in Palestine and Asia Minor, the population was predominantly Monophysite and the religious disputes led to numerous conflicts, Acacius, the Patriarch of Constantinople (472-489), who was initially a follower of the decisions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, together with Peter Mongus, the patriarch of Alexandria, decided to find a way to reconcile the religious parties. Therefore, they proposed to Emperor Zeno to make their opponents reach a mutual agreement through concessions made by the two sides.

Thus, in 482, at the suggestion of Patriarch Acacius, Emperor Zeno issued an act of union, the *Henotikon*, which was addressed to the Churches under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Alexandria. The *Henotikon* endeavored to avoid any sign of the Orthodox and Monophysite teaching regarding the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ. The *Henotikon* recognized the decisions of the three Ecumenical Councils,

¹¹ C. I. DUȘE, *Împăratul Constantin cel Mare-piatră de temelie în promovarea și apărarea creștinismului*, în: vol. *Epoca, personalitatea și contribuția împăratului Constantin cel Mare la libertatea și consolidarea Bisericii creștine*, Simpozionul Internațional Oradea, 23-24 Mai 2014, Oradea 2014, 286-315.

¹² I. RĂMUREANU, M. ȘESAN, T. BODOGAE, *Istoria Bisericească Universală* Vol. I (1-1054), Ediția a III-a revăzută și completată, București 1987, 152-153.

anathematizing Nestorius, Eutychius, and their followers. Additionally, the 12 *Anathematisms* of St. Cyril of Alexandria (370-444) were also accepted, but he stated that Jesus Christ was “*the same nature with the Father, according to Divinity, and of the same nature with us according to humankind*”. The use of the terms “*one nature*” or “*two natures*” was also avoided, and the decision of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon of 451 regarding the union of the two natures in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ was not mentioned.

Although, at the beginning, the *Henotikon* seemed to improve the situation in Alexandria, in the long run it would displease the Orthodox and the Monophysites, and the number of religious parties would become even greater. Pope Felix III (483-492) also protested the *Henotikon*, analyzing the complaints of the Eastern clergy dissatisfied by the decisions of the decree of union, through two councils which he held in Rome on July 28, 484 and October 5, 485 and anathematized Peter Mongus, the patriarch of Alexandria, Peter Fullo, the patriarch of Antioch and Acacius, the patriarch of Constantinople, the cosigners of the document. In response, Patriarch Acacius erased from the diptychs the name of Pope Felix III and sever all ties with Rome, and thus the thirty-five-year Acacian schism was unleashed¹³. The *Henotikon* was a rare example of an emperor’s attempt to impose a religious doctrine by an imperial edict¹⁴.

Through the religious politics pursued during this period, the emperors endeavored to restore religious unity to the monarchy, even at the risk of a rupture with the papacy. Thus, the *Henotikon* opened a fierce battle between popes and emperors, who fought in religious matters, especially Emperor Anastasius I (491-518) who was a convinced and passionate Monophysite. During these religious movements, the Eastern Church was formed into a separate body¹⁵.

Consequently, this was the first serious division between the Eastern and Western Churches, which continued until 518, when Justin I (518-527) ascended the throne of the Byzantine Empire¹⁶. He will communicate to Pope Hormisdas (514-523), on August 1, 518, his ascension to the throne of the Byzantine Empire. Emperor Justin I wanted to reconcile the two Churches, and on September 7, a delegation led by Gratus left for Rome with letters to the Ostrogothic

¹³ N. CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, Sibiu, 2007, 199-201.

¹⁴ GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 119.

¹⁵ DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 32.

¹⁶ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 142-144.

king Theodoric and to the Pope Hormisdas. This pope was invited to come to Constantinople or, if he could not come, to send delegates to discuss the Acacian schism. The same delegation had also a letter from Patriarch John II (518-520) and Caesar Justinian, asking Pope Hormisdas to express his position regarding the situation of former Patriarch Acacius. In his response, Pope Hormisdas said that Patriarch Acacius and his successors, up to Patriarch John II, had been removed from the diptychs. Emperor Justin also informed Pope Hormisdas of the steps he had taken to restore the authority of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Pope Hormisdas greatly appreciated the new situation and in this regard, he sent a delegation to Constantinople, which consisted of Bishops Ghermanos and John, the priest Blandus and the deacons Felix and Dioscoros. This delegation was received by Justinian on March 25, 519 with great pomp, and the following day was received by both Emperor Justin I and Patriarch John II. In the reconciliation formula, Pope Hormisdas demanded the anathematization of Nestorius, Eutychius and Dioscorus, as well as the removal from the diptychs of the patriarchs of Alexandria Timothy Elur and Peter Mongus, the patriarch of Antioch Peter Fullo, the patriarchs of Constantinople Acacius (472-489), Fravitas (489- 490), Euphemios (490-496), Macedonius II (496-511) and Timothy I (511-518), who governed during the Acacian schism. Furthermore, Pope Hormisdas called for the acceptance of the *Dogmatic Epistle* of Pope Leo I (440-461) to the Patriarch of Constantinople Flavian (446-449).

On March 28, 519, the reconciliation formula was signed by Patriarch John II, by the bishops present in Constantinople, by the archimandrites of the monasteries and by the senators. The reconciliation of the two Churches was consecrated through a religious service in St. Sophia Cathedral, in the presence of the cosigners and the people. Pope Hormisdas thanked Emperor Justin I and Justinian for their help in reconciling the two Churches¹⁷.

The religious politics of Emperor Justinian

From 518, a brilliant new era began in the history of the Byzantine Empire, which will bear the name of the great emperor Justinian (527-565). The “Justinian era” was the one that marked the climax of the Byzantine Empire, politically, militarily, economically, and especially culturally. Due to these achievements, the

¹⁷ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 199-202.

reign of Justinian is considered by historians to be the golden age of the early Byzantine period¹⁸.

When he ascended the throne in 527, Justinian had the ideals of a Roman and Christian emperor. Considering himself the successor of the Roman Caesars, he considered that he had a sacred duty in restoring the unity of the Empire, inside the same borders it had in the 1st-2nd centuries AD. As a Christian emperor, Justinian believed that his mission was to spread the true faith among unbelievers, both among heretics and among the pagans. With this ideology, as a statesman, Justinian dreamed of conquering the whole known world. Now it will be the emperor Justinian who will control the great legislative work, which will later bear his name. His theological culture gave him the opportunity to intervene in the problems that troubled the Church during this period.

From the beginning of his domination, the main purpose of Justinian's church politics was to establish close relations with Rome, and he was therefore the defender of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, because the decisions of this council were completely rejected by the Eastern provinces. Therefore, Justinian's first concern was to reconcile with Rome and put an end to the schism between the two Churches. In order to seal the alliance with the papal throne and to prove to the pope his zeal as a defender of Christianity, Justinian persecuted brutally the Monophysites of the East for three years¹⁹.

Thus, during the domination of Justinian, the papal see of Rome enjoyed supreme ecclesiastical authority. In the letters that Justinian sent to the bishop of Rome, he addressed him with the nickname "*pope*", "*pope of Rome*", "*apostolic father*", "*pope and patriarch*". This title of "*pope*" was used exclusively for the bishop of Rome. In one of the epistles, Emperor Justinian told the pope that he was: *caput omnium sanctarum ecclesiarum*, "head of all the holy churches"²⁰. Moreover, in Novella 131 β emperor Justinian clearly stated that "*the most-blessed seat of archbishop of Constantinople, the New Rome, ranks second, after the holy apostolic see of the Ancient Rome*". Through this propinquity to Rome, the new dynasty felt stronger. Consequently, in 525, when the first Roman pontiff visited Constantinople, Pope John I (523-526), Emperor Justinian organized a triumphal reception²¹.

¹⁸ GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 127.

¹⁹ DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 36.

²⁰ A. KRECHT, *Die Religions-Politik Kaiser Justinians I*, Elibrom Classics, 2005, 62-68.

²¹ DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 36..

During his domination, Justinian came into conflict with Jews, pagans, and heretics: Manichaeans, Aryans, Nestorians, Monophysites, likewise with representatives of other religious doctrines, which were less important. Repeated laws against pagan sacrifices and the prohibition of pagans in imperial service show us that during this period the Empire was not fully Christianized. This fact is also confirmed by the conversion of a thousand pagans by Bishop John of Ephesus²² in 540. Emperor Justinian forbade pagans to teach in schools, and in order to eliminate completely the traces of paganism in 529, he suppresses the famous philosophical school in Athens (Platonic Academy), which was founded in 387 BC by Plato (427-347 BC). During the nine hundred years that the Platonic Academy functioned, it trained the best philosophers, who influenced the thinking and the spiritual life of the civilized world, even after it was abolished. After the reorganization of the University of Constantinople by Emperor Theodosius II in 425, the Platonic Academy declined. In his politics of eradicating the paganism, Emperor Justinian failed, as this would secretly continue to exist in remote parts of the Empire²³.

The art of this period has never been more various, prolific, and freer, meeting all methods of construction and all types of buildings²⁴. Henceforward was built the mausoleum of Galle Placidia (about 450), and in the next century - the Neonian and Arian Baptistery, the basilicas of St. Demetrius in Thessalonica, Saints Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople, San Apollinaire Nuovo and San Apollinaire in Classe, followed by the church San Vitale in Ravenna, which were decorated by Byzantine craftsmen with splendid mosaics. Since the period of Justinian, Byzantine art has known its first golden age.

Emperor Heraclius (610-641), son of the exarch of Carthage, overthrew Phocas from dominance, founding a new dynasty, and so, after half a century of tensions, the Byzantine Empire found a leader to take over its destinies. Patriarch Sergius, who had a strong influence on Heraclius' governing politics, made available the church's wealth to Heraclius, and so the emperor was able to rebuild the army²⁵. Straightaway, emperor Heraclius defeated the powerful Persian armies between 622 and 628. Following these wars, he managed to recapture several cities, including Ganzak, an important religious center for the Persians,

²² GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 131.

²³ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 165-181.

²⁴ DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 53.

²⁵ DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 57-59.

where he destroyed the Zoroastrian temple of fire, in revenge for the destruction of Jerusalem in 614. In 628, in Persia an uprising broke out in which Chosroes was dethroned and killed. Thus, Heraclius won a total victory, and in 628, after defeating his old rival, he thrived categorically in controlling the East²⁶.

The *Ektesis-ul* (ἔκθεσις)

Through these victories, Emperor Heraclius was able to regain the Monophysite provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt for the Byzantine Empire, but also to recover from the Persians the Holy Cross, which will be erected in Jerusalem on Easter day²⁷ of the year 630.

After achieving these brilliant military victories, Emperor Heraclius endeavored to restore the religious unity of the Byzantine Empire²⁸. Therefore, recapturing the Monophysite provinces of Syria and Egypt brought forward the old issue of the state's attitude towards the Monophysites. From the time of his campaigns, Emperor Heraclius began negotiations with the Monophysite bishops to reach a way of church union through certain dogmatic concessions.

This unity would have been possible in the context in which it would have been recognized that in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ would have been two natures, but one work/energy (ἐνέργεια) or one will (θέλημα). From these words will derive Monenergism and Monothelitism, a new heresy. The Monophysite patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch, who were appointed by Emperor Heraclius, showed their willingness to work for an agreement, as should have done Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople (610-638).

Palestinian monk Sophronius, who lived in Alexandria, protested this heresy. After becoming patriarch of Jerusalem in late 633 or early 634, Sophronius sent a synodal letter, known as the *Synodicon*, to Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople (610-638), to Pope Honorius of Rome (625-638), and to other bishops, letter in which he theologially argued the unfoundedness of Monothelitism. Sophronius of Jerusalem (550-638) made a synthesis between the Christology of Pope Leo I the Great (440-461) and that of St. Cyril of Alexandria (370-444) and stated that the work is related to nature and not to the person or the hypostasis.

²⁶ GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 162-163.

²⁷ M. KAPLAN, *Bizanț*, București, 2010, 22.

²⁸ DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 60.

Therefore, in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ, there are two natures and two natural works. These are united because one and the same is the worker or the operating subject. Thus, the Logos works the divine as God, and the human as a perfect man, since His humanity does not have its own hypostasis but is hypostasized by the Logos, which is hypostasized. By accepting a divine-human (theandric) work, St. Sophronius of Jerusalem taught that this is not a single work but that it relates to different genres. It is constituted at the same time, and what belongs to divinity and humanity is perfectly manifested in the work of one's own nature or essence in a simultaneous action. St. Sophronius of Jerusalem seems to be the first to introduce the concept of synergism.

Patriarch Sergius was to compose the Christological part of this document, and so he drafted the text of *Ektesis*. He held a council in Constantinople, after which he published a synodal decree in November 638, which provided the deposition of bishops, priests, deacons, and the excommunication of monks and laity in case of non-compliance with this dogmatic document. The *Ektesis* was publicly displayed in the church of St. Sophia, and its doctrine was declared the official imperial position²⁹.

Patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria and Emperor Heraclius signed the *Ekthesis*, but Pope Honorius I (625-638), who died on October 12, 638, was unaware of its existence³⁰. The new Pope John IV (640-642) did not approve the *Ektesis* and tried to advocate for the teaching of the existence of two wills and works in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ. Since he denounced the Monothelite teaching as heresy, that produced a great enmity between the emperor and the pope.

Seeing this situation, Emperor Heraclius, who anticipated the outbreak of great church disputes, will promulgate this *Ektesis*, that is an exposition of faith, by which two natures and one will ought to be recognized in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ. Although the emperor hoped that this *Ektesis* would lead to the reconciliation of the two sides, his hopes were not fulfilled, for the Arabs conquered³¹ Syria in 636, Palestine and Jerusalem in 638, and Egypt in 642. The religious politics of Emperor Heraclius had severe consequences because the Monotheism cause great dissatisfaction in Africa and Italy. Thus, in 646, the exarch of Carthage revolted against the imperial authority, followed by that of

²⁹ GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 163.

³⁰ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 226-228.

³¹ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 238-239.

Ravenna in 630. Thus followed, progressively, the loss of esteem of the inhabitants of Italy, and correspondingly the opposition of the papacy³².

The *Typos* (τύπος)

After Heraclius' death, Emperor Constantius II (641-668) became ruler of the Byzantine Empire. He remained attached to Monotheism, although it lost its political significance because the eastern provinces were conquered by the Arabs, yet especially because Monotheism was an obstacle to the friendship between the emperor and the pope of Rome. Emperor Constantius II made a series of reconciliations with the pope, and in this manner, he offered to make some changes in the Monothelite teaching.

Thus, in 648, he promulgated the *Typos* (τύπος) or the *Rule of Faith*, which void the Heraclius' *Ektesis* of 638. It forbids all Orthodox subjects who are in the spotless Christian faith and belong to the catholic/universal and apostolic Church, to fight or quarrel with one another over a will or a work/energy, or two works/energies and two wills³³. The *Typos* also forbade the written debates about Heraclius' *Ektesis* of 638, which was displayed in the narthex of St. Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople. The publication of the *Typos* produced an even greater division within the two Churches, and Pope Theodore (642-649) excommunicated Patriarch Paul II of Constantinople (641-653). Therefore, after the representatives of the pope in Constantinople were arrested, beaten and exiled for refusing the *Typos*, Pope Martin I (649-655) convened a council in Rome on October 5-31, 649.

In the presence of representatives of the Greek clergy, Pope Martin I condemned the banned *Ektesis* (*impiisima Ectesis*), and the villainous *Typos* (*scelerosus Typus*). Through its twenty anathemas, the Lateran Council condemned Monenergism and Monothelitism by rejecting the *Ektesis* and *Typos*. Furthermore, bishop Theodore of Faran and the patriarchs Sergius and Pyrrhus of Constantinople were also anathemized, stating that in the person of the Savior Jesus Christ are two natures who are unmistakably united, two natural wills, divine and human, and two natural works, divine and human, which they are in perfect harmony.

³² DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 63.

³³ K. J. von HEFELE, *A History of the Church*, vol. 5, Edinburgh, 1896, 95-96.

Emperor Constantius II became angry with Pope Martin I and ordered the exarch of Ravenna to arrest him and send him to Constantinople. Thus, on June 17, 653, the exarch Calliopa entered Rome with the army and arrested Pope Martin I, and after keeping him in captivity for one year and three months, he sent him to Constantinople; there he was subjected to terrible humiliations and was thrown into prison and sentenced to death. A little later he was sent into exile to the Tauric Kherson where he died on September 16, 655³⁴; it was the same place in which St. Clement the Roman received martyrdom in 101³⁵.

The great theologian St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662) protested strongly against the *Typos* and the Monothelism doctrine. St. Maximus the Confessor supported Pope Martin and condemned the actions of Emperor Constantius II. Due to this assertiveness, St. Maximus the Confessor was also brought to Constantinople. In 655, he was convicted of breach of betrayal: his tongue and right hand were mutilated so that he could speak and write no more against Monothelism³⁶; he was exiled in the beginning in Thrace, and then in Lazika, in the Caucasus, where he died in 662. Finally, Emperor Constantius II managed to impose by force his will on the Church, although Pope Martin and St. Maximus the Confessor were strong voices of the Church's independence opposing what they considered imperial tyrannical behavior³⁷.

The emperor and patriarch of Constantinople will continue negotiations with Pope Eugene I (657) and eventually they will be able to make peace with Pope Vitalian (657-672), and thus the schism in the Church has ceased. This reconciliation of the emperor with the Church of Rome was very important for the Byzantine Empire, since it strengthened the emperor's position in Italy³⁸.

The first period of the iconoclastic dispute (726-780)

The history of the iconoclastic dispute is divided into two periods. Thus, the first one began in 726 and lasted until 780, officially ending with the Seventh

³⁴ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 229-230.

³⁵ C. I. DUȘE, *Imperiul Roman și creștinismul în timpul Sfântului Clement Romanul*, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, 402-405.

³⁶ C. VOICU, *Patrologie III*, București, 2010, 35-53.

³⁷ GREGORY, *O istorie a Bizanțului*, 172-173.

³⁸ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 239-240.

Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787. The second period began in 802/813 and ended in 843 through the so-called “restoration of Orthodoxy”³⁹.

Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717-740) ordered in 726 the first measures to remove the icons from churches and public places, therefore began the Byzantine imperial iconoclasm. The faithful, the clergy and the monks of Constantinople protested these measures. These protests resulted in some acts of violence, and the riots in Constantinople and in European themes led Emperor Leo III the Isaurian to seek an official justification for iconoclasm, helped by the Church. Thus, the emperor tried to draw to his side Pope Gregory II (715-731), as well as Patriarch German I of Constantinople (715-730), to whom he asked to convene an ecumenical council.

Due to the refusal of Pope Gregory II and Patriarch German I, Emperor Leo III the Isaurian, considering himself “*emperor and priest*” and having the support of some of the Eastern bishops, he convened in 730 in Constantinople, a “*silentium*”, a theological conference. Therefore, those present at this council signed the decisions which legislated iconoclasm. Since Patriarch German I refused to adhere to iconoclasm, he was deposed and replaced by Anastasius (730-754), who was a follower of iconoclasm.

Pope Gregory II was a loyal supporter of the cult of icons, and in this regard, he sent two letters to Emperor Leo III, in which he indicated that he had no right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Church. Pope Gregory II also wrote him that the use and veneration of icons is in accordance with the teachings of the Church, because through the icons the same teachings of faith are transmitted as through the Holy Gospel⁴⁰.

When the first phase of the iconoclastic dispute began (726-780), and after the emperor Leo III the Isaurian issued the edict against the icons in 726, the patriarch of Jerusalem John V (705-735) invited St. John of Damascus to write against the heresy, and he accepted, composing three treatises against the iconoclastic heresy. St. John of Damascus took an active part in the debates of the anti-iconoclastic council of Eastern bishops, whereas the Emperor Leo III the Isaurian has been anathematized because of his interference. The fight of St. John of Damascus for the icons can be compared to the St. Athanasius the Great (295-373) fight against the Arianism. That is why the iconoclastic council of

³⁹ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 263.

⁴⁰ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 243.

Hieria in 754 anathematized him by calling him a teacher of iniquity. St. John of Damascus will be rehabilitated by the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, which honored him with the formula: “*The Holy Trinity has glorified the three*”⁴¹.

Unfortunately, this dispute of the imperial iconoclasm produced a great religious crisis within the Byzantine Empire, which will affect the relations between Rome and Constantinople. Pope Gregory II rejected the election of Athanasius as patriarch of Constantinople because the election was not done canonically, condemned Emperor Leo III as heretic, and removed Rome and Italy from imperial authority. Pope Gregory III (731-741) will convene a council in Rome on November 1, 731, which will decide the following: “*If somebody, scorning those who respect holiness the old apostolic tradition of the Church, defies devastating, destroying and blasphemously profaning the holy icons especially of the icons of our God and Lord Jesus Christ and of His Most Pure and Most Blessed Mother, of the ever Virgin Mary of the Holy Apostles and of all the saints, has to be banished from the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus and removed from the harmonious unity of the entire Church*”⁴².

The breakup of relations between Rome and Constantinople was also caused by the forceful action of Emperor Leo III, who sent the papal legates from the capital to prison. Likewise, Emperor Leo III tried to arrest Pope Gregory III and removed from the jurisdiction of Rome the provinces of Sicily, Calabria, Illyrian (old and new Epirus, Illyricum, Macedonia, Thessaly, Achaia, Dacia Ripensis and the Mediterranean, Moesia, Dardania and Prevalis with the metropolis of Scobra) and placed them under the Constantinople’s jurisdiction.

After the death of Leo III, on June 18, 741, the leadership of the Byzantine Empire was taken by his son, Constantine V (741-775). He continued iconoclastic politics and tried to bring it even a greater amplitude through a synodal decision. Therefore, the emperor prepared the council in the smallest details, together with the iconoclastic followers. Constantine V will compose several iconoclastic treatises, of which only two have been preserved, fragmented. Through these treaties, the emperor sought to instruct the clergy and the faithful in the iconoclastic direction, and through political disputes he wished to verify the iconodule bishops, whom will be abusively replaced by the iconoclastic bishops.

⁴¹ VOICU, *Patrologie III*, 99.

⁴² L. DUSCHESNE, *Liber Pontificalis I*, Paris, 1981, 415.

After securing himself with the support of three hundred and thirty-eight iconoclastic bishops, Constantine V convened a council at Hieria between February 10 and August 8, 754. Although this iconoclastic council of Hieria assumed the claim of an ecumenical council, it did not meet the conditions set for this purpose, because it was convoked by the emperor and its dogmatic decision did not have the consent of the pentarchy. Therefore, without the consent of the pope of Rome, the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, who represented bishops and believers outside the borders of the Byzantine Empire, this council could not be ecumenical. The Council of Hieria made the following decision: *“Based on the Holy Scriptures given by God and anchored by the rock of worship of God in Spirit and truth, we all who bear priestly dignity and have gathered in the name of the Holy and Life-giving Trinity, we unanimously decide that any icon, whether made of any material or painted, must henceforth be removed from the Christian churches as something foreign and detestable, and that no one should dare to practice furthermore the pagan craft of icon painting. Whoever dares to paint icons or honor them or place them in churches or keep them in their houses, whether he is a bishop, priest or deacon must be deposed, and whether he is a layman or a monk to be anathematized and held accountable by law imperial, as an enemy of God’s commandments and dogmas given by the Holy Fathers”*⁴³.

Fortunately, the vessels and liturgical vestments that had icons painted or sewn on them were not removed. Therefore, after the approval of the iconoclastic teaching by the Hieria council, the icons were removed, and their defenders were persecuted. Due to strong opposition from believers and monks, Emperor Constantine V ordered that the decisions of the council of Hieria be signed by bishops, priests, and monks throughout the Byzantine Empire.

Additionally, many monasteries that opposed iconoclasm were set on fire, destroyed, or turned into barracks and shelters for horses and materials needed for military campaigns. Similarly, in many churches, the paintings and mosaics were destroyed or covered with plaster, and in their place were painted hunting scenes, horseback riding, fishing or acrobatics. Therefore, the iconoclasm, having the support of the imperial court, alike of the bishops, will grow greatly in Byzantium. The Pope of Rome, together with some of the Churches of the East, will defend the cult of icons. In the West, Pentapolis, and the Exarchate of Ra-

⁴³ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 247.

venna, which were occupied by the Longboards in 754, will be conquered by Frankish King Pepin the Short (741-768) and offered to Pope Stephen IV (768-772) as “The Heritage of St. Peter”.

In April 769, Pope Stephen IV convoked a council, which was held in the Basilica Salvatoris, in the Lateran Palace, condemning the iconoclastic council of Hieria and confirming the worship of icons based on the writings of the Holy Fathers. The iconoclasm will also be condemned in a council by Patriarch Theodore I of Jerusalem (752/754-767). He, together with Patriarch Cosmas I of Alexandria (742-768) and Theodore I of Antioch (750 / 751-773 / 774), will anathematize Bishop Cozma of Epiphany of Syria in 764, in the Holy Spirit Sunday for being a follower of iconoclasm.

After the death of Emperor Constantine V, on September 14, 775, the Byzantine iconoclasm, having no more political support, will enter a phase of decay, since the new emperor Leo IV the Khazar (775-780) ceased the persecution against the iconodules and allowed the release of those imprisoned. The first phase of the Byzantine iconoclasm will end⁴⁴ with the death of Emperor Leo IV, the Khazar on September 8, 780.

The iconoclastic politics of the Isaurian emperors caused great disorder in the internal life of the Byzantine Empire, and it was significantly troubled for more than one century. From its earliest stages, the iconoclastic movement led to the alienation of Italy and created very tense relations with the papacy, which was forced to excommunicate the iconoclastic bishops and headed West for help and protection. Thus, the friendship of the papacy with the Frankish kings will open a new and important period in medieval history. Unfortunately, the iconoclastic movement will gradually create in time the premises for the future rupture between the two Churches⁴⁵.

The second period of the iconoclastic dispute (802/813-842)

After winning the first phase of the iconoclastic disputes, the Byzantine Church wanted to gain its freedom and escape state authority. This contradiction was the feature that marked the second phase of the iconoclastic dispute between 802/813-842, which stirred and upset the Byzantine Empire. It was fueled by the

⁴⁴ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 244-248.

⁴⁵ VASILIEV, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 281.

financial ability of Emperor Nikephoros, who, concerned with the recovery of the imperial treasury, struck at the Church's assets.

The sturdiest supporters of the Church's demands, as well as the greatest protesters, were the monks of the Studion monastery in Constantinople, led by St. Theodore the Studite⁴⁶ (759-852). The Studion monastery was the main monastic center of Byzantium, with seven hundred monks. On the death of Patriarch Tarasios (784-806) in 806, Emperor Nikephoros asked the opinion of St. Theodore the Studite, the abbot of the monastery of Studion, about who was the most suitable person for this office, and he recommended to the emperor to convene an elective body consisting of monks and clerics. The emperor did not consider the opinion of St. Theodore the Studite and appointed the layman Nikephoros as patriarch of Constantinople (806-815). Obviously, this decision of the emperor led to a conflict between the emperor and St. Theodore the Studite. He reproached the emperor for both the uncanonical appointment of Nikephoros as patriarch of Constantinople, and his favorable attitude toward Joseph, who ten years ago had performed the second marriage of Emperor Constantine VI (780-797).

In this situation, to wage peace to the Church, Patriarch Nikephoros convened a council in Constantinople, by which St. Theodore the Studite was sent into exile. This was the second exile of St. Theodore the Studite, which lasted two years from 809 to 811. After crowning of Michael I Rangabe (811-813), as an Emperor of the Byzantine Empire, St. Theodore the Studite was released from exile, and he tried again to fight for the restoration of the icons. Unfortunately, this attempt to restore the icons was interrupted by Emperor Leo V of Armenia (813-820), who in 814 resumed the iconoclastic politics of Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717-741). He reinstated the iconoclastic decrees of Hieria in 754 at the Council of Constantinople in 815. The emperor unsuccessfully tried to attract Patriarch Nikephoros and St. Theodore the Studite to his side. In protest, St. Theodore the Studite, jointly with one thousand monks, organized an impressive procession in Constantinople, carrying icons in their arms. Emperor Leo III the Isaurian pronounced in 815 a sentence of exile against the iconophiles and thus, St. Theodore the Studite took the path of exile for the third time. After the assassination of Leo III, the Isaurian, in 820 Emperor Michael II the Amorian

⁴⁶ DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 82-82.

(820-829), nicknamed the Stammerer, came to rule the Byzantine Empire: he was more easygoing of iconophiles, freeing from imprisonment those convicted⁴⁷.

On the death of Michael II in 829, the imperial throne was occupied by his son Theophilus (829-842). He was sixteen years old and was one of the most interesting Byzantine emperors. The guide of Theophilus was John the Grammarian, a priest who was known for his erudition and iconoclasm, which he unfortunately passed on to the emperor. Ambitious, refined, and precocious, Emperor Theophilus cultivated his reputation as a righteous and benevolent ruler over his subjects, thus hoping to prove the justice of iconoclasm by the success of his reign. In 833 he resumed the iconoclastic struggle by an edict condemning all those who refused the common faith of the iconoclasts.

In order to intensify this fight against the iconophiles, in 837, the emperor appointed his former tutor, John VII the Grammarian (837-843) as patriarch of Constantinople⁴⁸. The icons that began to be relocated in some churches during the reign of Emperor Michael II, but also in the imperial palace, at the instructions of Empress Theodora, will be discarded again and replaced with paintings depicting animals and birds⁴⁹. All these brutal measures taken by Emperor Theophilus proved to be completely inappropriate, because the iconoclasm did not guarantee the emperor military victories against the Muslims, so he became sick and died of dysentery.

At the death of Theophilus on January 22, 842, his son, Michael III the Drunkard (855-867) was two years old, therefore the authority (842-855), his mother. Empress Theodora, about thirty years of age, was in a stronger position than Irene (797-802) and did not need to use ruthlessness as did Irene when she took over the leadership of the Byzantine Empire, forty-three years ago. Empress Theodora was an energetic and intelligent woman, having as the main advisor the postal services logothete and eunuch Teoktistos⁵⁰

Empress Theodora called out of exile all the iconophile bishops and convoked a council in Constantinople on March 11, 843, which will anathematize all the iconoclasts. Consequently, both iconoclastic councils of Hieria in 754 and Constantinople in 815 were also condemned by the council. Furthermore, the

⁴⁷ C. VOICU, L.-D. COLDA, *Patrologie III*, București, 2015, 211-212.

⁴⁸ W. TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, București, 2003, 153-155.

⁴⁹ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 255.

⁵⁰ TREADGOLD, *O scurtă istorie a Bizanțului*, 154-155.

decisions of the seven Ecumenical Councils were confirmed, approving the worship of icons and anathematizing the iconoclasts. The bishops who disobeyed the council's decisions were deposed and replaced with those iconodules who suffered during the iconoclastic persecution. Thus, the restoration of the cult of icons will be done during a festive Liturgy, which was celebrated in St. Sophia Cathedral on May 11, 843. Since this council of Constantinople was held on the eve of the first Sunday of Lent, and the restoration of the cult of icons, it was considered a new victory for Orthodoxy over heresies, and it was established that this Sunday should be celebrated every year and called Sunday of Orthodoxy⁵¹.

During the iconoclastic disputes, the Byzantine Empire went for thirty years through a period of maximum unrest, during which the government took severe measures against the iconodules, dispersing and exiling them. Thus, the monks fought against the imperial authority, who did not hesitate to appeal the papacy, being determined to recognize the priority of the Roman Church, if ensured the independence of the Eastern Church relative to the state. The iconoclastic emperors wanted to keep the Church dependent on the state, thus increasing its imperial authority over it. Those who protested and fought the most against this claim were the monks of the Studion monastery, led by St. Theodore the Studite, who stubbornly refused the emperor's right to decide on dogmas. Despite all the suffering they endured, they were not impressed by the imperial authority and claimed the independence of the Church. Unfortunately, in this battle, the monks of the Studion monastery had no chance of success. Therefore, the dispute over the icons will have an indisputable result: subjecting the Church to the authority of the emperor even more⁵².

Conclusions

The religious politics initiated by Emperor Constantine the Great was continued by the Byzantine emperors, and the relations they created between the Church and the state were continued by all his followers, regardless of whether they were Orthodox or heretics. The Byzantine emperors protected the Church and sought to strengthen Christianity by protecting it from heresies that have occurred throughout history. Unfortunately, some emperors embraced the

⁵¹ CHIFĂR, *Istoria creștinismului I*, 256.

⁵² DIEHL, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, 84-85.

heresies arisen within the Byzantine Empire, while those defending authentic traditional Christianity suffered: they were removed from the episcopal see, sent into exile, or even received the crown of martyrdom. Regrettably, some Byzantine emperors tried to show despotic authority over the Church, trying to enslave it to their own interests: they convoked councils, removed and appointed bishops, without respecting the canons and traditional teachings of the Church. Many times, through the brutal intervention in the life of the Church, the Byzantine emperors produced schisms within it.

Although some emperors exercised despotic authority over the Church, most of them tried to protect it both doctrinally and materially. These emperors convoked at their own expense the Ecumenical Councils, which set the Church's teaching. Besides, most Byzantine emperors were the greatest founders of churches and monasteries throughout the Empire and contributed to the spreading, as well as defense Christianity against the Muslim invasion. If the Church would not have benefited from the protection of the Byzantine emperors, it would have suffered seriously from the Muslim attacks.

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