

IV. DIALOGI EKUMENICZNE I MIĘDZYRELIGIJNE

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Theological Anthropology at the Basis of Inter-Denominational Controversies: Dialogue within the World Council of Churches¹

Abstract

The article discusses moral concerns, which are a challenge for Churches and constitute principal foci of controversy. Anthropological questions underpin moral issues. The answer to the question about the source of human dignity and inherent human rights determines the response to specific matters, such as defining the beginning of human life and its inviolability, the approach to abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering, and even disability. The creation of man in God's image and cooperation with the Creator in the development of creation results in the need for a proper setting of the world, including the establishment of a social, political, and economic order serving each man. The way to overcome the differences in the interpretation of Christian anthropology – and thus determine the moral issues – are ecumenical dialogues in which the parties seek to discover the truth. Dialogue must be made in the two dimensions simultaneously: vertical (the essence of faith) and horizontal (social and moral issues). The unity of faith determines the unity in moral issues. If dialogue is to bear fruit in the form of mutual recognition, the parties should avoid anthropological errors contained in contemporary thinking (a.o. materialism, atheistic socialism, genetic reductionism, utilitarianism, and relativism as well as the falsehood of gender ideology). The recipe for this is to return to the biblical anthropology and to a patient and humble search for the truth.

Keywords: World Council of Churches, theological anthropology, moral issues, ecumenism.

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Antropologia teologiczna u podstaw kontrowersji międzywyznaniowych: dialog w obrębie Światowej Rady Kościołów

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje zagadnienie kwestii moralnych, które jako główne ogniska kontrowersji stanowią dziś wyzwanie dla Kościołów. U podstaw kwestii moralnych znajdują się zagadnienia antropologiczne. Odpowiedź na pytanie o źródło ludzkiej godności i przysługujących człowiekowi praw warunkuje odpowiedź na kwestie szczegółowe, takie jak: określenie początku życia ludzkiego i jego nienaruszalności, podejście do aborcji, eutanazji, inżynierii genetycznej, a nawet do niepełnosprawności. Z faktu stworzenia człowieka na obraz Boży i współdziałania człowieka w stwórczym dziele Boga wynika dalej obowiązek dbałości o zachowanie stworzenia oraz o sprawiedliwe urządzenie świata, a w nim ładu społecznego, politycznego i gospodarczego służącego każdemu człowiekowi. Droga do przezwyciężenia różnic w interpretacji antropologii chrześcijańskiej – a co za tym idzie, określenia kwestii moralnych – są dialogi ekumeniczne, w których strony dążą do odkrywania prawdy. Dialog musi się dokonywać w obu wymiarach łącznie: wertykalnym (istota wiary) i horyzontalnym (kwestie społeczne i moralne). Jedność wiary warunkuje bowiem jedność w kwestiach moralnych. Aby dialog przyniósł owoce w postaci wzajemnego uznania, należy uniknąć błędów antropologicznych, zawartych we współczesnych prądach myślowych (m.in. materializmu, socjalizmu ateistycznego, redukcjonizmu genetycznego, utylitaryzmu i relatywizmu, a także fałszu ideologii *gender*). Receptą na to jest powrót do antropologii biblijnej oraz cierpliwe i pokorne szukanie prawdy.

Słowa kluczowe: Światowa Rada Kościołów, antropologia teologiczna, zagadnienia moralne, ekumenizm.

The history of divisions in Christianity is almost as old as Christianity itself. In past centuries the causes of the divisions were mostly doctrinal in nature and sometimes political. In the twentieth century, apart from the divisions motivated doctrinally, also those caused by differences in the interpretation of the ethical and moral issues came to light. Dividing lines ran not just between traditional Churches, but also within individual Church organisms.

1. Theological anthropology at the basis of moral issues

At the core of moral issues, challenging the unity of the Church as a whole as well as individual denominational Churches, are consequential questions of anthropological nature. These issues are present in many ecumenical dialogues, both on the world forum and at the local level. We do not intend here to make a detailed analysis of the content of these documents. Let us, however, quote some common statements, especially the document prepared by the ARCIC II: *Life in Christ. Morals, Communion and the Church*², of 1994 or the one prepared

² ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION, *Life in Christ. Morals, Communion and the Church. An agreed Statement by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission*, London 1994.

by the Churches dialoguing as part of the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation team of the WCC: *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, esp. the part *Costly Obedience*³ of 1996. We could also refer to the local ecumenical dialogues, e.g. in Germany⁴.

At this point we need to note the document of the doctrinal Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, entitled *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*⁵, which could form the basis for reading the vision of theological anthropology developed by the WCC. The document was created in response to the demand submitted to the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare in 1998. For this reason, the anthropological-theological study prepared by Faith and Order does not constitute a comprehensive development of Christian anthropology and includes only those issues, which, in the opinion of the WCC Doctrinal Commission, are needed to understand human nature and the resulting understanding of moral issues. The document was prepared so as to draw attention to the selected issues which humanity must face; to determine what the Churches can say together about what it means to be a human being; to name differences in the understanding of human nature by the different Churches; to encourage Churches to jointly address the current challenges in the spiritual, ethical and moral fields, facing humanity today⁶. The document is not the fruit of ecumenical dialogue; therefore, it does not constitute an ecumenical consensus in the field of theological anthropology. It is rather to provide help for the Churches and other entities interested in the interpretation of issues implying anthropology. Due to the huge variety of theological approaches it is also impossible to acknowledge the existence of a common Christian response to the question: what does it mean to be human?⁷ The answer determines the further approach to specific issues concerning man and his life, so that – as an example – the differences in the understanding of human nature as man and woman,

³ Published in the book T.F. BEST, M. ROBRA (ed.), *Ecclesiology and Ethics. Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church*, Geneva 1997.

⁴ Common declaration of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church in Germany on abortion: KIRCHENAMT DER EVANGELISCHEN KIRCHE IN DEUTSCHLAND UND SEKRETARIAT DER DEUTSCHEN BISCHOFSKONFERENZ (ed.), *Gott ist ein Freund des Lebens. Herausforderungen und Aufgaben beim Schutz des Lebens. Gemeinsame Erklärung des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland und der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz*, Gütersloh 1989; common declaration of both Churches on euthanasia: *Im Sterben: Umfängen vom Leben. Gemeinsames Wort zur Woche für das Leben 1996: „Leben bis zuletzt – Sterben als Teil des Lebens“*, Gütersloh 1996.

⁵ WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology. A Faith and Order Study Document*, Geneva 2005 (further quoted as: CPTA).

⁶ CPTA, 3.

⁷ W. TABBERNEE, *Ecumenical Perspectives on Theological Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study and Draft Report*, in: FO/2004:60, July 2004, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/x-other-documents-from-conferences-and-meetings/plenary-commission-meeting-kuala-lumpur-2004/presentation-on-theological-anthropology-study/@/download/file/kuala-docs15-tabbernee.pdf>, 2 (12.08.2016).

the differences in defining the beginning of human life or the differences in the recognition of the issue of human dignity and rights will result in differences in the approach to moral issues, such as the evaluation of same-sex unions, the assessment of admissibility of contraception, abortion and euthanasia, or the approach to disability or genetic manipulation. These are, of course, only examples, because there are many more specific issues. The document *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology* touches e.g. on such issues as human dignity resulting from the creation of man in God's image, cooperation with the Creator in the development of creation, the need for a proper setting of the world, including the establishment of a social and political order serving man, man's responsibility for the creation and protection of the dignity of human labour, human rights to life, to equality between men and women, people with disabilities, issues related to genetic manipulation, and the danger of producing artificial intelligence. The document also points to the sins against man and society that directly result from the reversal of laws established by the Creator, which leads to: greed, unfair indebtedness of whole societies, poverty, forced migration, destruction of nature – the human environment.

2. Key moral questions in ecumenical dialogues as a challenge to mutual recognition

Although moral issues are the subject of numerous bilateral dialogues, at this point we refer primarily to the document of the "Faith and Order" cited above, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*. The list of moral issues there will by no means be exhausted. The most important issues covered in this document will serve as an example.

2.1. Dignity of the human person created in God's image

Justification of the rights of the human person depends on the answer given to the question about the source of human dignity. Christian anthropology from the earliest days drives human dignity from the creation of man in God's image. Every person is created in the image of God and has infinite value, regardless of their physical or mental characteristics⁸. This image may be indiscernible in a person who chooses to separate from God, but cannot be removed in any way⁹. Irremovability of the image of God in man means also non-transferability of his

⁸ CPTA, 12, 45, 127.

⁹ CPTA, 83.

inherent dignity¹⁰. Churches are generally in agreement about the unique value and dignity of every human life, which derives directly from the fact of creation and love of every human person by God¹¹. The dignity of man in history was repeatedly threatened and even today is faced with threats.

They also agree that the full richness of this mystery is revealed only in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image of God¹². While western theology focuses on the image of God in man, eastern theology distinguishes between image and likeness. Every person is created in the image of God, which is the category of being, whereas the similarity belongs additionally to those who have been perfected in love, reaching moral efficiency¹³. The presence of God's image in every human being reveals the relational aspect of human nature and emphasizes at the same time the human dignity, potentiality, and creativity as well as the restrictions of this nature: creature-hood, finiteness, and vulnerability¹⁴.

Dignity belonging to man, and resulting from the fact of creation in God's image, also includes the dignity of human labour. The document mentions this, but only in the context of the social impact of the development of artificial intelligence¹⁵.

It has to be noted, though, that the agreement to hold the inviolable dignity of the human does not mean a uniform interpretation by Churches in relation to the value and inviolability of human life. These values are given from the beginning of human life, but the moment when life of the human person emerges is sometimes defined differently. The document does not address at all the issue of inviolability of human life in the final period and suffering, and so also ignores the matter of euthanasia. It is its clear lack, because this subject is undoubtedly a challenge faced by the Churches today in many countries.

2.2. The human person's right to life – hazards of genetic manipulation

The development of biomedical techniques brings up questions both about the good that the human person might accrue and about the human costs and consequences of the use of these techniques. Problems also include long-term implications of genetic manipulations and the predictability of their results. It is also necessary to determine who has the right to decide about them and who decides who has the right to decide. Perhaps the most important issues are: matters

¹⁰ CPTA, 118.

¹¹ CPTA, 77.

¹² CPTA, 117.

¹³ CPTA, 86, 120.

¹⁴ CPTA, 82, 127.

¹⁵ CPTA, 54.

of understanding the role that humanity plays within creation, understanding of human uniqueness, and understanding of human nature as created in the image of God¹⁶. Unprecedented achievements of technology in the manipulation of human nature are a new challenge for all of humanity, bringing with it the danger of “playing God”¹⁷. These are questions faced also by church authorities and by communities of believers.

Depending on the way we define the beginning of human life, we shall morally evaluate abortion, abortion-inducing techniques of assisted reproduction, and genetic manipulation. No wonder that precisely this area of anthropological queries contains the most controversies among Christian denominations, and thus, poses many challenges to the Churches.

To formulate a response to the above-mentioned questions crucial here is the issue of defining the moment of human existence: is it the embryo from the time of the merger of gametes already fully human or is it only potentially? The Roman Catholic Church is of the view that the human embryo has full status of a human person, and – what it implies – the fullness of human rights from the moment of conception. Some Churches are willing to admit the status of the embryo from the moment of nesting, recognizing the embryo of less than fourteen days as worthy of ethical respect, but not as a full human being, entitled to the full rights of the person¹⁸. It implies a difference in approach to the biomedical techniques performed on an embryo. Among them is preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), insofar as it serves to selective abortion of embryos burdened with genetic defects. The same applies to the prohibition or admissibility of IVF techniques (*in vitro* fertilization) assuming the destruction of non-implemented embryos and selective abortion of the, so-called, supernumerary implanted embryos¹⁹. Genetic research leading to the destruction of embryos *in vitro*, burdened with genetic defects, or their selective abortion would also defy the dignity of persons with disabilities whose lives and human dignity are thus challenged²⁰.

The document, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*, contains no reference to the total ban on abortion, which is a natural consequence of the recognition of the full human dignity from the moment of conception or references to abortion in later, also post-implemented, foetal life. Still, it addresses the following issues: stem cells in both therapeutic and reproductive cloning.

¹⁶ CPTA, 53.

¹⁷ CPTA, 55, 57.

¹⁸ CPTA, 61.

¹⁹ CPTA, 62.

²⁰ CPTA, 119.

Acquiring stem cells from embryos causes their inevitable destruction. Hence, for those who see the early embryo as a human person this practice is unacceptable. Instead, the procurement of stem cells from adult cells is proposed or from stored umbilical cord blood²¹. The same applies to therapeutic cloning, in which stem cells are obtained on the fifth day of embryo's life. The moral evaluation of this technique depends on the recognition or non-recognition of the embryo's full humanity from the moment of conception²². More objections were expressed to reproductive cloning, which has been identified as unsafe, with ethically unacceptable tendency to deformation and defectiveness. Even – it was underlined – if we could overcome these defects, there remains the ethical objection to the possibility of determining the entire human genome, which should be regarded as an act of instrumentalisation of man against human dignity, and it cannot be accepted²³.

It should also be remembered that not all biomedical techniques pose a threat to human existence, and thereby a challenge for theological anthropology²⁴. At the same time the Faith and Order Commission encourages Churches to undertake a joint effort with the scientific communities to develop new and responsible technologies related to the beginning and end of human life, such as selective reproduction, stem cell research, cloning and euthanasia²⁵. Churches sharing the Roman Catholic approach take a strongly dismissive position to most of these techniques. Their use violates directly the dignity of human persons and their right to life; it is also the unauthorized interference in the creative action of God. The exception is the research on stem cells, not derived from human embryos.

2.3. The human person's right to equal status: the disabled in society

The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, in its study on theological anthropology, does not address the issue of equality between women and men resulting from the equal dignity of creation of a man and a woman in the image of God, apparently recognizing this issue as already well developed. However, it devoted a separate section to the right of persons with disabilities to function in the Church and in society on an equal basis with non-disabled people.

The Commission has put the issue of disability in the context of the perception of a person by means of human identity markers, such as race, tribalism, caste,

²¹ CPTA, 64.

²² CPTA, 65.

²³ CPTA, 66.

²⁴ CPTA, 19.

²⁵ CPTA, 129.

nationality, religion, gender, and sexual preference. Listing these characteristics has served to highlight the basic identity given to man by his paramount belonging to Christ, against which the “identity markers” lose their meaning and cannot be used to separate the person from their brothers and sisters in Christ²⁶. Our societies, however, have created mechanisms separating those “others”, leading to their dehumanization. Using these mechanisms, persons not matching the pattern of “perfection” are subject to exclusion. This “perfection” comprises the youth, attractiveness, success, and able-bodiedness²⁷. In such situations, divergence from the pattern, especially disability, becomes a reason for exclusion, which entails disastrous consequences²⁸. Meanwhile, Christian perfection is primarily perfection in love, imitating the perfection of God, which is expressed in vulnerability and openness to pain.

The task of the Church is to express acceptance of the multiplicity of forms of human life, also the one marked by the vulnerability and pain of people with disabilities and to strive to enable the disabled to participate fully in the life of the Church and the wider society²⁹. Disability does not prejudge the fullness of life or its lack, and the divisions introduced on the basis of the possession of a physical and / or mental ability are artificial divisions³⁰. Due to being created in the image of God, every human life has equal and infinite value, regardless of the current physical and / or mental state³¹.

2.4. Men and women as God’s collaborators in the continuation of creation

In the whole created world only humans hold the privilege of cooperating with the Creator in the development of creation. Thanks to communion with Christ, we have entered through the Holy Spirit the unique kind of relationship with the Father and we gain the ability to cooperate (Gr. *synergia*) with the Triune God for the fulfilment of God’s plan of love for all creation³². The uniqueness of this vocation to cooperate with the Creator results in man’s responsibility for the sustenance of the whole creation, with which, after all, the man is in relation of interconnections and interdependence. In this way, man becomes a “co-creator”, together with God, though his ability to create is limited by his own creatureliness. As partners of the Creator, we are called to develop the

²⁶ CPTA, 41–42, 84.

²⁷ CPTA, 44, 84.

²⁸ CPTA, 43.

²⁹ CPTA, 44, 52, 119.

³⁰ CPTA, 51.

³¹ CPTA, 45.

³² CPTA, 82, 90.

world and to keep it in prime condition, and finally to give glory to God with the whole of creation³³.

2.5. Responsibility for the just development of the world

Man is called to rule and care for the created world, he is also burdened with the responsibility for a fair setting of the world, including the establishment of a social, economic and political harmony serving every man. Global economic ties and instant communication make that the events happening anywhere in the world immediately affect human communities, even in the remotest places of the world. Transnational corporations obsessed with continuous profit can affect the lives of people in both developed and poor countries. This effect manifests itself, among others, in extreme poverty, and the build-up of violence and suffering³⁴.

The global economy is replete with examples of economic injustice. While some people live in conditions unworthy of the human person, the lives of others abound in wealth. In the structures of the global economy, which is dominated by greed, having money determines not only the value of man, but also determines his identity, often bringing him to the status of a commodity. In this way, in new hidden forms, slavery continues, although officially condemned both by Churches and by the public. Economics of the global market puts pressure on the societies not adjusted to it, disorganizing them and destroying their economic infrastructure and education³⁵.

Apart from the “holy poverty”, undertaken for religious reasons, there is also absolute poverty and relative poverty. Those suffering from absolute poverty cannot meet their basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. Relative poverty affects those who, because of the big gap between the rich and the poor, live on the margins of their society, even though they are quite wealthy in comparison with the residents of other countries, suffering absolute poverty³⁶.

Both of these types of poverty are a challenge for the Churches. To remedy them, Christians should support such social and political solutions that ensure fair distribution of material goods and thus attest to the equal value of all people before God, since all are equally bearers of God’s image³⁷.

In the document *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology* issues such as poverty, greed, unfair debt or forced migration have been treated only

³³ CPTA, 91, 117, 129.

³⁴ CPTA, 17–18, 24.

³⁵ CPTA, 27–28.

³⁶ CPTA, 31–33.

³⁷ CPTA, 34.

marginally. Some of these issues have been widely discussed in other documents of the World Council of Churches³⁸.

3. The way of ecumenical dialogues: an opportunity for mutual recognition (?)

The documents of the dialogue, existing on the “ecumenical marketplace”, and addressing a variety of ethical and moral concerns of modern Christians, testify to the work of the experts appointed by the Churches to the ecumenical dialogue, although they are unknown to a wider audience. This means virtually no reception of these documents within the denominational Churches. So, how should the process of reception run? In order to make the content sink in the consciousness of the faithful, statements of Churches’ authorities are required. However, they must be brief, prepared in communicative language and widely presented both to the faithful of individual Churches and to all the people of good will. The new situation we are living in now requires much more homogenous and clearer response from the Christian Churches.

Here we have to ask the question if the common witness of Christianity as a whole is possible. What are the areas in which we need to find a common response to safeguard the inner unity and the efficiency of external testimony? The approach to life coming into this world and leaving it, which entails moral evaluation of abortion and euthanasia, the perception of human sexuality including the evaluation of homosexuality, or the artificial fertility regulation – moral and ethical evaluation of the matters connected with biomedical engineering, i.e. *in vitro* fertilisation and genetic manipulation or transgenic hybrids – and, lastly, the approach to the inseparability of marriage and the definition of marriage as a union of persons of opposite sexes – these questions largely discussed within societies miss the unified answer that would be coherent and – most importantly – common for the whole Christian world.

These questions do not only interact with social life but also have far-reaching repercussions in the religious life of Church communities, bringing into discussion e.g. the question of the ordination of practicing gays or blessing unisex couples.

³⁸ See for example: WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call to Action*, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/neoliberal-paradigm/agape-call-for-action-2012> (12.08.2016); WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *The “other” is my neighbour. Developing an ecumenical response to migration*, Geneva 2015; WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *A Moment to Choose: Risking to Be with Uprooted People*, Geneva 1996; WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Migration and Migrant Workers: Discerning Responses as Churches*, 2, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/unity-mission-evangelism-and-spirituality/just-and-inclusive-communities/migration/migration-and-migrant-workers-discerning-responses-as-churches> (12.08.2016).

When we want to determine the possibility of mutual reception of the Churches, we have to ask about the possibility of a common Christian witness in moral and ethical matters. For the time being the answer to this question is not evident and we are unable to issue an unambiguously positive judgement.

Here we come back to anthropological matters. What do we believe about man? How, in the light of divine Revelation, do we interpret moral issues? Here we touch the interdependence of a doctrine of faith and a Christian life revealing in moral decisions.

Unity of faith is the basis for consent in morals. The question of unity of the Church cannot be, however, concentrated only on moral and ethical matters, no matter how important they might be. Visible unity of the Church goes far beyond the consent on moral issues and requires also an organic unity of faith. Thus, doctrinal matters cannot be neglected in any attempt to restore One Flock, One Pastor.

Ecumenism in its horizontal dimension (as we might call it) will never be full or stable if it lacks the essence, namely unity in the faith, which constitutes its vertical dimension. Both are inseparable, as the same faith gives the same foundation and the deepest possible justification for doing good and avoiding evil. What is more, the horizontalism, if adopted, could easily disturb the search for full visible unity of the Church, giving a false conviction of unanimity.

Thus, what we have to do is to continue the hard work of both doctrinal and moral/ethical dialogue, without neglecting any of its components. As the practice of the ecumenical dialogues has proved, it is a difficult, though not hopeless way.

Our ecumenical dialogue, first and foremost, is to focus on the joint discovery of the truth and not on its developing or achieving a compromise. True dialogue has nothing to do with negotiating a common position, where each party wants to push their case and go for the smallest concessions. It is impossible to reduce the demands of the Gospel to a minimum, recognized by all the Churches. Rather, the nature of the dialogue is about an attempt to look at the same truth of faith through the eyes of a partner. Dialogue does not create truth, but it is looking to discover it together and reread it. Therefore, the “true ecumenical activity means openness, drawing closer, availability for dialogue, and a shared investigation of the truth in the full evangelical and Christian sense; but in no way does it or can it mean giving up or in any way diminishing the treasures of divine truth that the Church has constantly confessed and taught”³⁹. Ecumenical dialogue is also “an imperative of Christian conscience” and, therefore, something a Christian must

³⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical “Redemptor hominis” addressed by the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to his venerable brothers in the Episcopate, the priests, the religious families, the sons and daughters of the church, and to all men and women of good will at the beginning of his papal ministry*, London 1979, 6.

irrevocably take on and implement⁴⁰. Properly conducted dialogue is a prerequisite for the proper reception of the results of this dialogue.

Thus, we have to continue the ecumenical dialogue in its two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. True ecumenical dialogue should primarily lead to the common rediscovery of truth and never to any kind of its establishment, elaboration or artificial compromise. True dialogue has nothing to do with negotiating a common stance, during which each party wants to force oneself upon the other and to make as few concessions as possible. This is because we cannot reduce the requirements of the Gospel to any indispensable minimum, constituting a common basis recognized by all the Churches and ecclesial Communities.

Such a dialogue has its inner dynamics, its existential dimension. The ecumenical dialogue, however, is not a goal in itself. Neither it is only mutual recognition of Christian Communities nor even common prayer. The common aim is the restoration of full visible unity of divided Churches.

4. Moral issues under threat of “anthropological errors” – interpretations of John Paul II and Benedict XVI

Accepting anthropological misconceptions, which are the basis for the formulation of concrete moral and ethical judgments, can become a threat to the mutual approximation and reception of Churches. The Catholic Church believes that it is better to follow the more difficult road, even risking accusations of failing pace with social trends than to trample upon human life and its dignity, which must eventually turn against man. The challenge for the Christian world is to take the true humanism that protects every human life as equal dignity and value in God’s eyes. Therefore, the Catholic Church defends the dignity and inviolability of human life from conception to natural death and warns against denial or distortion of the teaching about the creation of a human being as male and female, having equal status and equal participation in the dignity of God’s children. A human being created as a man and a woman, is a carrier of the image of God and – by fertility – endowed a vocation to participate along with the Creator in the creation of new man. All other concepts of a couple challenge the will of the Creator expressed in the act of creation, and are thus contrary to human nature. Also the ideology of gender is riddled with serious anthropological errors.

John Paul II, in his encyclical *Centesimus annus*, introduced the term “anthropological error” into the contemporary discourse. He pointed there to the

⁴⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical letter “Ut unum sint” of the Holy Father, John Paul II on commitment to ecumenism*, Vatican City 1995, 8, 15.

erroneous understanding of man in the ideology of socialism. Man is viewed only as an element and part of the social mechanism, in which individuals and their decisions do not count, which in turn, removes the responsibility of a single person for the good and evil, because he ceases to be an independent subject of moral decisions⁴¹. It should be noted, however, that any acceptance of an erroneous conception of man entails formulating erroneous rules for his conduct and production and later leads to a crisis of the culture built in this way⁴².

Benedict XVI extended the analysis of present anthropology, showing errors in such trends and phenomena as atheism, agnosticism, nihilism, atheistic evolution, rationalism, secularization – secularism, indifference, reductionism, relativism, gender ideology, individualism, utilitarianism, egoism, consumerism, hedonism, fundamentalism, fanaticism, duality, ideology of omnipotent technology, some aspects of globalization, and the anthropologies of some religions⁴³. At this point, we will focus only on the erroneous anthropology in respect of moral issues.

Adoption of a materialistic anthropology – observes Benedict XVI – leads to a mentality of contempt for life. A further consequence of this is an approval of the destruction of unborn life, which has a devastating impact on family life and society⁴⁴. False anthropology also includes the so-called, genetic reductionism, according to which man is classified on the basis of genetic information and his interaction with the environment, which is a form of neo-eugenics⁴⁵. This leads in further consequence to the selective abortion of people affected by genetic defects and denies the dignity of persons with disabilities, especially those born with genetic defects. Another anthropological error is contained in utilitarian individualism combined with cultural relativism. The error lies in the recognition of man as the only standard for himself, without reference to transcendence⁴⁶. When

⁴¹ JOHN PAUL II, “*Centesimus annus*”. *Encyclical Letter to His Venerable Brother Bishops in the Episcopate, the Priests and Deacons, Families of Men and Women Religious, All the Christian Faithful and to All Men and Women of Good Will on the Hundreth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*, Vatican 1991, 13.

⁴² Cf. A. MARYNIARCZYK, *Wprowadzenie*, in: A. MARYNIARCZYK, K. STĘPIEŃ (ed.), *Błąd antropologiczny*, Lublin 2003, 7.

⁴³ Cf. J. WARZESZAK, *Benedykt XVI o błędnych antropologiach współczesnych*, „Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne” 27 (2014) 2, 173–192.

⁴⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in an International Congress Organized by the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family. 5 April 2008*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080405_istituto-gpii.html (12.08.2016).

⁴⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Pontifical Academy for Life on the Occasion of the 15th General Assembly. 21 February 2009*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090221_accademia-vita.html (12.08.2016).

⁴⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Men and Women Religious, Members of Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life of the Rome Diocese. 10 December 2005*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20051210_religious-rome-diocese.html (12.08.2016).

man considers himself as the only and ultimate criterion for deciding about good and evil, it is impossible to establish social norms that protect life and well being of every human being. Utilitarian individualism is the foundation for a tendency to make profits at any cost, which leads to unlimited greed, and, consequently, to the development of the rich at the expense of the poor, and even to causing economic crises.

Benedict XVI also drew attention to the anthropological error underlying gender ideology. He recalled the words of Simone de Bouvoir, “One is not born a woman, one becomes so”. “These words lay the foundation for what is put forward today under the term *gender* as a new philosophy of sexuality. According to this philosophy, sex is no longer a given element of nature, that man has to accept and personally make sense of: it is a social role that we choose for ourselves, while in the past it was chosen for us by society. The profound falsehood of this theory and of the anthropological revolution contained within it is obvious. People dispute the idea that they have a nature, given by their bodily identity, that serves as a defining element of the human being. They deny their nature and decide that it is not something previously given to them, but that they make it for themselves. According to the biblical creation account, being created by God as male and female pertains to the essence of the human creature. This duality is an essential aspect of what being human is all about, as ordained by God. This very duality as something previously given is what is now disputed. The words of the creation account: “male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27) no longer apply. No, what applies now is this: it was not God who created them male and female – hitherto society did this, now we decide for ourselves. (...) When the freedom to be creative becomes the freedom to create oneself, then necessarily the Maker himself is denied and ultimately man too is stripped of his dignity as a creature of God, as the image of God at the core of his being. (...) And it becomes clear that when God is denied, human dignity also disappears”⁴⁷.

5. Conclusion

We are aware that a look through the prism of religious theology, even so well and thoroughly shaped as Catholic theology, carries the danger of narrowing the field of view and excluding those parts of Christianity, which slightly differently formulate answers to questions posed by theological anthropology. The long-term

⁴⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the Occasion of Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia. 21 December 2012*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121221_auguri-curia.html (12.08.2016).

goal of ecumenical dialogue would be in this area – using the wording proposed by William Tabbernee: “learning to recognize the Apostolic Faith both in and beyond the particularities of denominationally formulated theologies”⁴⁸.

In practice, it would have to consist in returning to the biblical anthropology, which has been built Christian moral teaching for many centuries. Ecumenical dialogue is not only the writing of protocols of convergence and divergence on a given topic. The common search for truth implies that having found it, we have to look through its prism at our existing formulations and previously existing differences, no matter how much we are attached to them. True dialogue presupposes the *kenosis* as well as the ability to change the existing ways of expressing truth. Only such a dialogue will be able to expect full reception leading to mutual recognition of Churches.

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⁴⁸ W. TABBERNEE, *Ecumenical Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*, 1.

- JOHN PAUL II, "Centesimus annus". *Encyclical Letter to His Venerable Brother Bishops in the Episcopate, the Priests and Deacons, Families of Men and Women Religious, All the Christian Faithful and to All Men and Women of Good Will on the Hundreth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*, Vatican 1991.
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