

PAWEŁ ZDZIARSKI*

From Negation to Acceptance. Christian Hermeneutics of Enlightenment

The Enlightenment is a concept diversely defined by the representatives of this epoch¹. The most common explanation of this term are the words of Immanuel Kant (died 1804), who describes the age of reason as “a man’s coming out of his self-imposed immaturity”². This immaturity was understood by the philosopher from Królewiec (Konigsberg) as the inability to use his own reason without the guidance of others”³. Its source was to be not so much a decline in the use of reason, as a lack of determination and courage to use it. Those who decided to take up the challenge posed by Kant became propagators of ideas characteristic of the modern era. In political terms, it was the theory of the social contract⁴, in the economic dimension, the Enlightenment gave rise to

* Paweł Zdziarski – Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7111-3323>; e-mail: pawloz999@gmail.com

¹ The periodisation of Enlightenment stays ambiguous (G. Himmelfarb, *Drogi do nowoczesności*, Warszawa 2018). It was shaped as a result of social crisis escalating since the 16th century which depended on moving away from feudalism and also on contradiction of the institution of Church and empire. This became a motive to the quest of new cultural standards. Beginning of the Enlightenment ideas falls on the decline of the 18th century. The laudable revolution of 1688 (dethroning of king Luis XIV) and “A Letter Concerning Toleration” by J. Locke are considered the inauguration of this epoch on British Islands. In France the beginning of Enlightenment is dated on 1715 (death of Luis XIV). In Poland the 40s of the 18th century and first attempts of restoration of the republic, which was already in great crisis are considered the source of enlightenment. (B. Stanisławczyk, *Kto boi się prawdy? Walka z cywilizacją chrześcijańską w Polsce*, Warszawa 2015). The end of this epoch falls on the break of 18 and 19 centuries and is connected to the French Revolution and following Wars o Napoleon, furthermore with gradual growth of the meaning of romantics (P. Chanu, *Cywilizacja wieku Oświecenia*, Warszawa 1993).

² I. Kant, *Odpowiedź na pytanie: czym jest oświecenie?*, trans. T. Kupś, in: I. Kant, *Rozprawy z filozofii historii*, trans. Translatorium Filozofii Niemieckiej Instytutu Filozofii Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika under the guidance M. Żelaznego, foreword T. Kupś, Kęty 2005, p. 47.

³ Ibid.

⁴ J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689).

'laissez-faire'⁵, i.e. the systematized concept of the free market, on the spiritual level theism⁶ and atheism⁷ dominated, while in scientific study the postulate of rationalism⁸ prevailed.

The Enlightenment is an important epoch from the point of view of contemporary Christian apologia⁹. Some of its postulates are openly opposite to Catholic dogmas¹⁰. The age of reason is considered to be the beginning of secularization (P. Berger, M. Weber). Abandoning faith and traditional values helped the idea of progress and facilitated attempts to create a new man who only believed in enlightened religion. The challenges of the eighteenth-century philosophy became an incentive for increased apologetic activity, which formed two ways of approaching modernity.

Modern-day radical apologists believe that the Enlightenment started a fierce struggle against Christianity (especially the Catholic Church) and made an attempt to erase it. In this type of apologia, the negative consequences of the Enlightenment ideology on the way of the revolution are emphasized, such as the radical political changes in France initiated in 1789. Some researchers point out that the main slogans of the age of reason have biblical foundations, yet distorted in the modern era. This is what the Italian journalist Rosa Alberoni (d. 2021) does. She states that "Christians know very well that the history of mankind has been pushed forward by revolutionary social and political actions, technical discoveries creating new concepts of nature, as well as philosophical and psychological discoveries that allowed us to better understand the mechanisms of the human psyche. They refuse to believe, however, that the greatest and most admirable revolutions that brought about mankind's progress were the bloody French and Soviet revolutions. Christians also refuse to believe that the concepts of freedom, equality, and fraternity were conceived in the late eighteenth century with the guillotine. It is because they know and have the right to proclaim that Jesus Christ was the father of the greatest revolution in the history of mankind"¹¹.

⁵ A. Smith, *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776).

⁶ Voltaire, *Traite sur la tolerance* (1767).

⁷ D. Diderot, *Lettre sur les aveugles a l'usage de ceux voient* (1749); see M. Sieńkowski, *Przedmiotowy aspekt wiary według Immanuela Kanta*, "Studia Elckie" 20(2018), no. 4, pp. 429-439.

⁸ B. Spinoza, *Ethica Ordine Geometrico demonstrate* (1677).

⁹ See P. Artemiuk, *Renesans apologii*, Płock 2016; K. Kałuża, *Dziedzictwo oświecenia – błogosławieństwo czy przekleństwo? O niektórych problemach współczesnej chrystologii*, in: *Współczesny kontekst chrześcijaństwa*, red. P. Artemiuk, Płock 2016, pp. 12-48; J. Kulisz, *Czasy nowożytne wyzwaniem dla chrześcijaństwa*, Warszawa 2001; J. Szczepański, *Odpowiedź Kanta na pytanie: czym jest oświecenie?*, in: *Filozofia oświecenia. Radykalizm – religia – kosmopolityzm*, red. J. Miklaszewska, A. Tomaszewska, Kraków 2015, pp. 95-108; A. Tomaszewska, D. Biernat, *Religia – sekularyzm – oświecenie. Słowo wstępne*, in: *Oświeceniowe źródła idei sekularyzmu*, Kraków 2017, pp. 7-32.

¹⁰ See G. Himmelfarb, etc., in: R. Brague, *Królestwo człowieka*, Warszawa 2020.

¹¹ R. Alberoni, *The Expulsion of Christ*, Izabelin-Warszawa 2001, p. 160.

According to some lay thinkers¹², the slogans: Freedom, Equality, Fraternity included in the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (1789) – are ideals deeply rooted in the Bible. Liberal apologists perceive modernity as a process of the emancipation of science, politics and economy from the direct influences of Christianity (see secularization). This process, as they explain, is related to the following issues: inviolable human dignity and freedom, the proclamation of the equality before the law, the development of democracy, the autonomy of the state and the Church, progress in experimental science and technology, and basing the political order on human rights.

We are the successors of these two currents in understanding modernity. On the one hand, Christian apologia was right to take a critical attitude towards modern trends, faced with the struggle with faith and tradition, and the crimes of the promoters of the Enlightenment. While opening up to democracy and religious freedom, we cannot ignore the dangers of the Enlightenment ideas, such as humanism that eliminates God in the name of human freedom, anthropology that does not take into account human sinfulness, democracy based solely on the written law, rejecting natural law, media supporting voracious consumerism, “new revolutions” deceiving millions with its pansexuality and hedonism, or permissive educational systems, etc. On the other hand, the Church after Vaticanum II is open to an in-depth dialogue with representatives of modern ideas, while remaining on the side of the truth. This combination initiated the trend of balance, which led to rebirth of contemporary apologia.

By reflecting on the legacy of the Enlightenment, I will do it in an apologetic spirit. However, I will broaden the traditional perspective and suggest a new perspective on the age of reason. I do not want to limit the horizon of the search, which is why I put forward the thesis that, when it comes to enlightenment, Catholic apologia takes a position that ranges from negation, through acceptance, to a balanced view. Therefore I will show the trend of negation by referring to Rosa Alberoni’s thought and the trend of acceptance to the works of Cardinal Walter Kasper. Finally, I will present the apologetic trend of balance, recalling the thought of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

The exile of Christ as the synonym of the age of reason – Rosa Alberoni

For many modern apologists, the anti-Christian tendencies of the Enlightenment are so threatening that they require a firm response from believers. The 18th century was a turning point for the defenders of the faith. The church, pushed to the defensive, began an apologetic struggle for its own existence and did not allow the removal of God as a fundamental value in human life. Many apologists continue to have a critical view on the Age of Enlightenment. In the age of reason they see the birth of many currents that are dangerous for the

¹² N. Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, Warszawa 2001, p. 34.

Church. This group includes Rosa Alberoni, who resists the Enlightenment visions of the world in her work *The Expulsion of Christ*.

Rosa Alberoni was born on April 11th, 1945 in Treviso. In 1974, she graduated in modern languages at the University Institute for Modern Languages (IULM) in Milan, where she began her university career a year later. She became a professor of sociology. She was also involved in journalism. She co-created numerous radio and television programs, and published in the newspapers *La Stampa* and *Il Giorno* as well as in the magazines *Gioia*, *Anna*, *Oggi*. She ran her own column in *Corriere della Sera*. In her essays and novels, she defended the Christian vision of the world and man. She presented a critical attitude towards secularism and Darwinism. She died on January 3rd, 2021.

Alberoni begins her analysis of the Enlightenment with questions of progress and modernity. She wants to know when the “expulsion of Christ” from human consciousness really took place. The first moment she mentions is the work of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon from 1843, who was considered the father of anarchism. However, this was not a statement taken out of context, but a mature consequence of Enlightenment thoughts, and in the longer term – Cartesian ideas¹³.

Descartes, although he did not reject Christ, according to Alberoni, undermined the foundations of Christianity as he broke with the idea of “God of philosophers” and did not recognize the Creator as an independent Existence¹⁴. This inspired new enlightenment thinkers to create a new vision of man, who, left to himself, has his own consciousness as a basis¹⁵.

Descartes did not want to remove God from history, as he did not see Him as an obstacle on the path of a man to improvement and progress. In the indisputable presence of the Creator, he saw rather an obstacle to his desire to return to *tabula rasa*, to his desire to radically change the norms coming from man and not from God, and therefore he gave grounds for His rejection¹⁶.

Alberoni emphasizes that the fight against God is not common in the whole stream of enlightenment. Even in revolutionary France, most thinkers recognized the existence of a Creator. Instead, they were openly against the Catholic doctrine and the Church hierarchy. The journalist points out that the reasons for this hostility cannot be explained only on the social or political level. The cause lies in the person of Christ. Until then, He was close not only to people with a traditional mentality, but also to progressives, who saw Him as an inspiration to discover their freedom and individuality. For Renaissance people like Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo, Christ appeared as the ideal of humanity¹⁷. The development of science is nothing more than the gradual dis-

¹³ R. Alberoni, *The Expulsion of Christ*, p. 7, 13.

¹⁴ See John Paul II, *Pamięć i tożsamość*, Kraków 2005, p. 18.

¹⁵ See R. Alberoni, *The Expulsion of Christ*, p. 9.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 10.

covery of the laws on the basis of which God designed the universe as well as approaching the Savior intellectually and morally¹⁸.

This pattern, as Alberoni emphasizes, collapses in the eighteenth century due to the activities of Jean Jacques Rousseau (died 1778), whose views most influenced the way of thinking in contemporary society. The writer gives the French philosopher a special place in the process of Europe's departure from faith in Christ. As she emphasizes, this philosopher made such a radical change in the history of ideas that, accepting his vision, one would have to reject all the concepts that man had invented earlier¹⁹.

For Rousseau, primitive man is the ideal. His happiness comes from a lack of deity, no morals, and no thought whatsoever. This condition makes a person naturally good. The French philosopher sees any progress as acting against humanity. Only a wild man did not degenerate. Evolution therefore has a negative dimension, and great discoveries and civilizations do not matter. Man did not become morally better after Christ came, which is in clear contradiction to Christian thought²⁰.

Man, as Rousseau perceives him, is a fallen, broken, degenerate being. The development of language, intelligence, the creation of a family, the emergence of consciousness, the flowering of individuality, fine arts and music, the invention of mathematics and geometry, laws, rationalist institutions, the state – these are just the next stages of its degeneration, corruption and enslavement²¹.

As Alberoni points out, the content proclaimed by the French philosopher found fertile ground due to the common need for radical change in the 18th century. While Christians in the era of decay of morals expected the fulfillment of the words of the New Testament Revelation, Rousseau offered the people their own apocalypse. On the ruins of a degenerated world, a “new world of virtue and goodness”²² was to be built. As the cause of the present state of affairs, the philosopher cites human freedom that led man astray. Unlike animals, he is not only guided by instinct, but is also able to make conscious decisions. While exercising his freedom, he chooses the passions which become the cause of all his misfortunes²³.

Alberoni distinguishes three stages of human degeneration according to Rousseau. The first is to start a family, the second is to create private property, and the third is to legislate. All of them inevitably lead mankind to the fall²⁴. This fate can only be stopped by a social contract. The philosopher believed that people, controlled by their own desires and selfishness, could paradoxical-

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See *ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 15.

ly create a new, infallible, collective entity²⁵. A mass of stupid, demoralized and degenerate aristocrats, through this mysterious contract, creates a perfect social being who cannot be mistaken, because he is literally infallible, so he will certainly set them free and make them perfect²⁶.

Alberoni shows not only the senselessness of Rousseau's socio-political vision. The journalist also depicts its cruelty, which is the physical elimination of anyone who opposes the new regime. According to the social contract, every citizen should get rid of his religion in order to return to it later. But it will not be the same faith anymore. Rousseau emphasizes that anyone who wishes to remain faithful to Catholic dogmas, including *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, must be punished with death²⁷.

As the quintessence of the teachings of the French philosopher, Alberoni points to the renunciation of freedom, and thus the concept of the universal will. This postulate became the core curriculum of the later twentieth-century totalitarian systems. The will, which was to secure the eternal human rights, has actually become their contradiction²⁸. Citizens who were sovereign so far, who were independent individuals, now became a part of a political body and do not have significant influence on the will of the "brain" or ruler.

According to Alberoni, Rousseau's ideology could have been influenced by his private life. Family problems and relations with the aristocracy whom he despised, but who positively treated his ideas, shaped the philosopher's views. The analysis of the eighteenth-century social movements, especially the phase of enthusiasm and unanimity, is also important. Only this "birth group" could give the French philosopher devoted disciples. The writer notes that Rousseau, with his demagogy and detachment from reality, as well as ruthless terror against disobedient citizens, breaks all democratic standards. Alberoni reminds that many people in various countries having denied Christ really denied their own freedom and fell into the totalitarian trap²⁹.

It is a deception, a monstrous deception and it is easy to make fools out of people who find themselves in this state. Instead of teaching them how to create democratic institutions – that is how to designate strict rules of choices for themselves, how to assign the rights of minority, regulations sanctioning non-negotiable rights which no one, not the crowd, nor the sovereign can disturb – as the English taught – he abuses the state of collective rapture to snatch their irretrievable abandonment of freedom³⁰.

²⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁸ See *ibid.*

²⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

For Rousseau, all those who represent a given value system are demoralized degenerates. Alberoni notes that the defenders of the traditional order in the form of the clergy and aristocracy fit this vision. The philosopher used in proclaiming his ideology the socio-political situation in eighteenth-century France, where full power was exercised by an absolutist monarch, and a large social group, the so-called third estate, insisted on their rights. The bourgeoisie and peasantry were prone to the vision of a new order that would give them a better social and economic position. So it absorbed Rousseau's views, ignoring their disastrous consequences.

Rousseau's social contract, according to the Italian writer, looks simple and short in time, but its effects are irreversible. It completely changed the existing archetype of good, deeply rooted in European culture and derived from the teachings of Christ. As Alberoni points out, the concept of the French philosopher was not only anti-Christian, but also at odds with the principles of Judaism, as both religions see the world created by God as inherently good. Rousseau's vision, on the other hand, resembles the gnosis according to which matter is bad and rotten³¹.

Alberoni also stops at the vision of history proposed by the French thinker and enters into a polemic with him. In her opinion, praising the past and contempt for the present resembles the ancient views expressed by Tacitus (*De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae*, 98). The ancient era was very pessimistic. Its characteristic feature became the perception of the course of history in certain cycles: civilization was born, developed, reached the apogee of its glory, and finally degenerated and died. Roman scholars admired ancient heroes whom they wanted to emulate but could not. This made them reflect negatively on the future³². Christian thinkers had a different approach. They saw the ideal of life in Christ, and the announcement of parousia prompted them to strive for perfection that would be revealed in the new man, freed from sin.

“And only Christ interrupts this circle of time, giving the beginning and meaning to the path taken until his coming into the world, and then defines the future as the ascension and the undefined goal of perfection: «Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect» (Mathew 5:48)”³³.

Alberoni's optimism stems from the Christian vision of man, the world and history. Nothing is a coincidence, everything has its own order and purpose. Man, created in the image and likeness of God, fights on earth to regain Paradise in order to live eternally with his Creator. He is not alone in this struggle because he is strengthened by the grace of Christ. He has free will, and it is ultimately up to him to decide which path he will take. It means rejecting

³¹ See *ibid.*, p. 26.

³² See *ibid.*, p. 27.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

the pagan mentality based on cycles and doom. This place is taken by the vision of history as a continuum from the creation of the world to the ultimate eschatology. According to the journalist, by adopting the pagan concept of history, Rousseau not only denied Christian civilization, but also insulted humanity.

“Christian perception of history opposes the classical concept and surpasses it. Having surpassed, it does not enjoy the peace and certainty of reason, it does not surpass with rational construction like Rousseau and his followers try to. It bursts it apart with a fervent feeling that God is the truth, happiness, love and salvation for all people it bursts it apart making man the main hero of his own life and story, it also It also annihilates man’s fear hidden in the idea of perceiving him as an incidental creature, therefore just dust which turns into dust”³⁴.

Alberoni emphasizes that the error of historians in assessing the French Revolution results from perceiving this event only in socio-political terms. Meanwhile, it was also the last religious war within Christian civilization. This conflict differed from the previous ones in that instead of a clash between Christians of different denominations, the followers of the religion of the Enlightenment attacked Catholicism. This new vision of natural religion comes with theism, Freemasonry, and the cult of reason. The journalist notes that the French Revolution appropriated the slogans of freedom, equality and fraternity that stem directly from the Gospel³⁵. Denying their Christian origin, according to the writer, is another manifestation of hostility towards Christ’s followers. Enlightenment thinkers, continues Alberoni, saw in the Catholic Church the epitome of obscurantist superstition that cannot go hand in hand with progress and the triumph of Reason³⁶. Revolutionary changes in legislation are taking place in France, and divorce has been legalized for the first time. The symbolic fact of rejecting Christ is also the liquidation by the revolutionary authorities of the Christian calendar and its replacement with a new revolutionary one. From October 6th, 1793, time was to be counted from the advent of the French Republic and the goddess personifying Reason³⁷.

Rosa Alberoni is extremely critical of the achievements of the age of reason. Recalling the thought of J.J. Rousseau, she presents an Enlightenment vision of religion, man and history, which she believes has become deformed. By abandoning or denying Christian values, people began to lose their sense and eschatological perspective, and to adopt disastrous rhetoric.

This ultimately led to the rise of totalitarian systems and numerous casualties. For Alberoni, Christ is the guarantor of tradition and, at the same time,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁷ See *ibid.*

true progress. The Enlightenment, on the other hand, pushed humanity towards spiritual regression.

The need for a second Enlightenment – Walter Kasper

We can notice a variety of positions regarding the attitude of apologists-theologians to the Enlightenment. Some opt for a radically conservative approach and distance themselves from this era (restoration theology), others are uncritical, emphasizing the need to constantly open up to innovative ideas (liberal theology)³⁸. There are also centered views. It seems that Cardinal Walter Kasper (born 1933) is an advocate of the last perspective. The German theologian puts himself “at the center” and takes a moderate criticism of this epoch among extreme opinions, appreciating also its positive influence on history. His attitude towards enlightenment is best expressed in the work *The Reality of Faith*. We will look at this theological perspective.

The Reality of Faith is a collection of considerations under the influence of an experiment that the author made among specialists in the field of Catholic theology in Tübingen. It is worth emphasizing that it took place in the early 1970s, i.e. in the first decade after the conclusion of Vaticanum II. It was a time of intense discussion about new directions in theology set out by the Council Fathers. The author describes the need to use these ideas in practice as the aim of the publication. Already at the beginning of the chapter “Crisis or the kairos of faith?”, he reflects on the statements of Hegel and Nietzsche. According to Kasper, they are even more powerful nowadays. For many people, not only God, but the very question of God is dead³⁹. On the one hand, the cardinal claims that the atheist of the twentieth century does not feel hungry for a relationship with the Creator. On the other hand, he believes that today’s times, paradoxically, can serve to renew the spiritual life. He argues with the vision of the Church as a besieged fortress. He recalls the arguments of people who are reluctant to transform Catholicism, who “claim that the spirit of secularism has penetrated also into the Church and that also in the Church, in the disguise of pluralism and a new interpretation of faith, the boundaries between truth and untruth have been blurred”⁴⁰. Kasper assesses this attitude as a lack of faith and a willingness to convert. It encourages caution in giving too easy judgments about the modern world. He does not deny the crisis of faith itself, but condemns certain measures with which some people want to combat it. Hence, the crisis can become “kairos” or “a factor leading to the renewal and deepening of the awareness of faith”⁴¹.

³⁸ Comp. F. Schleiermacher, *Mowy o religii do wykształconych spośród tych, którzy nią gardzą*, Kraków 1995, pp. 67-117.

³⁹ See W. Kasper, *Rzeczywistość Wiary*, Warszawa 1979, p. 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Kasper, reflecting on the situation of the Church, evokes historical crises that Christianity had to deal with. One of them was the age of the Enlightenment, which, according to the author, largely shaped the way people think today. "If we want to understand the present", he emphasizes, "we must start with getting to know the modern Enlightenment"⁴². According to the theologian, enlightenment should be considered in broader terms than it is indicated in the chronological framework. Beginning with the Ionian philosophy of nature, man rationally tries to use allegory to explain certain phenomena known to him as myths. The author repeats the Hegel thesis that the whole Western history is a process of "overwhelming the man by his freedom"⁴³. The actual age of enlightenment is distinguished by the fact that man is aware of this freedom. Kasper refers here to the thought of Kant, who described the age of reason as "man's coming out of his self-imposed immaturity"⁴⁴.

The Enlightenment is therefore a huge breakthrough in human consciousness and can be called "anthropological breakthrough" or "modern subjectivity"⁴⁵. It was this phrase that made a person feel confident with himself and understand the need for self-determination. The Cardinal notices the many consequences of such thinking. Its effect was, on the one hand, the recognition of universal human rights and freedoms, and on the other, the infamous French Revolution. The hierarchical and patriarchal social system was replaced by the "partnership order of free and equal"⁴⁶ and the existing authorities were questioned. This changed the image of many areas of human life in a lasting way. According to Kasper, no one today can claim to be a democrat without referring to the Enlightenment. The consequence of modern ideas is "the hominization and secularization of the world in which we encounter fewer and fewer traces of God, and more and more traces of man"⁴⁷. The author claims that in the past this often resulted in church distrust and rejection of any innovative ideas. He gives the case of Galileo as an example⁴⁸.

Yet Kasper does not idealize enlightenment. In the subsequent reflection, he deals with a specific critique of this era. Referring to Hegel, he points to the dangers that led to the French Revolution. He believes that many Enlightenment ideas result in human pride and the illusory belief in self-sufficiency. In this way, a person falls into the trap of his own calculation and becomes an ordinary number. The German theologian recalls that Nietzsche had already foreseen the consequences of such thinking by announcing the death of God⁴⁹.

⁴² Ibid., p. 12.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ See *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 15.

Of course, it is not a question of biological meaning. In this context, God ceases to be a point of reference for man who takes his place.

In opposition to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, Kasper places the philosophy of restoration, which also played a huge role in modern thought. In the cardinal's opinion, "it first and foremost permanently shaped the theology and practice of the Church from the beginning of the 19th century"⁵⁰. Kasper invokes philosophers: J. de Maistre, L. de Bonald, D. Cortes and C. L. Haller. The basic feature of this trend was the view that human reason is basically dependent on speech, tradition, and also the authority which alone can guarantee truth and order. Human freedom is conditioned by history and society, and reason is overtaken by faith. Such thinking contributed to the development of the entire philosophy of authority. Within theology, however, this trend found application in the traditionalism later condemned by the Church⁵¹. Nonetheless, Kasper believes that the most important consequence of the philosophy of restoration was the inspiration for the fathers of Vatican Council I, who led to the proclamation of the dogma of the primacy and infallibility of the pope. The Church appeared as a force to counter the world rebellion. In this way, he attracted the greatest minds of the era. Converts such as Brentano, Stolberg, Newman, Claudel, Wust, Maritain were able to find support only in the Church.

According to the German theologian, the Second Vatican Council⁵² stood in opposition to the way of thinking focused on restoration. For if authority was questioned, it can only be maintained through one's own argumentation. Instead, authority has to prove itself as a condition of freedom, because only then is it credible. According to the theologian, "today we must try to mediate positively between faith and modern thinking, between the Church and modern society"⁵³. An important feature of this perception is the departure from the "locked fortress" syndrome and engaging in dialogue with innovative ideas. As Kasper notes, this is not a complete novelty. The theologian invokes the third great current in modern thought, which is mediation, which began in the times of Goethe and the 19th-century school in Tübingen⁵⁴. Theologians such as J.S. Drey, J.B. Hirscher or F.A. Staudenmaier implemented *aggiornamento* before its slogans were widely known. This trend is close to Kasper, who criticizes the neo-scholastic restoration of theology.

The cardinal also does not agree with the theses of liberal theology and modernism. In his opinion, they do not overcome the weak points of neo-scholasticism, but only shift them. The German hierarch quotes the words of G.E. Lessing, who spoke of "the mess of modern theology and accused it of

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵¹ See *ibid.*

⁵² See *ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵⁴ See *ibid.*

making us very unreasonable philosophers under the pretext of making us reasonable Christians”⁵⁵. For faith cannot remain merely an ideology that justifies the existing world as Marx wanted. For Kasper, not only is extreme conservatism a threat to theology, but also the temptation to be at the vanguard of revolutionary movements⁵⁶. The author also argues with the assumptions of dialectical theology. In his opinion, its solemn tone combined with moderate Catholic currents cannot obscure the fact that it has not solved the right postulates of liberal theology, but has trivialized it⁵⁷.

Summing up his reflection, Kasper describes the present times as the second enlightenment. It is a reflection of modernity on itself, “metacriticism of its own criticism”⁵⁸. According to the German theologian, this is supposed to be an advantage over the first enlightenment. We are already after the cruel experiences of the twentieth century, which should make it easier for us to get rid of the idealistic belief in common reason and all pervading ideas. Therefore, the second enlightenment is to be more sober and moderate and make us aware of the truth about the finiteness of man⁵⁹. This does not mean, however, that it is easier to open up to religious issues today. As Kasper states, “learning about human boundaries leads the representatives of neo-positivism and critical rationalism to the a priori rejection of previous metaphysical and religious problems they recognize them a nonsense”⁶⁰.

So the most important problem of the new enlightenment is the question of human freedom. Kasper is close to the thought of B. Pascal, who stated that although we are not free, we know about this lack of freedom and we suffer because of it⁶¹. According to the cardinal, these words speak of the experience of “the tension between transcendence as a constant transcendence of oneself, and a merciless attachment to the reality of physical existence, between being and the sense of reality”⁶². Kasper, however, notices the positive features of this situation. He claims that modern man has new opportunities to speak about God in a responsible manner⁶³.

The crisis of cultures as a chance for Europe – Joseph Ratzinger

Card. Joseph Ratzinger (born 1927) is one of the contemporary thinkers who reflect on the legacy of the Enlightenment. In his works, he frequently raises the issue of the crisis of the Western civilization culture, which appears

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ See *ibid.*, p. 22.

as a consequence of the modern era. Looking for the causes of the collapse of Europe, the German theologian sees them primarily in the Enlightenment rejection of God and His revelation⁶⁴. In *Europe of Benedict in the crisis of cultures*, Joseph Ratzinger diagnoses the spiritual condition of the Old Continent and offers a medicine to the secularized world.

It is no coincidence that the German hierarch refers to the figure of St. Benedict of Norcia. It was his vision of the Old Continent that was contrasted with that crisis of cultures. The religious rule of the Patron of Europe had a huge impact on the life and spirituality of the future Pope. Written in the 6th century in the monastery at Monte Cassino, it spread in the following centuries throughout the continent. Its individual principles with the Benedictine maxim *ora et labora* were known wherever Western Christianity reached. Even though St. Benedict addressed it primarily to monks, it soon gained a universal dimension. Additionally, after many centuries, it turns out that its indications are still valid. This universality and timelessness of the rule was also discovered by Card. J. Ratzinger, who not only extended the cult of the patron saint of Europe, but after being elected the See of Peter, took the name of the founder of the oldest Christian order in the West.

Reflecting on the spiritual condition of the Old Continent, Joseph Ratzinger looks at the sources of the crisis in European culture. He sees salvation for Europe in returning to the Christian roots of the Old Continent. He sees the present times as full of both threats and opportunities for humanity⁶⁵. The progress that has been made in recent centuries and, as it turns out, is still gaining momentum, gives the man more and more technical possibilities. It is inextricably linked with threats to the developing civilization. The German theologian divides them into those that are known to the public and those that they are still obscure⁶⁶. The first group includes terrorist organizations that can use modern inventions to increase their military capabilities. However, he emphasizes that there are also equally worrisome, latent threats to which the incorrect conception of man's nature is included. According to this "new definition", man is deprived of the dignity of a child of God, and what matters is the power of his skills. The likeness to God is reduced to only the physical side of humanity.

However, Joseph Ratzinger sees the greatest threat in the imbalance between modern technical possibilities and the moral strength of man. According to the German cardinal, it is decreasing in direct proportion to technological

⁶⁴ As Joseph Ratzinger writes in his book *Truth and tolerance: Christian belief and World Religions*, relativism which also became the basis for contemporary democracy depends on the fact that nobody knows the appropriate course, all courses are the foundations of the attempt for the better and seek common features in a dialogue, the foundations to which we also need to include the rivalry between the features of recognition that cannot come down to one joint form J. Ratzinger, *Wiara – prawda – tolerancja. Chrześcijaństwo a religie świata*, trans. R. Zajączkowski, Kielce 2004, p. 95.

⁶⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Europa Benedykta w kryzysie kultur*, Częstochowa 2005, p. 41.

⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 42.

progress. The technical human mentality limits morality to the subjective sphere and dismisses the vision of inalienable, universal moral laws, which in turn leads to the self-destruction of man:

The safety that we need as the basis of our freedom and dignity, in conclusion cannot originate from the technical systems of control but may emerge from the moral power of the man. If there is a lack of it or it is insufficient, then the power which the man possesses more and more transforms into the form of destruction⁶⁷.

Joseph Ratzinger admits that there are certain principles in modern morality, such as: justice, peace, and protection of the planet. However, he points to its inconsistency and shallowness in application⁶⁸. Requirements are directed to others, but your own personal development is forgotten. Cardinal Ratzinger gives an example of political moralism, which had its roots in the 1970s. According to the German theologian, despite the noble slogans, it leads to contempt for man. The “kingdom of God”, which Christ brought to mankind (cf. Luke 17:21), is transformed into temporal “Kingdom values”. The cardinal describes them as empty and subject to numerous abuses⁶⁹.

The paradox of Europe, according to Joseph Ratzinger, results from the fact that it was in the Old Continent that good conditions were created for the spread of both Christianity and the rationalist ideas of the Enlightenment. The development of the latter led to the process of globalization that we observe today. The meeting of different cultures is possible thanks to the technical culture. Thus, Europe, which once sent missionaries to spread the Gospel to other continents, today excludes God from public consciousness by denying His existence or deeming it impossible to prove⁷⁰.

Joseph Ratzinger emphasizes that the morality promoted by the political establishment in Europe results from a utilitarian understanding of values. So it is morally good that it brings profit:

“In the world based on calculation we foresee the aftermath and asses what should be considered moral and what should not. In this way the category of goodness vanishes as Kant proved Nothing in itself is good nor bad, it all depends on the aftermath of activity which can be foreseen⁷¹.”

Joseph Ratzinger made his diagnosis in 2005 (then he published the above-mentioned book), at a time when the debate on the treaty establishing a constitution for Europe was taking place in Europe. Ultimately, it was never ratified

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 42.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

⁶⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

due to political and economic disputes between individual countries. Cardinal Ratzinger, analyzing the proposal of this document, focuses on the issue of the preamble. During the preparation of the document, there was a discussion about the foundations on which the Old Continent was built. Originally, the Convention of the European Union proposed to include here references to the culture of the ancient Greeks and Romans and the French Revolution. Ultimately, after criticism from the Catholic Church, churches of other denominations, the European Christian Democrats, as well as the governments of individual member states, there was a reference to the “humanistic and religious tradition”⁷², without mentioning a specific religion. The principle of separating the Church from the state and the accession ambitions of countries with a Muslim tradition (Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania) were also referred to. Ratzinger believes that the lack of reference to God in the constitution, and the lack of mention of Europe’s Christian roots, severs the fundamental foundations of Western civilization. He considers the arguments against these facts to be superficial and to conceal the real reason of recognizing the culture of the Enlightenment as the only one⁷³. Europe’s Christian roots are, however, a historical fact that no one can deny. The future pope emphasizes that reference to them does not offend representatives of other religions, nor agnostics and atheists. Moreover, he sees the promotion of secularism as a threat to religious dialogue, and not in emphasizing his own Christian identity.

According to Joseph Ratzinger, enlightenment culture is essentially defined by the right to freedom⁷⁴. All areas of public life are subordinate to it. The Enlightenment concept of freedom gives rise to such values as religious freedom, parliamentary democracy, the tripartite division of powers, the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, and finally the protection of human rights and the prohibition of discrimination. However, Ratzinger notes a certain hypocrisy of this culture. It creates conflict situations in which innate human rights give way to pressure from public opinion, even though in theory they are protected. The German theologian gives an example of the dispute over abortion, where the right to life is opposed to the struggle for women’s rights. Also, freedom of speech is not respected due to the prevailing political correctness. All of this leads to a dogmatism that is a denial of true freedom⁷⁵.

Joseph Ratzinger emphasizes that it is not about rejecting the very ideas of democracy and human rights. The cardinal, however, is skeptical about the recognition of the Enlightenment culture as universal and applicable to all people⁷⁶. In his opinion, Western patterns cannot be applied in many places in the

⁷² See *The treaty establishing a constitution for Europe*, https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europeau/files/docs/body/treaty_establishing_a_constitution_eurpe_pl.pdf (access: 26.02.2018).

⁷³ See J. Ratzinger, *Christianity and the crisis of cultures*, p. 51.

⁷⁴ See *ibid.*

⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 55.

world. Not everywhere is human mentality adjusted to parliamentary democracy. Moreover, according to Ratzinger, the culture of the Enlightenment cannot be regarded as final and complete. Although it promotes a rationalist philosophy, it is not rational in the strict sense of the word. Its anthropocentrism impoverishes the vision of man and deprives him of a moral instance higher than his own calculation. Without being rooted in God, everything becomes relative to him:

“It is true that positivist philosophies contain various elements of truth. Yet they are based on the self-limitation of reason typical for a defined cultural situation – contemporary west – and as such for sure cannot be the ultimate speech of reason. Therefore it is far from the philosophy which one day should become binding for the entire world”⁷⁷.

Joseph Ratzinger refutes allegations that the Church, following this line of thought, completely rejects enlightenment and modernity⁷⁸. For Christianity is the religion of the Logos, and its development was accompanied from the very beginning by the maxim *fides quaerens intellectum*. The apologetics of the Church Fathers was able to find their place in a world dominated by Greek philosophy. Ratzinger reminds that Christianity is a religion that focuses on universalism, standing above the borders of countries and cultures. It emphasized the protection of the dignity of every human being who was believed to be the image of God and His creation. The theologian concludes that it is no coincidence that the philosophy of the Enlightenment arose within the framework of Christian culture. It was there that favorable conditions for the development of rationalist ideas were created⁷⁹. Ratzinger admits that Christianity over the centuries has not always adhered to its nature of religious freedom and has at one point become part of the system. Referring to the Conciliar Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, the cardinal states that the merit of enlightenment may be to using the idea of this epoch as an opportunity for Christianity to once again give its proper voice to the intellect⁸⁰.

Faith in God the Creator of the world is, in the opinion of Joseph Ratzinger, a philosophical force that is a real alternative to modern man. Positivist ideas, although considered by many to be the most rational, fail to explain the causative purpose of the world. Christianity, contrary to materialistic theories, regards the act of creation as the work of Reason from which all reality comes.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

⁷⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 66.

⁸⁰ See *ibid.*

“(…) reason coming from what is unreasonable and which ultimately is unreasonable itself cannot be the solution to our problems. Only the creative reason, revealed in crucified God as love can actually show us the way”⁸¹.

Joseph Ratzinger contrasts the Enlightenment *etsi Deus non daretur* with Pascal’s maxim *veluti si Deus daretur*⁸². Following the French philosopher, he repeats that one should live with God’s existence in mind, which not only does not limit man’s freedom, but also helps him find the support and the criterion he needs. Otherwise, the search for universal values will fail, as has happened with many enlightenment makers. The story of people who based their search for truth on God was completely different. As an example, the cardinal gives St. Benedict of Norcia. Its timeless message is enduring and present in different cultures. Ratzinger compares the patron saint of Europe to Abraham and encourages us to put Christ in the first place⁸³.

Enlightenment ideas, according to Joseph Ratzinger, remain a wasted opportunity to find universal values. Man, forgetting God, tries to look for a different foundation. It creates more quasi-laws that seem sufficient to build a new, better world. However, he does not see numerous contradictions in his persistent search for freedom. Feeling momentarily liberated, he really becomes a slave to the challenges he sets himself. Ratzinger seems to repeat after his predecessor in the See of Peter: “nations that lose their memory lose their identity”. Europe and all Western civilization will retain their identity if they remember their roots. Apart from Greek philosophy and Roman law, the Christian religion is undoubtedly one of them. The crisis of cultures can only be overcome by contemporary followers of St. Benedict of Norcia.

Conclusion

Taking up the topic of the article, I put forward the thesis that in the contemporary assessment of the Enlightenment era, three trends can be distinguished: acceptance, negation and balance. Concluding the analysis of the title issue, I would like to formulate the most important conclusions.

Firstly, from today’s perspective, we are able to say that the ideas of the Enlightenment have largely failed to survive the test of time. Postulates that were supposed to make people live happily in peace became the seeds of totalitarianism. The extreme effect of rejecting God and traditional values was the rise of twentieth-century criminal systems such as communism, fascism, and Nazism. Disappointment with the Enlightenment has in turn led to the spread of postmodern theories that the eternal truth does not exist and that everything is relative. To accept enlightenment and to look uncritically at this era means not recognizing these consequences. Even if representatives of this trend see

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 67.

⁸² See *ibid.*, pp. 68-70.

⁸³ See *ibid.*, p. 72.

some negative features of modernism, they consider them harmless. We cannot therefore speak of any apologia in this case, since Christianity has been blurred by the cult of progress.

Secondly, the denial rightly emphasized the disastrous impact of abandoning Christianity and trying to replace it with the religion of Reason. They see the totalitarian nature of an epoch that shimmered as the beginning of human freedom. Although they often make a correct diagnosis, the methods of reaction they propose do not always reflect reality and may not bring the desired effect. Over the last three hundred years, the situation in the world, and with it the human mentality, has changed to such an extent that it is necessary to develop appropriate resources. Existing in pluralistic conditions, apologia should go hand in hand with dialogue and learning the arguments of the opposing party.

Thirdly, the new apologia, whose renaissance we are currently witnessing, is forging a balanced approach to enlightenment. It follows from the centuries-old tradition and heritage of Vatican II and the teaching of contemporary popes. Although once apologia had the face of negation, today it sees the need to accompany people who abandon their faith. It also appreciates the value of contemporary political and economic systems, based on democracy, which originate from the ideas of the Enlightenment. In the modern vision of human rights, however, it sees values that were previously represented by Christianity. It emphasizes that enlightenment could only come about in a civilization controlled by the followers of Christ. What the representatives of this epoch called the natural law, the Church saw in the eternal law of God.

Fourthly, research into enlightenment from the perspective of Christian apologetics must undoubtedly continue. They should run in at least several directions. First, in the spirit of the French intellectual, R. Brague, a hermeneutic of enlightenment should be carried out. His works, especially "The Kingdom of Man", make you realize how much modern ideas have settled in our world. Brague takes an apologetic position, postulating the disenchantment of the Enlightenment. To this end, he reconstructs the birth and fall of modern design. According to the French researcher, the dispute over the age of reason continues, as the dynamically developing transhumanism reminds us of. All the more so, a hermeneutic of enlightenment must be done. One can also, quite rightly, adopt the perspective proposed by Gertrude Himmelfarb. This American intellectual, by diversifying enlightenment, shows its various shades. He also suggests examining modern ideas carefully and not using the same measure for all Enlightenment thinkers. The last proposal, somewhat already discussed, still remains valid. It is about the "enlightenment of the enlightenment", that is, an accepting approach to the age of reason, as suggested by Cardinal W. Kasper. It is a balanced proposal, seeking in modern postulates to coincide with Christian thought. It seems that the path of the Christian interpretation of the Enlightenment should combine all three approaches.

* * *

From Negation to Acceptance. Christian Hermeneutics of Enlightenment

Summary

Representatives of contemporary Christian apologia evaluate enlightenment in different ways. Three basic trends developed among them. One of them, the trend of negation, rejects the age of reason as such, emphasizing, above all, the disastrous consequences of the ideologies that derive from it. Another trend of acceptance emphasizes the Enlightenment sources of the idea of human rights and the democratic system. Finally, the trend of balance combines both approaches, developing a reflection on the errors of the age of reason, yet not avoiding the need for dialogue. The aim of the work is to present these three concepts, indicating the last one as adopted by the new apologia whose renaissance we are currently observing.

Keywords: Enlightenment, apologia, Catholicism, Church, hermeneutics, Rosa Alberoni, Walter Kasper, Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI.

Bibliography

- Alberoni R., *The expulsion of Christ*, Milano 2006.
 Artemiuk P., *Renesans apologii*, Płock 2016.
 Brague R., *Królestwo człowieka*, Warszawa 2020.
 Eagleton T., *Kultura a śmierć Boga*, Warszawa 2014.
 Himmelfarb G., *Drogi do nowoczesności*, Warszawa 2018.
 Jan Paweł II, *Pamięć i tożsamość*, Kraków 2005.
 Kałuża K., *Dziedzictwo oświecenia – błogosławieństwo czy przekleństwo? O niektórych problemach współczesnej chrystologii*, in: *Współczesny kontekst chrześcijaństwa*, red. P. Artemiuk, Płock 2016.
 Kant I., *Odpowiedź na pytanie: czym jest oświecenie?*, trans. T. Kupś, in: I. Kant, *Rozprawy z filozofii historii*, trans. Translatorium Filozofii Niemieckiej Instytutu Filozofii Uniwersytetu im. Mikołaja Kopernika under the guidance M. Żelaznego, Kęty 2005.
 Kant I., *Uzasadnienie metafizyki moralności*, Warszawa 1971.
 Kasper W., *Rzeczywistość Wiary*, Warszawa 2020.
 Kolakowski L., *Jeśli Boga nie ma.... O bogu, diable, grzechu i innych zmartwieniach tak zwanej filozofii religii*, Kraków 1988.
 Kulisz J., *Czasy nowożytne wyzwaniem dla chrześcijaństwa*, Warszawa 2001.
 Locke J., *Dwa traktaty o rządzie*, Warszawa 2020.
 Postman N., *W stronę XVIII stulecia*, Warszawa 2001.
Radykalizm – religia – kosmopolityzm, red. J. Miklaszewska, A. Tomaszewska, Kraków 2015, pp. 95-108.
 Ratzinger J., *Europa Benedykta w kryzysie kultur*, Częstochowa 2005.
 Ratzinger J., *Wiara – prawda – tolerancja, Chrześcijaństwo a religie świata*, trans. R. Zajązkowski, Kielce 2004.
 Schleimacher F., *Mowy o religii do wykształconych spośród tych, którzy nią gardzą*, Kraków 1995.

- Sieńkowski M., *Przedmiotowy aspekt wiary według Immanuela Kanta*, "Studia Elckie" 20(2018), no. 4, pp. 429-439.
- Smith A., *Badania nad naturą i przyczynami bogactwa narodów*, Warszawa 2021.
- Spinoza B., *Etyka w porządku geometrycznym dowiedziona*, Warszawa 2008.
- Stanisławczyk B., *Kto się boi prawdy? Walka z cywilizacją chrześcijańską w Polsce*, Warszawa 2015.
- Szczepański J., *Odpowiedź Kanta na pytanie: czym jest oświecenie?*, in: *Filozofia oświecenia. Radykalizm – religia – kosmopolityzm*, red. J. Miklaszewska, A. Tomaszewska, Kraków 2015.
- Tomaszewska A., Biernat D., *Religia – sekularyzm – oświecenie. Słowo wstępne*, in: *Oświeceniowe źródła idei sekularyzmu*, Kraków 2017, pp. 7-32.
- Wolter F., *Traktat o tolerancji*, Warszawa 1988.
- Zybertowicz A., *Samobójstwo Oświecenia? Jak neuronauka i nowe technologie pustoszą ludzki świat*, Kraków 2015.