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## THE CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE: AN ECUMENICAL APPROACH

There are many ways to build the common Christian identity. The whole of ecumenical striving for the unity of divided Christianity encompasses an enormous space of various acts and relations. In fact, the famous typology of the kinds of ecumenism proposed by the Second Vatican Council seems to cover to the certain degree only an enormous space of the interconfessional relations towards unity. The Decree on Ecumenism has distinguished between spiritual ecumenism (*oecumenismus spiritualis*), doctrinal ecumenism (*oecumenismus scientialis*) and practical ecumenism (*oecumenismus practicalis*)<sup>1</sup>. The oncoming celebrations of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of signing of the Decree demand to consider new and alternative ways of doing ecumenism.

In opinions of many, ecumenical movement needs to search various inspirations from the cultural and intellectual patterns of the present day. This is the task of the highest importance as Christianity and Christian Churches, above all in Europe, face a deep crisis. The clearest signs of this crisis are “the collapse of religious practices, a progressive deterioration of beliefs and a constant erosion and loss of the credibility of the institutions, a lack of the presence of the established religions in society. (...) a number of religious persons and theologians keep denouncing and lamenting underneath the evident religious crisis, a real crisis of God”<sup>2</sup>. Ecumenism must simultaneously be the response as well as the way of Christian Churches when facing various challenges of the contemporary world.

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<sup>1</sup> A. SKOWRONEK, *Próba określenia ekumenizmu*, w: *Ku chrześcijaństwu jutra. Wprowadzenie do ekumenizmu*, red.: W. HRYNIEWICZ, J.S. GAJEK, S.J. KOZA, Lublin 1996, 32.

<sup>2</sup> J.M. VELASCO, *The Ecumenical Movement at the Present Socio-Cultural and Religious Time*, a lecture delivered during the International Congress of the International Ecumenical Fellowship, Avila (Spain), 23.07.2013.

Ecumenism provides both the Church leaders and grassroots Christians with the methods of common work for unity. Yet in the both *reflexive* and *liquid* society, when using two important adjectives connected to the present sociological theories of the contemporary reality, theology and ecumenism must be permanently looking for new methods, in order to be more intelligible.

It seems that many inspirations might be found in the more and more developed culture of remembrance. Political Europe, described sometimes as a dark continent, due to the wars and totalitarian systems, introduce a number of projects that concern individual and collective memories. It is proceeded particularly in regarding on the memory of victims of the totalitarian systems. Yet remembrance could be also a method of evangelization.

The most important questions to be asked here is: what does the culture of remembrance mean? How does it affect society? What is its connection to the Christianity and Christian Churches? Are they interrelated each other? If so, wouldn't it be useful to include it into the set of ecumenical methods in order to make ecumenism more efficient? This entire set of questions presents a direction of findings to be shown in the text.

### **1. The processual nature of society: How do the past, the present and the future intertwine themselves?**

Culture of remembrance must be deeply enrooted in how society is understood and how its nature is grasped according to the contemporary sociology. The most important conclusion to be stressed is that society appears as a concurrence of the interrelated processes. It is in the constant flow from the past to the future. Piotr Sztompka is right when he states that society in the present state encompasses what has been contributed by the past and what will be expected and what will be possible in the future<sup>3</sup>. Our present day is therefore a bridge between the gap of the history and of the forecast. What is now, how do we live today is the place in time in which we may transform various experiences from the past into the instruments to build the future. This processual nature of society is therefore referred to the mechanics of causality which constitutes a platform where present time is affected by the past periods of the time and thus effects the future.

Edward Shils defined society as a relatively self-contained social system with its own territory, government, name, history and culture. Society then is "a tangled skein of an infinity of ties which in ways difficult to formulate, constitute

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<sup>3</sup> P. SZTOMPKA, *Socjologia zmian społecznych*, Kraków 2010, 67.

a whole"<sup>4</sup>. Yet for the society and its existence, as Shils clearly expounds, of crucial importance is to discern its own history and the historical causality between yesterday, today and tomorrow. This interrelation, according to Shils, is the ground of the Tradition.

How may we define then the notion of Tradition? Piotr Sztompka doesn't limit it to only one definition. After him, we must distinguish its two meanings. The first one, which is described as a broader concept, refers to the whole of objects and ideas from the past which are possible to be discovered or to be found in the present, thus these relicts of our history of which we still remember, which we know or which have not been destroyed. According to the second, narrower meanings of the Tradition, it is a part of the historical heritage which has not only survived up to the present day, but which is closely interrelated with our present reality<sup>5</sup>. Tradition, thus, is an area of both material and ideal nature which has a symbolic meaning for the distinctive society or community. Thomas Stearns Elliot when writing about Tradition in the perspective of the literature said that "Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order (*Tradition and Individual Talent*)<sup>6</sup>. In this phrase Elliot has clearly articulated the symbolical continuity, expressions of which are maintained within the Tradition.

What was in the past is provided to us through two distinctive tools of which the first one is of material feature and the second one is recognized as a non-material, ideal. The material tool is referred to the physical existence of various objects. Houses and bridges, routs and ports, churches and monuments, tools and machineries construct an inherited material environment where we live even if it is not created by us ourselves<sup>7</sup>. It is this part of our surroundings which is embedded in the activities of former generations. The ideal tool is related to the

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<sup>4</sup> H. ORLANS, *Edward Shils' Beliefs about Society and Sociology*, "Minerwa" 34: 23-27, Kluwer Academic Publishers 1996, 24.

<sup>5</sup> P. SZTOMPKA, *Socjologia* 70.

<sup>6</sup> S. G. AXELROD, C. ROMAN, T. J. TRAVISANO, *The New Anthology of American Poetry: Modernism: 1900-1950*, New Brunswick 2007, 432.

<sup>7</sup> P. SZTOMPKA, *Socjologia* 67.

human abilities to remember and to communicate. What was experienced in the past is open to us through our remembrance. Yet, as we are able to remember to the certain extent only, we must rely on the memory of other members of the society. The process of remembrance may be realized in two ways: through the oral transfer of information concerning various facts from the past and through the systematic historiography. The first one was gorgeously expressed by Ryszard Kapuściński in his famous collection of essays about Africa *The Shadow of the Sun*: "(...) here the outer reaches of memory are the limits of history. Earlier, there was nothing. Earlier does not exist. History is what is remembered. Africa (...) did not know writing, and history here is an oral tradition, legends passed from mouth to mouth, a communal myth created invariably at the base of the mango tree in the evening's profound darkness, in which only the trembling voices of old men resound, because the women and children are silent, raptly listening"<sup>8</sup>. Yet, many of what was said about African communities, is still present in western societies, even despite of their more and more loose social bonds and despite of the increasing of the social reflexivity<sup>9</sup>. The importance of the oral tradition is therefore acknowledged, but the most of the process of the remembrance is made by the systematic historiography whereas history is expounded to us through the better and more and more efficient methods of recording. The process which has been moved after Gutenberg had invented his first printing press and which may be recognized today in a number of various types of modern information carriers, has simultaneously developed both a historical consciousness and a consciousness of the sequentially seen linear time.

As highlighted above, the ideal tool of transferring of remembrance provides the contemporary societies with not only bare facts from the past but also with their meanings. This process is strictly connected to the reception of various norms, values, symbols as well as knowledge of former generations which creates our cultural surroundings. This reception has also a decisive impact on the meanings concerning whole of material tools. As Piotr Sztompka picturesquely illustrated, the *Forum Romanum* in Rom, without our knowledge about its history and importance for European culture might be seen only as a place of ruins<sup>10</sup>.

Both, material and ideal tools complement each other. Yet, this complementary combination must be completed by the notion of invented Tradition. The term – coined by Eric Hobsbawm – used in a broad sense, refers to the “con-

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<sup>8</sup> R. KAPUŚCINSKI, *The Shadow of the Sun*, New York: Random House 2001, 301.

<sup>9</sup> A. GIDDENS, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford: University Press 1991, 20.

<sup>10</sup> P. SZTOMPKA, *Socjologia* 68.

structed past” when this, what is said to be experienced, is only one’s projection, both intended or not. The process of invention of Tradition may be proceeded in order to legitimate new values and norms or to strengthen identity of a distinctive social group<sup>11</sup>. In the very strict sense of the term, “invented Tradition” is “(...) taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past”<sup>12</sup>.

## 2. Interpretational nature of the culture of remembrance

The discourse on invented Tradition as well as on the material and ideal tools used to pass on the past, allow us to define the culture of remembrance more strictly. According to Aleida Assmann, we must distinguish the distinctive sense of the remembrance (*Erinnerung*) and the memory (*Gedächtnis*). Assmann claims that “while the former term refers to reflection upon and the exchange of personal experiences about culture and history, the latter refers to a program for a group’s bonding into a greater «We», as in diverse rituals with which nations keep alive their past”<sup>13</sup>. Yet Assmann’s clarification may be acknowledged as the first stage to recognize how many various concepts concern the subject. Due to the terminological difficulties (and sometimes differences) seems to be more proper to define the culture of remembrance descriptively. It is, thus, the whole of undertakings, institutionalized or not, that contribute to strengthen both collective and individual memory about past experiences, in order to use these experiences to construct the future. It is embedded in the conviction that every distinctive society or community must build its identity on one narrative line which encompasses the past, the present and the future. The culture of remembrance thus reveals itself in number of places of memory, monuments, museums, exhibitions, books, films, websites, memorial days, lectures ect.<sup>14</sup> It forms an attitude of openness and interest of the past.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, 69.

<sup>12</sup> E. HOBSBAWM, *Introducing: Inventing Tradition*, in: E. HOBSBAWM, T. RANGER, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: University Press 2012, 1.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.goethe.de/ges/pok/pan/en7000483.htm> (17.11.2013).

<sup>14</sup> *Erinnerungskultur in der pluralen Gessellschaft – Neue Perspektiven für den christlich-jüdischen Dialog*, ed: R. BOSCHKI, A. GERHARDS, Paderborn 2010, 17.

What was in the past is always displayed to us – what Anthony Giddens defines, though referring it to another context – as a mediated experience<sup>15</sup>. It is open to us via our memory, which is always used in the distinctive moment, or via memory of others, both individuals or groups. Yet the past, regardless of the subject of the transfer, depicts itself as a construction, or more precisely a reconstruction. Due to the mediation processes, memories, both individual and collective, are interpreted. That's why the remembrance process must be considered as an interpretation. Heidemarie Uhl has right when insisting that "(...) every generation has to define its own approach to the past – in this respect it is also the task of each generation to express its own remembrance needs, its view of history and its attitudes towards it". In the interview owing to the "culture of remembrance projects" introduced by the German Federal Minister for Education, Arts and Culture, she claims that "(...) the media of cultural memory (...) make a society visible through its relation to the past and ensure that this is handed down to the next generation. Passing on memory is, however, a complex process: views of history can be abandoned, as for example the shattering of post-war myths has shown, historical reference points can fade and lose their relevance. In this way, living memory can descend into «storage memory» (Aleida Assmann) or continue to have an impact as «islands of time» (Jan Assmann) over hundreds if not thousands of years, as shown by the example of religions. Despite all attempts to encode memory in material symbols, the future of remembrance will always be uncertain"<sup>16</sup>.

Maurice Halbwachs has stressed another dimension of how society interprets the past; he insists that "(...) what remains from the past is that which society in each era can reconstruct within its contemporary frames of reference"<sup>17</sup>. That frames of reference confirm the assumption of the interpretational nature of memories. Yet if our remembrance must be interpreted, it may be simultaneously instrumentalized. It means, in the very strict sense, that the remembrance is adopted by various social groups or institutions for some reasons of political, cultural or religious nature. The most conspicuous examples of how the culture of remembrance may be used, have been provided by the totalitarian systems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: both nazists and communists have painted the identity of their own picture of an ideal human being through a number of various narrations, myths, symbols and monuments. Yet, when asking about the instrumentalization

<sup>15</sup> A. GIDDENS, *Modernity and Self-identity*, 46.

<sup>16</sup> H. UHL, *A Culture of Remembrance in and for Today's Society*, in: [http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1215\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1215_en.pdf) (17.11.2013).

<sup>17</sup> J. ASSMANN, J. CZAPLICKA, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*, "New German Critique. Cultural History/Cultural Studies" 65(1995), 127.

of memory, one must claim that it can be used, depending on object, for both proper and improper purposes. The first kind of purpose is well illustrated in the spread across the entire Europe of the culture of remembrance projects, which point to recognize, to commemorate and to use the history of victims of European totalitarian dictatorships in order to avoid the same fate in the future.

### **3. Ecumenical attitude: How may the culture of remembrance be used in order to affect ecumenical processes?**

The question of the instrumentalized remembrance is strictly connected to the issue of identity. As mentioned above, one's memory or memory of a social group affects one's identity.

But what is identity? There is an inundation of the concepts of how the notion of identity is defined across social sciences. Lack of a coherent and a comprehensive definition reflects the importance of the issue for the present human condition as well as postmodern tendencies to avoid solid categories. Yet we focus on our identity as we become more and more individualistic in the more and more liquid reality. Jock Young trenchantly asserts that "just as community collapses, identity is invented"<sup>18</sup>. And the liquidity of our reality, when using the famous notion coined by Zygmunt Bauman, consist in "the growing conviction, that change is the only permanence and uncertainty is the only certainty"<sup>19</sup>.

Anthony Giddens, one of the most prominent sociologists of the present day, claims that identity is what we think of ourselves in the biographical categories such as race, gender, age, religion, nationality, qualifications, incomes, activities ect. Further, an identity is how we comprehend our past, our presence and our future<sup>20</sup>. Yet according to many sociologists and philosophers which consider present social reality, one of the more characteristic features of our times is that our identity is created rather than creating. The more we are immersing in the chaotic world of the empty signs provided us by the mass-media the less we are able to find the sources of identity inside of ourselves. Bauman grasped it in a very sophisticated way when he stated that in our epoch "man is a screen to his fellow man", when paraphrasing famous aphorism coined by Thomas Hobbes. In his mood diagnosis of the social and human condition has been discerned that our identity is and will be reduced to the masks we change and present each other

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<sup>18</sup> A. ELLIOTT, P. DU GAY *Identity in Question*, London: Sage Publications 2009, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Z. BAUMAN, *The Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2013, 45.

<sup>20</sup> A. GIDDENS, *Modernity and Self-identity* 49.

relating to the time and space. Yet the masks are of one-side dimension, without an intrinsic background, prepared outside of ourselves, in the main extraterritorial cultural centres.

But how does it refer to the issue of remembrance and how does it regard ecumenism? Should the ecumenical movement as well as the ecumenical theology support the culture of remembrance? Isn't it possible to profit from it? On the contrary, in the light of what was said above, doesn't the culture of remembrance fix various divisions between Christians when strengthening distinctive confessional identities?

A lot was said about the principles of ecumenism; there is no need to repeat here entire theological discourse. What seems to be the most important is that ecumenism is primarily a searching for unity of Christians on the ground of respecting one's own confessional identity. We speak about an ecumenical identity which is built on this main rule of respect. Yet, this must be completed by the first principle of Christianity, the Great Commandment of Love. Every ecumenical relation without regarding on this basis must be deprived of its own meaning. If so, every undertaking of the culture of remembrance is the chance for the case of Christian unity if truly ecumenical. And it is truly ecumenical when leading Christians of various confessions to God.

#### **4. Conclusion: an illustration of the ecumenical culture of remembrance**

Instead of sociological and theological scrutiny of intertwining of the question of identity, remembrance and ecumenism, seems to be better to illustrate the issue with a distinctive example of the ecumenical culture of remembrance. A striking, even though less known example of the culture of remembrance has been provided by the case of the Forest (Mountains) Churches in the region of Cieszyn Silesia, spread on the both sides of the Polish-Czech Border. A major part of the region's landscape is dominated by the picturesque chains of the Silesian Beskids mountains covered by the beautiful spruce forests. In several less accessible points of the Beskids there are places where Lutherans from the region used to gather to conduct illegal worships in the time of the Counter-reformation<sup>21</sup>.

One of the more distinctive features of the Cieszyn region is reflected in its confessional structure of population. This is the place where lives the biggest Protestant community in Poland, precisely speaking: the Lutheran one. Yet, in

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<sup>21</sup> J. BELOW, *Leśne kościoły: miejsca tajnych nabożeństw ewangelickich w Beskidzie Śląskim*, Bielsko-Biała 2009, 6.



the light of the intertwining of national and confessional factors which impact on the commonly known and understood stereotype of a Pole-Catholic, sounds surprisingly to learn about quite other concept of Polish identity, which is in the Cieszyn Silesia combined with the Lutheran confession. Even more surprisingly, also for the Poles from other regions, appears the historical true that the Polish national revival in the region of Cieszyn Silesia as well as partly in Upper Silesia was sparked by the Lutheran priests and theologians and their pastoral and publishing efforts.

Lutheranism appeared here for the first time in the twenties of 16<sup>th</sup> Century, very soon after Martin Luther announced his program of reformation. From the very beginning, new theological principles were accepted by the grassroots Christians what was reflected in an increasing number of Lutheran congregations. Fifty years after Luther's 95 theses, Protestants were in majority in the region. Since 1610, the Habsburgs started to re-catholizate Silesia, what was related to the various forms of persecution of the Protestant population<sup>22</sup>.

Lutherans were deprived of their churches. As the Protestant worships were banned, the distinctive communities used to gather in less accessible places in the mountains to pray and to celebrate liturgy. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Lutherans priests and leaders from the region commemorated nine places of the illegal worship in Polish as well as in Czech part of the region. Several of them is occasionally used today for the services of the local Lutheran congregations.

There are various forms of commemoration: stones that are said to be used during worships, crosses, commemorating plaques, monuments with inscriptions. The places refer to the Lutheran identity. Yet their symbolical meaning is intelligible for all Christians. Signs as the cross, the biblical verse or the chalice create one cultural code which unite entire Christianity. And even though a Catholic when visiting these places during trekking knows their etiology immersed in the confessional controversies, the basic Christian symbols allow her or him to recognize these places as the common, religious and Christian heritage.

Here the ecumenical perspective of the culture of remembrance clearly manifests itself. The places of the forest churches support Lutheran identity but simultaneously are accessible and intelligible for all Christians. In the gorgeous mountainous landscape and in the overlaid harmonies of the murmuring or whispering of Beskidian trees, one seems to be closer to God while praying. Due to the culture of remembrance past controversies are transformed into the common Christian heritage and create the common Christian culture. Yet, first of all there

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

are the places where Christians, regardless their confessional belonging, may pray to one God in the common faith.

## **Kultura pamięci: perspektywa ekumeniczna**

### Streszczenie

Spółeczeństwo jest ze swej natury zawsze zbiorem wzajemnie powiązanych procesów dokonujących się w czasie, ciągłym przechodzeniem od przeszłości, poprzez terażniejszość do przyszłości. Pamięć o byłych doświadczeniach jest zaś kluczowym czynnikiem kształtującym tożsamość tak jednostek jak i społeczeństw, przekazując wzory kulturowe, normy i wartości. Pamięć jest przy tym zawsze pewną interpretacją tego, co było, skoro przeszłość jest dostępna człowiekowi zawsze czy to przez mechanizmy zapamiętywania czy też poprzez zapośredniczony przekaz, realizowany tak drogą ustną, jak i systematycznej historiografii. Interpretowana pamięć może prowadzić do jej instrumentalizacji. Przykładem takiej instrumentalizacji jest „kultura pamięci”, którą można zdefiniować jako całość przedsięwzięć, zarówno zinstytucjonalizowanych jak i nie, które przyczyniają się do umocnienia kolektywnej jak i indywidualnej pamięci o byłych doświadczeniach, tak aby wykorzystać te doświadczenia w kształtowaniu przyszłości.

Artykuł zmierza do odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy kultura pamięci może stać się narzędziem ekumenicznym. Wobec diagnozowanego przez wielu socjologów i teologów kryzysu chrześcijaństwa, Kościoły chrześcijańskie stają przed koniecznością wypracowywania nowych metod działania, które skuteczniej pozwolą stawić czoła wyzwaniom współczesności. W konsekwencji, przed taką koniecznością stoi również ekumenizm. Kultura pamięci, również ta odnosząca się do dawnych kontrowersji, może stać się takim ekumenicznym narzędziem, o ile jest projektowana w poszanowaniu podstawowych zasad dialogu ekumenicznego i oparta na ewangelicznym nakazie miłości.

**Keywords:** culture of remembrance, ecumenism, the Forest Churches, Lutheran.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kultura pamięci, ekumenizm, Leśne Kościoły, luteranśki.