

Izabella Smentek*
UKSW, Warszawa

THE PROBLEMS OF NOTIONS IN ESCHATOLOGY

The present article deals with the use and understanding of eschatological terminology. The concepts used and the starting point of the consideration affect its orientation and the distribution of aspects. If we take the “final events” as a starting point, we obtain an anthropological picture of man’s fate and his destiny to eternity. When starting with the mystery of God and His plan, one must pay attention to the Person of Christ the Coming One and this makes eschatology a treatise on the Triune God that completes His work.

This study also draws attention to the semantic nuances of some notions relating to eternal life, such as novelty, kingdom, Father’s house, heaven, glory or eternal happiness. These and other expressions contain a wealth of meaning rooted in Revelation and the Church’s tradition. Their thoughtful and conscious use serves the purpose of a deep and creative and at the same time precise reflection.

INTRODUCTION

The deposit of revelation is complete and unchanging. Nevertheless, how deep we will be able to penetrate the truth we explore depends on the way we address the subject or model, as the outstanding American theologian Avery Dulles would have it. Concepts developed over the centuries and rooted in Scripture are the keys

* Dr hab. Izabella Smentek – the author of books including: *Eschatologia trynitarna. Prawda o Trójcy Świętej jako punkt wyjścia eschatologii*, *Człowiek przez Boga posłany. Misterium o Prymasie kardynale Stefanie Wyszyńskim* and academic articles. She lectures dogmatic theology at the UKSW in Warsaw; e-mail: i.smentek@uksw.edu.pl; ORCID: 0000-0002-7798-9967.

to the treasury of revelation. This concerns in particular those realities that escape temporal perception. A number of expressions that can be qualified as eschatological, seem to confirm this principle. We adopt the intuitive term “the other world” to indicate that we are not talking about what is close and tactile. The expressions create starting points in the construction of reflection. For example, the phrase “afterlife” indicates the death threshold as a starting point and implies questions about what can survive death in man. The terms “eternal life,” “fullness,” “eternity” as “*tota simul perfecta vitae possessio*” put life at the centre of attention. Finally, “eternal life in God” makes the fundamental theme of eschatology what God is like and who He is, what is this “participation” of which Christ speaks to Peter before the last supper (Jn 13:8). Beginning with different starting points, we come to the same truth through different questions. We create different proportions of issues. The formulation “final things/events” suggests a focus on putting the facts in order, although in this case the very concept of “thing” (*res*) is more a “reality” than an object, as in the Polish expression “*Rzeczpospolita*” (*respublica*). The theological sense always remains in some kind of reference to the colloquial one, sometimes is intertwined with it. Extra-theological intuitions influence associations and the course of thinking. For example, the Russian definition of the last judgment “*strashnyj sud*” (Страшный суд) does not immediately turn thoughts towards the mercy of God.

It is impossible to close the list of expressions related to eschatology. Which one should be put in the first place? These include terms such as: life/eternal life, death/the second death, parousia/the day of the Lord, the resurrection/the participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, condemnation/hell/the resurrection of condemnation/the eternal fire, the kingdom/the reign of Christ, New Jerusalem/City/the new creature. We will examine some of them. The eschatological terminology also includes: God’s rest (entering this rest), or terms that speak of fullness (*pleroma*)/fulfillment. It is impossible to omit the vocabulary of happiness/joy, glory, or the day of eternity. It is also worth recalling here the hermeneutics of eschatological expressions presented by Christian Schütz.¹

The purpose of this article is not to fully explain all the terms of eschatology, but to elucidate some of them with the teaching of the Church in mind. It is more about discovering concepts, drawing attention to certain difficulties connected with them. In addressing these theological and lexical issues, it should be noted that eschatology is a particular field in which it would be inappropriate to use terminology in an authoritarian way. We have at our disposal a certain “factual

¹ Cf. Ch. Schütz, *Die Völlendung der Heilsgeschichte*, in: *Mysterium salutis. Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*, ed. J. Feiner, M. Löhler, t. V: *Zwischenzeit und Völlendung der Heilsgeschichte*, Zürich–Einsiedeln–Köln 1976, p. 626–649.

state,” a resource of notions, which the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith² appeals to be reasonably respected. Are they unambiguous? Precise? “Technical” or intuitive? When they are used, we are bound by a universal directive of meaningfulness; words that do not belong to common language should be possible to be defined in it.³ This is a touchstone of knowledge, reason and linguistic competence. It enables conscious and meaningful utterances.

We can ask questions: what do we have at our disposal? What tool can we use to organize knowledge in this field? And so: What creates the scheme – the “scaffolding” of eschatological thinking? And from this, it follows how we talk and what we talk about, so, consequently, how we understand what we talk about. The starting point should be the very concept of “eschatology.”

NEW OR THE LAST ONE

ESCHATOLOGY AND THE ESCHATA

The concept of “eschatology” was supposedly used for the first time by a seventeenth century Lutheran theologian A. Calov.⁴ However, the etymological source of this term is much older, biblical. In Revelation, Christ himself appears as the First and the Last (Revelation 1:17 – ο πρῶτος και ο εσχάτος). “Eschata” therefore describes what is “last,” “final.” The adjective “eschatological”, derived from this stem, is in common use. Precise use distinguishes “eschatological” from “eschatic.” Eschatological is what refers to eschatology as science, like “eschatological truths.”⁵ And eschatic is “what concerns eternal life.” The eschatology of the Church is the Magisterium’s teaching about eternity; the Church’s eschatism is a feature of the community of the baptized. Eschatological hope is connected with the message about eternal life, the knowledge of the calling to eternity evokes an eschatological aspiration, which can be described within eschatology. The aspiration, hope, and eschatic events, on the other hand, are not so much the domain of science as of the end times.

² Cf. Holy Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Letter on Certain Questions Regarding Eschatology*, Rome 1979, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_pl.html [access: 1.05.2020].

³ Cf. M. Tkaczyk, *Zagadnienie sensownego języka teologii w ujęciu Józefa M. Bocheńskiego*, “Lignum vitae” 2 (2001), p. 102.

⁴ Cf. J. Finkenzeller, *Eschatologia*, in: *Podręcznik teologii dogmatycznej*, vol. XI, ed. W. Beinert, transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 1999, p. 13.

⁵ Cf. W. Granat, *Ku człowiekowi i Bogu w Chrystusie*, vol. II, Lublin 1974, p. 416.

Are we not already living the final days? The “final future” in St. Paul’s theology is closely related to soteriology; it is already close in Christ.⁶ The author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* says that the last stage of revelation (eschatos) took place “in these days,” that is, in the apostolic times (cf. Heb 1:1–2).⁷ The expressions eschatological/eschatic are often used interchangeably. For example, W. Granat says that *eschatology* is not something future-oriented, but is anticipated at present.⁸

So perhaps what is last/final is therefore not times, but things – realities (eschaton)? This approach allows us to see the topic of eschatology not only in the future, but everywhere where what is final is already present. After all, a thing is a Latin *res*, so rather a certain reality than a material object. The expression “*res sacra miser*” says that a poor person is a sacred reality, not a “thing.” Perhaps, in order to avoid associations with what is material, it would be better to talk about realities than final things? Yet, this reality is just one eschaton, and the plural would be a misunderstanding. Maybe it would be better to say “final subjects”? The expression “final things” is criticized because eschatology is not about “something,” but about life, the completion of the fate of people and the future of creation.⁹ It is not only the reification itself that encounters objections, but also the division into heaven, purgatory, hell, God’s judgment separate from the personalistic aspect of eschatology. This division, handy for didactic reasons, was commemorated by poetry and art as a “Dantean” model of eschatology, based on the Ptolemaic image of the universe.

What has been described as eschatos is final, that is to say, is a destination, but is not “last” in a series of subsequent events or matters that take place on earth. It is different in relation to them; it is new and brings renewal.

NOVELTY AND RENEWAL

“Here I make all things new.” (Rev 21:5) is announced by God in the Book of Revelation. In the eschatic completion everything becomes new (*kainos*). This does not mean another creation *ex nihilo*. The Second Vatican Council explains that eschaton, or “new heaven and new earth,” is the world after an eschatological renewal (cf. LG 48). It is not so much the material perfection of this world that comes first, but its righteousness. The eschaton is the world of the saved, because justice concerns persons. The renewal of persons is an essential element of eschatic novelty.

⁶ Cf. Z. Niemirski, *Biblijna koncepcja przyszłości*, STV 31 (1993) 1, p. 22–35.

⁷ Cf. J. Szłaga, *Eschatologia Listu do Hebrajczyków*, in: *Biblia o przyszłości. Materiały pomocnicze do wykładów z biblistyki*, ed. L. Stachowiak, R. Rubinkiewicz, Lublin 1987, p. 94.

⁸ Cf. W. Granat, *Ku człowiekowi...*, vol. II, p. 472.

⁹ Cf. F.J. Nocke, *Eschatologie*, in: *Handbuch der Dogmatik*, ed. T. Schneider, Düsseldorf 1992, p. 378n.

This novelty differs from what is only temporarily new (*neos*) in the temporal world because all this undergoes various degradation. When any work is new, it has the qualities that its creator gave it. It is in accordance with His intention. When it gets older, it is subject to destruction, so it loses the qualities given to it by the author, loses its beauty, becomes less and less perfect. The eschatic novelty is not subject to degradation. The new creature remains perfectly in line with the Creator's plan. It does not move away from His hand. It is not only sustained in existence, as it occurs in the present eon. It is not subject to any influence that could bring disorder. It does not distance itself from God's plan, which is equivalent to realization.

Palingenesis

Palingenesis (renewal) is a concept that can be confusing for those who know it from outside theology. In the language of sciences it means the revival of something that used to exist once, something old, e.g. the return of features that have disappeared. An example of this can be hoatzin, a bird whose young ones have claws appearing on their wings to climb the branches.

Palingenesis has a completely different meaning in the language of theology. The rebirth mentioned by the Gospel of St. Matthew is not a return to what has passed away. The evangelist quotes the Lord Jesus' assurance that at the rebirth the Apostolic Church, that is, those who followed him, will share in His royal dignity of the Son of God (cf. Matt 19:28n). The good to which they have contributed on earth will be increased in heaven according to the proportion of the new creation. K. Schelkle recalls in this context that old and new creation cannot be combined (cf. Mk 2:21). Rebirth is not a return to the past, but a new birth, as the goal of creation.¹⁰ Probably that is why M. Wolniewicz interprets the word palingenesis as "new existence."¹¹

The new creation is already initiated by the resurrection of Christ and is present in the "mystery." In this way what we do with Christ already creates a good that, after the renewal of all things, will find its place in eternity (cf. KDK 39).

Apocatastasis

Apocatastasis is a theory of a "radical renewal" to which not only everything, but also everyone, would ultimately be subject. Its proponents refer to an excerpt

¹⁰ Cf. K.H. Schelkle, *Neutestamentliche Eschatologie*, in: *Mysterium salutis...*, p. 750.

¹¹ Cf. *Pismo Święte Nowego Testamentu*, ed. M. Wolniewicz, Poznań 1984, p. 43.

from Acts of the Apostles in which St. Peter says that the “time of renewal of everything” will come. (Acts 3: 21 – “*χρονων αποκαταστασεως*”). The Apostle’s words indicate that he means time (*chronos*), the fulfillment of time, and the goal towards which history is heading, namely, *parousia*. The *Letter to the Colossians* speaks of the reconciliation of everything through Christ, that is, the mystery of redemption. The proponents of a theory contrary to the Church’s teaching infer from this that condemnation is temporary. Origen is considered the father of such views. In the announcement of everything being surrendered to Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:25–28) he saw the suggestion of every human being returning to Him, but denied the devil’s redemption.¹² In the second half of the nineteenth century, S. G. Mivart tried to combine the theory of apocatastasis with evolutionism, which was then fashionable. His statement that the punishment of the condemned will gradually decrease until it finally stops was rejected by decree of the Holy Office on July 19, 1890.¹³

Does the rejection of apocatastasis not contradict the image of a merciful God? Condemnation is the departure from God forever caused by a decision expressed in deeds. The freedom that determines decision making is the good of the person. God does not destroy freedom, because that would mean destroying His best work – a person whose freedom is so great that he/she can accept or reject the truth about himself/herself, he/she can want the good. But does not someone who rejects the good also deny their freedom, which was created for the good? Yes, such person rejects himself in the sense that he denies the truth about himself, about his vocation, but he does it himself; he makes decisions because he exists. There is no opposition between God’s mercy and freedom, because the freedom that enables an undetermined choice of the good is derived from God’s goodness. It is the good God who wants persons to exist as free.

And what about the hypothesis that man, unlike Satan, could be given the opportunity to “end” the punishment of condemnation? We have no reason to believe that man is someone privileged over the angels. After all, God loves them too, and He did not want any of them to leave. Finally, what Christ himself says is important; it is hard to think that the words about “eternal fire” (cf. Matt 25:41) would only have the meaning of didactic rhetoric, and not of declaring reality.

However, the hypothesis of the “hope of salvation for all” does not contradict the Church’s teaching, because it cannot be ruled out that there will be no one who does not convert even in the last moment of life, elusive for those around.

¹² Cf. J. Finkenzeller, *Eschatologia...*, p. 206.

¹³ Cf. W. Granat, *Ku człowiekowi...*, vol. II, p. 609.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CONCEPTS

IMMORTAL SOUL AND RESURRECTION

Pius V in the bull “Ex omnibus afflictionibus” states that the immortality of the first people is a gift of grace that perfects nature, and not an integral part of human nature, which is formed by soul and body.¹⁴ The immortality of the soul, which continues despite sin and death, should be distinguished from it.¹⁵

A man has no life out of himself. Always, even in eternity, he receives it from God, who has life and is its Source. This drawing from the Source of Life is presented in a beautiful image of the river of Revelation flowing out of the throne of God. The trees on its banks, which never lose their greenery, are a sign of the stability and abundance of imparting life (cf. Rev 22:1nn). Primordial immortality, before original sin, is something different from eternal life. Sin invades between God and man, separating from the Creator and so does the derivative of sin – death, an attempt to radically separate from God, the Giver of life. The gift of immortality is not completely taken away by death. Traditionally counted among “final things,” death has no last word, it is the penultimate chord in human history. The immortality of the soul is a gift placed in it from the beginning in view of what is ultimate.

Should not the “immortality of the soul” be replaced in today’s theology with an expression that better reflects the fact that man is a psychophysical unity? The Church’s teaching warns against rejecting traditional concepts that are understandable and appropriate for expressing the truths of the faith. This includes “the soul.”¹⁶ Although this concept is reminiscent of Greek dualism, it is not unfamiliar to the Bible. Saint Paul even speaks of the threefold structure of humanity – spirit, soul and body (cf. 1 Thess 5:23). Notions of particular value are those which are not merely “technical,” but those which are generally understood, accepted and intuitively comprehended, which, of course, not only does not exclude their meaning as academic terms, but also strengthens them. Concepts that do not require definition or longer explanation do not lose their precision because of that. Therefore, one should not be afraid that talking about the soul will make it difficult to understand man as a psychophysical unity. The immortal soul is an essential element of a person’s identity and a guarantee of his or her integrity despite death.

¹⁴ Cf. *Breviarium fidei*, ed. by St. Głowa, I. Bieda, Poznań 1989, VII, p. 112.

¹⁵ Cf. J. Warzeszak, *Człowiek w obliczu Boga i pośród stworzenia*, Warszawa 2005, p. 140n.

¹⁶ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Letter on Certain Questions Regarding Eschatology*, Rome 1979, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19790517_escatologia_pl.html.

It is the carrier of this spiritual and material unity which makes sense in the perspective of the resurrection.

The gift of immortality, deposited in mankind, is not yet the goal. It is explained in the mystery of the Passover of Christ, who went to preach salvation to spirits “locked in prison” (cf. 1 Pet 3:19). Without the Lord Jesus’ resurrection, death would remain a situation without an exit even for the righteous. Christ died to bring us to God so that we could be in close proximity to the Father (cf. 1 Pet 3:18). Saint Peter speaks of Christ being “revived” by the Holy Spirit. The Son of God has life in himself. The Holy Spirit takes part in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, he is the transmitter of God’s life to humanity; he creates Christ’s humanity, no longer subject to death. The risen Christ leads to the Father, to life, to the fullness of humanity in the resurrection. Without Him, man alone cannot achieve this filial bond with God. He receives it through the Saviour, through union with Him, through the passage of His way from death to life.

Christ’s Resurrection, His presence on the right hand side is a rescue, an “ark” in which man can take refuge despite death (cf. 1 Pet 3:21). Saint John Paul II calls human existence in time “the penultimate reality” (cf. EV 2). This concerns in particular the present eon, after the Redemption. In an anthropological aspect, regardless of location in salvific history, human existence is a process that will be fully realized in eternity. St. Paul writes about the transformation for which man was created (cf. 2 Cor 5:5–6). The Holy Spirit, who took part in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, brings the dead to life. Under His influence, the humanity is preserved, saved and absorbed by life inaccessible to death. That is why God gives the Reviving Spirit as the pledge of future transformation. What is mortal in man is not rejected, but is endowed with life, the same that is the property of the Holy Spirit. What is immortal – the soul – is open to the action of the Holy Spirit. God, who has destined man for immortality, has shaped the immortal in him so that man, the only creature on earth, is susceptible to the transformation performed by the Holy Spirit, i.e., to become “spiritual.” Beyond man, the old world disappears “to the voice of the last trumpet” – along with the last chord of temporal human history.

What will the ultimate, resurrected humanity be like? Do we know anything about its material aspect? Theologians talk about the “impassibility of the body” after the resurrection. This seems logical because it is difficult to imagine a combination of opposites, suffering and happiness. On Easter evening, Christ showed His disciples a truly human body. He let himself be touched, He ate. Should we deduce from this some extraordinary physical resistance after the resurrection? The pain we can experience now is a sign that the limit of endurance is being exceeded, a warning against destruction or damage. If there is no more evil and destruction, there will be no point in warning.

The baptized man already carries within him the pledge of eternity, the mark of the Holy Spirit. The community of the baptized, the Church is already undergoing a final transformation, also in its cosmic dimension. This takes place in the liturgy, which anticipates what is its fulfillment, i.e., the parousia and worship of God in eternity.¹⁷

KINGDOM

“...it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Lk 12:32) – these words of Christ speak of the content of the eternal reward. The promised “kingdom” is the reign and splendour of the Son of Man; it is His own domain. He who has received the “kingdom” participates in what belongs to the Son, and therefore in His relation to other beings.

The kingdom is a gift of the Father’s liking, of His goodness and generosity. It is not made up of goods external to that goodness, but concerns the very “pleasure of the Father” who fills us with life in Christ (cf. Rom 1:7). It consists in what is personal, in encountering God in love.¹⁸ K. Schelkle points out that the “kingdom” is above all an undeserved gift. It is given to children, that is, that is to those who have not even had the opportunity to deserve a reward.¹⁹

It is fundamentally different from earthly kingdoms with their historical and political equivalents. Of all the widely discussed biblical uses of the term, let us note the image given in the Revelation of the cosmic reign of Christ, who “holds the seven stars” (cf. Rev 1:16). He is the Lord of everything – He is not dependent on anything in the created universe, let alone on the supposed cosmic powers which, in ancient imaginations, were supposed to rule over man and history. It is Him, God, the Man Kyrios, who is the Lord of time and all things.²⁰ The coming kingdom is inseparable from the person of the Lord Jesus.²¹ In any case, the very word “basileia” (kingdom) means both the position, the fact of being king and his domain of reign. The Revelation points to this reality from the perspective of ultimate fulfillment in which the salvation and power of God ultimately embraces all creation (“kosmos”).²² Christ himself represents the Kingdom of

¹⁷ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Eschatologia – śmierć i życie wieczne*, in: *Opera omnia*, vol. X: *Zmartwychwstanie i życie wieczne*, transl. J. Kobięcia, Lublin 2014, p. 193.

¹⁸ Cf. J. McDermott, *Królestwo Boże w Nowym Testamencie*, “*Communio*” 32 (1986) 18, p. 27.

¹⁹ Cf. K.H. Schelkle, *Neutestamentliche...*, p. 726.

²⁰ Cf. M. Karrer, *Himmel, Millenium und neuer Himmel in der Apokalypse*, “*Jahrbuch für Biblischer Theologie*” 10 (2005), p. 229.

²¹ Cf. K.H. Schelkle, *Neutestamentliche...*, p. 726.

²² Cf. A. Kiejza, *Królestwo i królowanie według Księgi Apokalipsy*, RTK KUL, XLVIII (2001) 1, p. 146–152.

God.²³ Even more, He is the Eschaton, not just the “personalization of eternity,”²⁴ but a real gateway to it and its essence to the saved. Eternal life is not about getting a place “somewhere” in the space subject to Him, but about reigning together with Him, thanks to passing with Him through death to life. It is therefore a share in His own inheritance (cf. 2 Tim 2:11).

The presence of the Kingdom already in our midst (cf. Lk 17:20), that is, in Christ standing among the people,²⁵ raises the question: Do we have the right to include this concept in eschatology? Yes, because it is Christ who is the personal Eschaton – the eternal life of the saved. After His resurrection, we live in an era of eschatological “already and not yet.” Christ’s reign is already present in history because there has been an absolute and irrevocable victory over Satan. At the same time, this reign continues in a dynamic way in every individual victory of God in human conscience and deeds.²⁶ The Bible experts point out that the kingdom of God is an original term introduced by the Lord Jesus, which does not have its origin in Judaism.²⁷ It is a novelty that He brought to earth. To attribute eschatological meaning to the term “basileia” is therefore most appropriate; even if it does not refer in a given context to the final fulfilment, it speaks of salvation being realized, or, in pre-paschal pericopes, of its approaching.²⁸ At the same time, it is discernible in the history of the Church and develops in it.²⁹

THE THOUSAND YEAR KINGDOM

The longing for peace and wellbeing in the temporal world gave rise to theories about the earthly concretization of Christ’s kingdom. At the basis of these theories were the words of the Book of Revelation: “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Revelation 20:5–6). According to Justin’s ancient interpreta-

²³ Cf. F. Mußner, *Das Reich Christi, Bemerkungen zur Eschatologie des Corpus Paulinum*, in: *Im Gespräch mit dreieinem Gott. Elemente einer trinitarischen Theologie*, ed. M. Böhnke, H. Heinz, Düsseldorf 1985, p. 141.

²⁴ Cf. Ch. Schütz, *Die Vollendung...*, p. 659.

²⁵ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Eschatologie – Tod und ewiges Leben*, Regensburg 1978, p. 40n.

²⁶ Cf. A. Kiejza, *Królestwo...*, p. 153.

²⁷ Cf. J. Kudasiewicz, *Historia i eschaton w idei Królestwa Boga głoszonego przez Jezusa*, in: *Biblia o przyszłości. Materiały pomocnicze do wykładów z biblistyki*, ed. L. Stachowiak, R. Rubinkiewicz, Lublin 1987, p. 59n.

²⁸ Cf. W. Rakocy, *Królestwo Boże „w was” czy „pośród was”*, *Coll theol* 71 (2001), p. 34.

²⁹ Cf. S. Stasiak, *Eschatologia w listach pasterskich*, Legnica 1999, p. 35.

tion, there would literally be a “first resurrection,” different for saints and sinners; the latter would receive destructible bodies like they had during their lifetime on earth.³⁰ However, Revelation does not speak here of “the first death,” but of “the first resurrection.” It must therefore be understood not as a resurrection from the dead, but as rising from the death of sin, as a spiritual enrichment of life even before physical death.³¹ Christian life is already a participation in Christ’s triumph, although universal resurrection has not yet happened.³² Such interpretation finds its justification in the words of Saint Paul, who calls baptism burial and resurrection in Christ (cf. Col 2:12). For the recipient of this sacrament receives the grace of sharing in the Saviour’s atoning death and together with it a new life in union with Him. This new Christian existence is a sharing in Christ’s relationship with the Father. It already, on earth, anticipates eternity and the pledge of a future rising from the dead to live with the Saviour. The term “first resurrection” presents well the essence of this baptismal being grafted in Christ: for it is His Passover, not the immortality of the soul, that enables participation in God’s eternity, access to the life of the Trinity.

Another, not distant from the previous one, interpretation is that the first resurrection is not only a spiritual rebirth but also the glory of the saved in heaven.³³ The kingdom of a thousand years is the stage of happiness that the souls of the righteous will experience immediately after death, when they are safe under Christ’s rule.³⁴ This approach can be combined with the previous one: the thousand-year kingdom lasts from Christ’s resurrection to the end of the world. Satan’s imprisonment was accomplished through the Saviour’s paschal victory, and it is confirmed in every intervention of God for the faithful. The thousand year kingdom covers both the temporal and extraterrestrial sphere of the Church.³⁵

The historical and political interpretation of this kingdom is known as millenarism (Latin *mille anni* – thousand years, gr. chiliasm), which sees in the words of the Revelation the prophecies of earthly happiness and the golden age of peace. However, this is not justified either in the Book of Revelation itself, which speaks of the hardships and adversities that believers will face, or in theology.³⁶ Millenarism also speaks of a second trial which could be made available after the first resurrection; the result of the particular judgment would then not be

³⁰ Cf. B. Daley, *The Hope of the early Church. A handbook of the patristic eschatology*, Cambridge 1991, p. 21.

³¹ Cf. R. Rubinkiewicz, *Eschatologia Księgi Apokalipsy*, in: *Biblia o przyszłości. Materiały pomocnicze do wykładów z biblistyki*, ed. L. Stachowiak, R. Rubinkiewicz, Lublin 1987, p. 149.

³² Cf. J. Luzarraga, *Życie wieczne w pismach św. Jana*, “Communio” 1 (1992) 67, p. 25.

³³ Cf. W. Granat, *Ku człowiekowi...*, p. 642.

³⁴ Cf. M. Karrer, *Himmel...*, p. 245.

³⁵ Cf. R. Rubinkiewicz, *Eschatologia...*, p. 148.

³⁶ Cf. W. Granat, *Ku człowiekowi...*, p. 643.

final.³⁷ Officially rejected by the Magisterium (cf. CCC 676), Chiliastic theories return in the form of various political and religious utopias. The second half of the twentieth century saw them within the so-called liberation theology, according to which in each epoch there is a new parousia, a new unveiling of the mystery of Christ, this time as a Liberator, also in economic aspect.³⁸ This theory also received official criticism in a document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.³⁹

JUDGMENT AND THAT DAY

THE DAY OF CHRIST

The terms “that day,” “the day of the Lord,” indicate the dynamism of Christ’s action. It is He who closes the history and arrives, that is to say, becomes fully present on the day of the parousia. The future age, literally: “the age to come” (cf. Lk 18:30) does not come by itself, but thanks to the coming of Christ.

The word “day” here is full of meanings. Saint Paul writes that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief at night (cf. 1 Thess 5:2). The contrast in this phrase is striking: behold, the day, the brightness of the Lord bringing righteousness surprises the night, breaks the darkness on earth. The “reign of darkness” of which the Lord Jesus spoke during His capture is finished (cf. Lk 22:53). It is finally dispersed by the light of His victory. “Peace and security”, treated here with irony, is the false conviction of those who are accustomed to darkness, and so the coming of the day comes as an unpleasant surprise to them; as a thief takes away from them an illusory sense of self-confidence and conditions of existence based on a lie. In contrast to this the Apostle urges the faithful not to sleep, i.e., not to submit to the laws of the night. The parousia will occur unexpectedly, and no matter how far the world would move away from Christ, for the day cannot be stopped.

Parousia is an arrival that makes the mystery of the Holy Trinity present, bringing it closer. The experience of the Trinitarian mystery is already the pledge of parousia; that day is already in some way present in the experience of the Holy Spirit. By faith or by its rejection, temporality becomes the beginning of judgment, the future separation according to the measure of Christ, i.e., according to the conformity of life with His teaching.⁴⁰ Just as the “hour of Christ” was the

³⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 515.

³⁸ Cf. L. Boff, *Salut en Jesus Christ et processus de libération*, “Concilium” 96 (1974), p. 73nn.

³⁹ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, Rome 1986, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19860322_freedom-liberation_pl.html.

⁴⁰ Cf. F.J. Nocke, *Eschatologie*, in: *Handbuch...*, p. 387–389.

fulfillment of the Father's will, so the day which the Father knows (cf. Mk 13:32) is the final fulfillment of the Father's plan, the blessing of the seventh day of creation.⁴¹ It is the submission of everything to the Father by the Son according to the order of Trinitarian love. Likewise, the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, "not my will but yours" (cf. Lk 22:42) – did not express a discord between the Son and the Father, but the order of the relationship of the Divine Persons. The end of history, when this order has affected creation in an unprecedented way, so that the life of the Trinity may be shared by human beings, is precisely the "day" which the Father knows, determined in His creative thought.

The expression "the day of the Lord" indicates the special role of Christ in completing the history of the world and man. The day of the Son of Man, proclaimed by the prophets (cf. Is 27:12n), connects His "hour," the time of the salvific Passover – a moment in history – with the final completion and revelation of the Saviour (cf. Lk 17:30). This is not only the end of history, but the fullness of salvation accomplished. This is why the texts speaking of heaven are both soteriological and Christological.⁴²

That day brings good. The conclusion of the fate of creation and the history of mankind is above all good despite the seemingly catastrophic scenery. It was already the Old Testament prophet who foretold that all that are scattered will be gathered and the lost will be found then (cf. Is 27:12n). Everyone, because everyone is important. Congregating the saved means reversing the wrongs, eliminating the evil that the dispersion meant. On the day of the Son of Man what is ostensible ceases to matter. The temporal foundations of existence turn out to be impermanent and obsolete (cf. Lk 17:31). Cleverness loses its meaning, and calculations and foresight aimed at taking a safe place do not determine survival and do not bring salvation (cf. Lk 17:34). On this "day" "the heavens will pass away with a loud noise" (cf. 2 P 3:10); the noise that accompanies the rapid movement highlights the immediacy of transformation. However, this transformation does not lead to annihilation. The day of the Lord is the beginning of the "day of eternity" (cf. 2 P 3,18). Christ comes to give His life to the saved in one moment.

UNIVERSAL RESURRECTION

The universal resurrection is a consequence of the plan of God, who created man for immortality (cf. Wisdom 2:23), understood not as immortality of the

⁴¹ Cf. A. Popovič, *The seventh day of creation – Genesis 2:1–3. An exegetical – theological analysis of the seventh day of creation (Gen 1: 1–23)*, "Antonianum" LXXXI (2006), p. 644.

⁴² Cf. J. Frey, "Himmels – Botschaft". *Kerygma und Metaphorizität der neutestamentlichen Rede vom "Himmel"*, "Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie" 10 (2005), p. 205.

spiritual element alone, but as the fullness of humanity. The resurrection of the dead reflects the logic of the God of life, the God who is communion or personal exchange of love, and calls to life in His image.

The dynamism of God's action destroys death radically (cf. Is 25:8); once and for all and completely, i.e. in relation to every human being. The Old Testament prophet preached the truth about God who does not accept death and does not allow it to last forever. The revelation of the New Testament speaks directly of the resurrection through Christ and shows it in a Trinitarian perspective.

Such content can be read from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 15:35–49). Apostle writes in it that in the Resurrection he will ultimately receive such a body, such a shape of his humanity as God has foreseen for him (1 Cor 15:38). This body will be "glorious" (verse 43, *en doxe*), and thus transformed by the glory which signifies the space of God's existence, His closeness (cf. Matt 16:27); "spiritual" (v. 44, *pneumatikon*) – submitted to the Holy Spirit; "strong" (v. 43, *en dynamei*) – in the power of acting God. Body received at the universal resurrection is indestructible (v. 50), not endangered in its vitality. It bears the reflection of God's eternity, the fullness of that immortality which God has planned for man in the work of creation.

The humanity of the saved is enriched by the characteristics of the risen Lord (cf. 1 Cor 15:47). St Paul speaks of a resurrection modelled on Christ through union with Him (cf. Rom 6:5nn). The human race deserves to experience death – the consequence of sin. The Son of God accepted this consequence, but at the same time it was impossible for death to rule over Him, not only because He was sinless, but above all because He possessed a Divine nature that was completely foreign to death. Christ died as someone stronger than death. From now on, whoever dies in union with Him will not ultimately be defeated by death.

Christ has the power to regain life on His own. His resurrection from the dead is first and unique. It is He Himself who is the Life and Condition of the Resurrection. We will not rise from the dead by our own power, but thanks to Christ, "just like Him" (cf. Rom 6:5). Thanks to Him, those who are resurrected and endowed with His life become immune to death.

A JUST JUDGMENT

The concept of "judgment" in the common sense implies terms close in meaning, such as: justice, or at least its assumption, sentence – making a decision, or judge – someone who gives a verdict. In what sense does it apply to an eschatic judgment?

The Old Testament Book of Wisdom teaches that the future judgment is not about counting sins. It is a public act of a just God who sees the emptiness and evil that the ungodly have left behind and rewards the faithful.⁴³ The Lord Jesus reveals the Trinitarian perspective of judgment: already now the Holy Spirit teaches about justice, i.e. that the Lord Jesus has done the Father's will and that the Father accepts Him in glory. Justice is shown as an attribute of God. At the end of the time Christ comes to bring justice, i.e. to give what belongs to God himself.

The judgment shall be done in accordance with that justice. The evangelical theologian Hans Kammler explains the word "krisis" used in the gospel of St. John as, above all, "the court of punishment" (Strafgericht).⁴⁴ This interpretation is in line with the message of St James' Letter talking about the relentless judgement (literally "without mercy" – James 2:13) to those who have lacked mercy, that is, to those who have not shown themselves to be like the merciful God, have not done His works. Conformity to Christ, following Him, cooperating with Him are the measure of judgment. The literal meaning of the Greek "krisis" is the "separation" that creates two poles according to this measure. On one of them there is "doom," "misery" and perdition, the other – a wreath of reward, indestructibility and immortality.⁴⁵

"Krisis" is also a decision;⁴⁶ one that evaluates the decision of the person being tried. The separation is made on the basis of the response to the call to life in Christ. In this sense, faith or rejection of faith is not only the basis of judgment, but also self-judgment, now and in the future.⁴⁷ The question arises: what about those who objectively could not afford to respond with faith, e.g. children who died without baptism, or people who did not develop full awareness and responsibility. After all, they are also people, and it is difficult to imagine that they would be deprived of this essential element of their personal existence, which is freedom. We also know that God wants the salvation of all. From these two premises we can presume that everyone, in a way known to God, is given the opportunity to make this most important decision, thanks to which he can freely accept the salvation offered to him or her.

Who performs the judgment? Christ, Kyrios, Lord of the universe. He who is righteous, who can be a representative of God's justice and has the power to

⁴³ Cf. K. Romaniuk, *Eschatologia Księgi Mądrości*, Coll theol 38 (1968), p. 90–96.

⁴⁴ Cf. H. Kammler, *Christologie und Eschatologie. J 5, 17– 30 als Schlüsseltext johanneischer Theologie*, Tübingen 2000, p. 90n.

⁴⁵ Cf. S. Stasiak, *Eschatologia...*, p. 150–152.

⁴⁶ Cf. J. Blank, *Krisis. Untersuchungen zur johanneischen Christologie und Eschatologie*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1964, p. 42.

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 306.

separate. The words of the Gospel saying that the Son revives those whom He wills (cf. Jn 5:22) assure of the full power of the Son of God. The Lord Jesus has the power to judge.⁴⁸ Saint Paul speaks of the cooperation of the saints; they will be judges of this world because they share in the reign of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:2). Their moral righteousness is a clear criterion for division. The wrongs suffered on earth in the name of fidelity to Christ reveal the iniquity of those who, by inflicting suffering on others, have shown their hostility to the kingdom of God's justice (cf. 1 Cor 6:9).

A JUDGMENT OVER THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH

The eschatic judgment separates the heirs of heaven from the "inhabitants of the earth." Who are the latter? They are the ones for whom being settled on earth means being attached to sin. Therefore they do not want a world other than the one in which sin is possible. The Revelation calls them "inhabitants of the earth" (cf. Rev 11:10). They do not accept the call to eternal life to such an extent that they send each other gifts because of the death of the gospel prophets. They rejoice at the crime and at suppressing the truth. They worship the Beast; they surrender to Satan and to those who blaspheme God (cf. Rev 13:12). They yield to the deceptive charm of the Beast; they accept lying (cf. Rev 13:14). They let themselves be deceived because the lie suits them. Similarly, they let themselves be made "drunk by the great harlot," that is, they willingly commit sin and, as a result, do not accept salvation (cf. Rev 17:1.8).

Hell and "the second death" are the synonyms of rejection of salvation (cf. Rev 2:11) – irreversible departure from the Living God. The Book of Wisdom speaks of the irrevocability of hell (cf. Wis 3:18). The condemned are punished according to their intentions (cf. Wis 3:10). Because they have despised justice and abandoned the Lord, they will be separated from Him and from the community of the saved. They did not believe in the possibility of overcoming death, so death will remain for them, according to their faith (cf. Wis 2:1). Therefore condemnation is "the second death." In addition to this "cold" logic, Scripture conveys an evocative image of hell based on the symbolism of destructive fire (cf. Matt 25:41). Eternal fire is the opposite of God's creative action; it destroys, yet cannot completely annihilate being. Therefore it does not burn out, but lasts indefinitely (cf. Mk 9:43). Hell is an enduring and irrevocable obliteration, and at the same time an impermanence – a disintegration in which one's own existence is constantly subject to non-acceptance. It is an endless negation of God's work,

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 122, 159.

and therefore of what one is and who one is of His will. It means remaining in anti-creative “no and never.” Is such an existence possible?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church confirms the irrevocability of the penalty of hell (cf. CCC 1035). How can condemnation coexist with a universal resurrection, including those who “wake up to shame?” (cf. Dn 12:2)? The resurrection of condemnation, literally “the resurrection of judgment” (cf. J 5:29, *αναστασιν κρισεως*) does not last only at the “moment” of the judgment. The resurrection means life, the rejection of death, it is the total breaking away from its power. We understand this well in relation to the saved, who accept the eternal life offered to them. The condemned rejects Christ, who is life, remains in a permanent rejection of the gift of life in God.

God who calls to eternity does not change His mind. He does not cancel the call to life and love. In the case of someone who rejects God, this call remains without a positive answer. God “keeps faith because he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim 2:13). Christ offers Himself to man as Life. He does not offer just some thing, but himself as a Life in God. Whoever rejects Him does not choose anything, because there is no life outside Him. The gift of life remains unaccepted. An evil spirit is not creative and cannot offer anything as an alternative. In the present time, he proposed God’s works as his own, now he no longer has access to creation.

The final separation does not annihilate the person, for there is no power to cancel the creative “let us create man.” But it radically cuts one off from the “new creation” because it is all dedicated to God. The Revelation shows the image of the defeat of rebellious angels for whom there is no longer a “place in heaven” (cf. Rev 12:8nn). The devil who was cast down could harm “the earth and the sea.” His activity is limited to what is transient. Neither evil spirits nor the condemned have access to “new heaven and new earth” (cf. Rev 21:1). “Nothing unclean will come into it” (Rev 21:27). “The inhabitants of the earth” remain homeless forever.

HOME AND HERITAGE

The concept of the Father’s house refers to the Trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son. It points to the essential feature of eternal life, which is union with Christ and participation in His filial relationship with the Father.

THE HOUSE OF THE FATHER

“The dwellers of heaven” (cf. Rev 12:12) differ from the “inhabitants of the earth” not only in that Scripture uses a different expression to define these two groups. The former, already during their earthly pilgrimage, found refuge, sal-

vation in heaven. As a result, they are saved. Their “home” (Jn 14:2 – *oikos*; 2 Cor 5:1 – “hut”, *skene*) is a “house of the Father”, space not built by human effort, regardless of the expression used. It is Christ who can introduce into his Father’s house, and therefore entering it depends on union with Christ.⁴⁹ It is He who prepares dwellings for those who follow Him (cf. Jn 14:2).

In the Old Testament, the temple was called “the house of the Lord”, because thanks to the temple God resided among the people (cf. 2 Krn 31:10). It was there that one could meet Him – offer a sacrifice, pray. But the walls of the temple did not exhaust the meaning of the “house of the Lord.” To live in this house “for ever,” as the psalmist says (cf. Ps 23:6), is to live in His goodness and grace. The image of the feast for the righteous, contained in the previous verse of the Psalm, directs the thought towards eternity. The author of Psalm 68 announces the house which God “will prepare for the desolate” (cf. Ps 68:7). Even when it comes to earthly prosperity and security, the words: “Our God is the God who liberates” and “to God, the Lord, belong deliverances from death” (Psalm 68:21) in the light of the fullness of Revelation can be interpreted as an announcement of the salvific work. In the words of Isaiah, God promises to His faithful: “I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off” (Is 56,5). The closeness of God, the admission to His worship is associated with indestructibility. It anticipates it.

A house “not made by human hand” (cf. 2 Cor 5:1) is not only a safe haven, but the Father’s own house, God’s way of existence, the intimate interior of Trinitarian communion. Being resurrected with Christ by the Father allows one to be close to Him (cf. 2 Cor 4:14).⁵⁰ It is no longer just about living in the world He created, but in His presence. A house is not made by the human hand, for although merits and good deeds make it possible to enter it, it is created and opened by God; it is He who invites to his communion of life. What does that mean?

When Christ says He goes to prepare a place, He announces that there will be a place in the life of the invisible God for the created humanity. This is His own place, the place of God-man. This does not mean that each saved person will become somebody additional, the “fourth” among the Trinity. Nothing will change in Trinitarian relations either. The change concerns the status of humanity; the saved person participates in Christ’s love for the Father, responding to it in the Holy Spirit through union with the Saviour. This participation is communal, involving not each one individually, but the entire community of heaven dwellers.

⁴⁹ Cf. J. Frey, *Himmels...*, p. 217–220.

⁵⁰ Cf. J. Plevnik, *The destination of the Apostle and the faithful: second Corinthians 4, 13b–14 and 1 Tes 4, 14*, “The Catholic Biblical Quarterly” 62 (2000), p. 92.

GOD'S REST

The letter to the Hebrews speaks of the promise of entering the “rest of God” (cf. Heb 4:1). The object of eschatological hope is therefore to participate not only in God’s action but also in His very existence, in the possession of life. The concept of “rest” also brings to mind the joy of God and His affirmation of creation (cf. Gen 2:2).

After the completion of creation, God placed man in paradise. Paradise has become synonymous with happiness, yet with the primordial, not final one. Although the Lord Jesus announced to the repenting convict that he would be “in paradise” with Him (cf. Lk 23:43), in His public teaching he does not promise a “garden” but “home.” The Gospel also speaks of “heaven,” which is the space belonging to God, the symbol of His transcendent existence. The Revelation, on the other hand, puts before our eyes not the garden, but the image of the city (cf. Rev 21:2), a formed community.

“God’s rest” (*katapausis*, Heb 4:1nn) expresses His joy related to creating, giving existence and life. Contrary to the suggestion contained in the word itself, it is not a “break” in the Creator’s work. There was no “break.” God also acted after the completion of creation. The rest leads us to notice not just God’s works, but God Himself, in His creative joy, which is a model and source of happiness for creatures. “God’s rest” makes us see that everything in the world has not come from a soulless mechanism, but is the result of the act of Someone who acts out of love and therefore “rejoices in his works” (cf. Ps 104:31). Thus “entering into God’s rest” means sharing in His creative joy, in the love which rejoices because it creates and gives. In God, Love and joy are personal; they are attributed to the Person of the Holy Spirit. Entering the rest is, therefore, taking love and joy from the Source, from the Holy Spirit – according to His nature, and thus forever and ever.

HEAVEN

Heaven is the key concept of eschatology. It probably enjoys more popularity than the “Father’s house.” It expresses above all the transcendence of God’s existence. In the language of Judaism it was a synecdoche of the unspeakable name of God. In the New Covenant, the inaccessibility of God’s being is crossed over by the Son of God who descended from heaven (cf. Jn 3:13.31) in order to open it to people. Thanks to His salvific sacrifice, heaven can become a place of human presence. Saint Paul links this concept to a house in heaven (cf. 2 Cor 5:1), that is, where God resides. He also calls it homeland (cf. Phil 3:20), and this is repeat-

ed after the Apostle by the teaching of the Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 49). We belong to the reality in which there is Christ. The hope of His coming determines our identity (cf. Col 4:1; 2 Thess 1:7).

Although “heaven” speaks of the transcendence of God, of His way of living, different from creatures (cf. Mk 16:19), it also points to the communal aspect of eschaton. Its inhabitants are saints (cf. Revelation 13:6; LG 50:51), but also angels (cf. Mk 13:32; Matt 18:10; 22:30). This concept emphasizes the communal joy of the saved and their mutual affirmation and participation in the joy of God and in His work. This is expressed, for example, by the joy in heaven of the converted sinner, of which we read in Saint Luke (cf. Lk 15:7). The image of heaven as a community of persons with God who rejoice with Him describes not only “the future age.” It underlines the “vertical unity” of the Church in the present eon. That is why the Second Vatican Council, avoiding the “eschatological schism,” does not speak of “the three Churches” (the one making a pilgrimage, undergoing purification, and triumphant), but one whose members are at different stages of the journey (cf. CCC 48:49).

In the present eon, heaven is the reference point of eschatological hope. “Temple in heaven” (cf. Rev 11:19; 14:17) is the reality in which God receives worship. There He not only *Exists* in its inaccessible transcendence, but He is also accessible to prayers. He surrounds people on earth with His care. In this image we perceive not only the accessibility but also the expression of God’s fatherhood and concern for the completion of salvation. The openness of Heaven (cf. Rev 19:11) and “the armies of Heaven” have a similar meaning (cf. Rev 19:14), as does the “fire from heaven” (cf. Rev 20:9). All this speaks of the vigilance of God’s justice, about the ordering of the universe and history. Despite the apparent successes of evil in the temporal world, there remains a faithful Source of an indestructible order which does not turn away from human history, and after its conclusion everything will be submitted to God’s reign.

From heaven comes down the New Jerusalem, the dwelling of God with men (cf. Rev 21:2.10). From the Trinitarian order comes the eschatological harmony of creation, justice, salvation. The “new heaven and earth” is, by analogy with the “heaven and earth” of Genesis (cf. Gen 1, 1), the expression of the new creation and thus of the whole of the renewed universe. The emphasis on the newness of heaven and earth (cf. 2 Pt 3:13) points out that the whole cosmos is subject to an eschatic transformation, that there is no confusion of what is new and what has passed away (cf. Rev 21:1). This transformation is referred to in the Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, which speaks of “a new dwelling place and a new earth” (“novam habitationem novamque terram” – GeS 39). The Council notes that eschatic justice concerns the entire habitat of the saved; the personal eschaton enjoys creation “unchained from vanity.”

The concept of heaven therefore corresponds more to the presentation of God's transcendence and at the same time to the communion of God with the saints and with the angels now, while "dwelling place" and "home" speak of the kind and quality of the eternal reward from God.

HERITAGE

Hope for heaven is connected with the "treasure" awaiting there. (cf. Mk 10:21). What is "in heaven" belongs to the heavenly Father. *The Letter of Saint Peter* speaks of the heritage preserved in heaven (cf. 1 Peter 1:4). The Son has a right to the Father's property, and the value which the Father passes on to the Son in the heart of the Trinity is His love. Eternal goods are the object of "heritage" (*kleronomos*). They can be given to those who find themselves in the rights of the Son. Christians become "heirs" of a place in Trinitarian communion by baptism, and reach the fullness of their inheritance at parousia.⁵¹

The final granting of the reward to the "blessed of the Father" is an event between the Son and the Father (cf. Matt 25:34–46). The Son thus fulfils the Father's will. Accepting the saints to share in His filial dignity is an expression of love for the Father and at the same time a gift of love of the Father and the Son for people. Christ – the King allows us to share in His royal power, but the Kingdom is not divided into parts. He accepts into His existence, which for this reason does not suffer any diminution or division. He accepts the saved to be with Him, where He is, in His eternal sonship.

This heritage has been prepared "since the founding of the world," because that is what the world, including man, was created for. From the beginning – it was for eternity and eternal life in God. What is Christ's property, is for man. The eternal heritage has no end, because it comes from the eternal life of God. It is a gift of His Fatherly love, which is eternal, not in the sense that it gains the mark of eternity. On the contrary, from this love comes eternity for created persons; their continuous abiding in eternal God. For this reason the inheritance received by virtue of an assumed sonship is eternal and indestructible (cf. 1 Cor 5; 1Pet 1:3n).⁵²

Through the eternal Spirit, the Son offered himself to God as an immaculate sacrifice (cf. Heb 9:14). Redemption, therefore, is the work of three Divine Persons remaining in an eternal communion of love. Christ has merited an eternal heritage. He entered heaven itself – the glory of the inner life of the Trinity with his humanity, that is, He brought humanity into a place which is an eternal inheri-

⁵¹ Cf. S. Stasiak, *Eschatologia...*, p. 167.

⁵² Cf. W. Granat, *Ku człowiekowi...*, vol. II, p. 559.

tance (cf. Heb 9:15–24). The author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* says that He did it “once and for all” (cf. Heb 10:19). Irrevocably.

REWARD

The concept of “heritage” concerns goods which are due without merit, by virtue of birth. A “reward” is something one wins, something one has to earn with their own efforts. Eternal inheritance is the filial place of Christ. United with Him, they receive, out of God’s love, a share in what belongs to the Son. The concept of the eternal reward underlines the aspect of the necessary moral effort that leads to this union. The saved receive eternal life for free, because it is not in human power to deserve it. However, they receive it only when they respond with love during the earthly pilgrimage. The concept of reward expresses the truth about the courageous acquisition of eternal life (cf. 1 Tim 6:12).

The “rest in God”, compared to a celebration, safety with Him are the reward of the righteous after their hardship (cf. Wisdom 4:7; 5:15nn). The saved person is the winner (cf. Rev 2:11). It is not a military victory, involving defeating someone else, but rather oneself, one’s own weakness. Therefore it is compared to the success of an athlete who wins through mobilisation and discipline. The metaphor of sporting struggle is matched by the allegory of a wreath as a reward. The wreath awarded to the winner (cf. Rev 2:10) does not evoke associations with the attributes of a despot beating others with brutal force. It testifies to the noble features shown in the struggle. It means dignity, recognition of effort, a distinction which does not give rise to fear or aversion but, on the contrary, the favour and admiration of the community. Those who get the award – the saints affirm each other. The prize is “heritage among the saints” (cf. Eph 1:18).

ETERNAL LIFE IN GLORY

ETERNAL LIFE

Life is the key concept of eschatology. Depending on the accompanying term, it is a starting point and, in a way, a reference point for further thought. If it is an “afterlife,” the point of reference will necessarily be the grave and the question of what and in what sense allows man to survive death. The phrase “eternal life” leads one to reflect on the eschatological fullness, on the full and perfect possession of life as defined by Boetius. However, the paths of such reflection will run along the analogy of life as such, that is, the life we already know. The phrase

“eternal life in God” first poses the question of who God is, what is His creative and salvific action, the purpose of which is to give man the fullness of life in glory. Do different starting points lead to the same conclusions? Probably yes, since we are using the same Revelation, but we can expect more or less complicated ways of getting there and different accents.

Life is a gift, not a thing, writes St John Paul II (cf. EV 2; 22). Reflecting on eternity in opposition or by analogy with time leads to interesting statements about beginning, end, changeability and development, consequences and simultaneity. It thus enriches theology with philosophical questions, but this concerns more “things” (realities) than people. This is a natural consequence of a common understanding of what is “eternal,” i.e. “permanent” and not necessarily “living.” The transfer of the emphasis from “eternal” to “life” makes it necessary to start with God who is “Life” and place the reflection on His Life at the center of eschatology.

Theologians point out that the very adjective “eternal” should be reserved for God, who is eternal in His nature. Only He is without beginning and without end. Therefore, the created beings that have a beginning would, in justified situations, be entitled to the adjective “everlasting/perennial.” For example, we can say that man has an ultimate and everlasting goal.⁵³ Those who are condemned will suffer an everlasting punishment.⁵⁴ But does not such a precise term remain understandable in too narrow a circle? Common Polish language does not distinguish between Latin “aeternus,” “perennis,” “sempiternus.” Hans Urs von Balthasar recommends not using the word “eternal” to refer to evil and death, because “eternal” is an attribute of God.⁵⁵ However, in the Polish version of the *Catechism* we have the phrases “eternity of hell” or “eternal fire” (cf. CCC 1035). The same applies to life. The variety of Greek expressions makes it possible, for example, to contrast in the Gospel of Saint John the spiritual “zoe” with the earthly “psyche”.⁵⁶ If we combine these two words into one “eternal life,” we gain new content. It is not just about duration. It is a life not only endless, not only inexhaustible, but new in essence; it is the fullness of life in God.⁵⁷

ETERNAL LIFE IN GOD

Eternal life in God is participation in the life of the Trinity, according to the Trinitarian order of communion. The saints participate in it by remaining in Christ,

⁵³ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 478n.

⁵⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 482.

⁵⁵ Cf. I. Bokwa, *Trynitarno-chrystologiczna interpretacja eschatologii w ujęciu Hansa Ursa von Balthasara*, Radom 1998, p. 238.

⁵⁶ Cf. J. Finkenzeller, *Eschatologia...*, p. 43.

⁵⁷ Cf. F.J. Nocke, *Eschatologie*, w: *Handbuch...*, p. 474.

in the Holy Spirit. It is communion with the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit (cf. EV 1). Participation in this communion of love is at the same time a knowledge – an experience of God the Trinity (cf. EV 37). In the final fulfillment, the one saved with Christ gives himself to the Father. He abides in Christ through the Holy Spirit and at the same time experiences His unifying power. The Holy Spirit, who is the Unity of the Trinity, ensures that the saved are not individually separated. He creates their mutual unity of love, like the Trinitarian unity and within it. He is the inner principle of the unity of the community of saints in Christ (cf. MnD 20n).

Therefore, in the earthly life, abiding in Christ is an anticipation of eternal life. The Holy Spirit, who brings about the righteousness that is in Christ, is revealed as the Spirit of eternal life (cf. DeV 48). Already now creation, by submitting everything from the Son in the Holy Spirit to the Father, finds its share in the mystery of God, which becomes the ultimate power of man and the world.⁵⁸ It is communion with God that encompasses and leads earthly existence towards the ultimate destiny (cf. EV 38).

GLORY

In Holy Scripture, the term “glory” (*doxa*) introduces into the sphere of divine transcendence. It means God’s way of being, His Trinitarian existence. “Glory,” that is, God Himself, but also the “inhabitants of Heaven,” angels, all come closer to people in the person of the Lord Jesus. This is why at key moments of revelation we hear about “glory,” for example, at the Lord’s birth (cf. Lk 2:14), at the transfiguration (cf. Lk 9:28–35), or at the announcement of parousia (cf. Lk 9:26).

God makes available to the saints the space of His being in glory, He gives a share in the Trinitarian communion of love. This is why Saint Paul writes that “the richness of the glory of his inheritance among the saints” is the vocation of Christians (cf. Eph 1:18). We worship the saints, that is, those who abide in union with Christ. The cult of the saints is therefore clearly Christocentric.

In the parousia, Christ arrives in glory, manifesting Himself definitively and directly, as Lord and Saviour; sharing in the glory is the content of eternal reward. This concept therefore belongs to eschatology.

Theologians over the centuries have spoken of different degrees of glory.⁵⁹ The very concept of the degree creates the impression of pure earthly provenance. The detailed sciences often use the measure of degree, e.g. when determining temperature, angle, intensity of storm or earthquake. In these cases it is about values

⁵⁸ Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Znak, któremu sprzeciwić się będą*, Kraków 2005, p. 183.

⁵⁹ Cf. W. Granat, *Ku człowiekowi...*, vol. II, p. 564.

or non-personal phenomena. But is the degree an adequate measure of happiness? By analogy, yes. We can speak metaphorically, that is imprecisely, although comprehensively, about the degree of love, sacrifice, or virtues. In this way we point out, for example, the heroism of the virtues of the candidates for canonization. Language allows for this. But is it still right to measure what is “without measure?” Was the introduction of degrees to eschatology not influenced by the habit of earthly thinking to classify people and evaluate them according to their degree of dignity, their positions, medals received, etc.? Does it therefore correspond to the truth of revelation, especially that of God the Father?

We can find a suggestion about this in the prophecy: “As your own mother comforts you, so I will comfort you” (cf. Is 66, 13). God’s word compares God’s goodness towards the people to parental love. If applied to eschatic consolation, it should be said to be a gift of love that is immeasurable but suitable for everyone, according to the measure of divine infinity and mercy.

VISIO BEATIFICA

The Latin term “visio beatifica” in the Polish theological literature is probably as popular, if not more, than vernacular “beatific vision.” It is actually a synonym for “heaven,” but drawing attention to the cognition/contemplation of God. This expression refers to the phrase in which St. Paul presents the eschatological future through the allegory of seeing: “while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:6n). “Vision in Heaven” is therefore different from temporal contemplation and even from the experiences of mystics. It is also different from the cognition available in the context of parousia, when the presence of God becomes something obvious, not requiring verification, self-evidence that includes within itself the criterion of cognition. This is a universal cognition, accessible to all.

Visio beatifica is contemplation available only to the saved. It is an inner contact with the very personal “criterion” of truth. In the temporal world we get to know God through that which is created. In parousia, God’s action is obvious. In the eschatic vision, cognition is combined with the interaction with God in relation to creatures, that is, with the eschatic reign. It is accompanied by creative joy resulting from participation in the dialogue, in the exchange of love of Divine Persons.

The Catechism defines *visio beatifica* as “contemplation of God in glory” (cf. CCC 1028). God is then known as He is. The word “seeing” expresses an intense and direct knowledge of the invisible God, knowledge not only without the mediation of creatures, but also without intermediary signs, without words. The

term “beatific vision”, used interchangeably, (cf. CCC 1045) is a direct translation of Latin “visio.” But Polish “seeing” seems more appropriate because it corresponds to the new ability of the saved to perceive God directly.

Why does *visio beatifica* make one happy? It is a vision that contains the reciprocity of looking: “I will know as I have been known.” God is not contemplated as an interesting object. It is a “face-to-face” vision (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). At first glance we see here the opposite of hiding from God because of sin (cf. Gen 3:8nn). The saint in eternity participates in the inner knowledge of the Persons of the Trinity; thanks to the Holy Spirit, who permeates the depths of God (cf. 1 Cor 2:10n). The Holy Spirit gives a direct insight into these “depths,” that is, how the Son comes to know the Father. He comes to know Him with thanksgiving, just as He gave witness during His earthly activity. The Holy Spirit also gives insight into how God knows man, i.e. what the loving thought, that led him from being created towards eternal life, consists in. This knowledge contains joy, the affirmation that one does not want to be hidden. It is the joy of being in the light of Christ, within the reach of His loving gaze (cf. Rev 21:23).

ETERNAL HAPPINESS

Happiness or joy? In everyday language, or even theological language, one can probably hear more about “happiness.” Joy is associated with a state of feeling, with mood. Władysław Tatarkiewicz wrote about understanding these notions in the secular language.⁶⁰ In the New Testament the word “the happy ones” (*makarioi*) is found, for example, in the text of the eight blessings (cf. Matt 5:3nn), but it is joy (*chara*) that means sharing in God’s happiness (cf. Jn 15:11). The adjective *makarios*, on the other hand, is applied to God (translated as “blessed God” – 1 Tim 1:11).

Happiness in theology is a particularly eschatological term. It is not to be found on earth. It is reached by sharing in Christ’s sufferings and baptismal conforming to His death in the hope of the resurrection (Phil 3:10). For the condition of happiness is the renewal of humanity and liberation from vanity. How do we know this?

By starting his public activity, Christ announces the liberation of man from destructibility (cf. Lk 4:18nn). His miracles – the healings, the resurrections – aroused joy and enthusiasm, an announcement of future joy. It was not only a display of the power of the Messiah, the Saviour, but also an indication of the purpose of His mission, that is, the ultimate guidance of man from the vanity of being. Man gets to know this vanity during his earthly pilgrimage, and he expe-

⁶⁰ Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, *O szczęściu*, Warszawa 2004, p. 79 – 81.

riences it most intensely in his own death. Through this death and resurrection at the end of the ages, he meets and experiences Christ acting. In his history, he comes to know Christ, who let himself be ravaged in order to bring man out of the vanity of being to a new, secure level of existence. Eternal joy is a consequence of crossing the ontological abyss from being subject to death towards living in God's eternity. It is announced by the earthly joy of good, of sharing the good, following Christ's model, the selfless affirmation of the good that others experience. The very liberation from vanity would only be a certain negative aspect of happiness; it is complemented by the experience of the bond with Christ.

In the parable of the talents the faithful servant receives an invitation to the joy of the Lord (cf. Matt 25:21). In eternity, man has no life out of himself. Nor is he a sovereign of eschatic goods. Yet he participates in impartation of eternal life in Love, through the Spirit of Truth. This truth includes recognizing his dependence on God who is Life and Love. Man participates in the joy of God. This joy is His action and the fact that He loves. The joy of God is the homeland of saints.

In the *Letter to the Philippians* we read that our homeland is in heaven (cf. Phil 3:20n). "Our," or, as the context suggests, of those who want to fulfil their vocation, who do not aspire to "what is mundane," unworthy of man, but have hope in Christ. It is the "homeland," that is, one's most proper place, assigned by God. Moreover, it is a heritage and a community where one is at home, where humanity is realized, where one can enjoy one's own and at the same time common, unique gifting. The "homeland in heaven" indicates being with Christ, where He resides as God-Man with an indestructible, transformed humanity.

The texts of Sacred Scripture which speak of joy in the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 10:21n) and the Church's own experience justify its attribution to the Paraclete. He is the Personal Happiness of the Trinity. The eternal happiness of the saved is the cooperation with Christ in the creative and unifying joy of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

The word is important. By God's inspiration, St John writes that the Son of God has the name of the Word. The eternal Word not only reveals the truth of the Trinity, but expresses it. It expresses the fullness of truth about God. There is no truth beyond Him. He – the Word is the Truth. In Him and through Him we know its depth. We hope to endlessly come to know it in this way in eternity. That is why the words we speak about it are important now. They are meant to reflect the brilliance of the Truth.

What do we have in eschatology? The terms listed above obviously do not exhaust the scope of this field of theology. It is also not all we have at our disposal. The present study does not exhaust the fullness included in the eschatological terms. It indicates a certain way of conducting reflection and the meaning of the words used. The expressions chosen here constitute a characteristic fragment of what in Scripture and history serves eschatological reflection. They include those that relate to currents or ideas such as apocatastasis and, above all, biblical ones that are as close as possible to the content of the revelation.

It can be observed that the concepts used, and even the order or hierarchy of their juxtaposition, influence the aspect in which we consider a given reality. For example, “home,” “Father’s home” focuses on the closeness of God, on His caring fatherhood. It also points to the role of the Son of God and evokes the subject of assumed sonship. The concept of “heaven” seems impersonal, yet it is derived from the surrogate name of God (cf. 1 Macc 3:18n). “Heaven” draws attention to the “new heaven and the new earth” and thus to the whole reality of the new creation. As a living space for the saints, it points to the communal aspect of the eschaton, to the fact that the saved together enjoy “homeland in heaven.” “Heaven” is the goal of the earthly pilgrimage. Therefore, it reminds us of the need for effort during the pilgrimage.

The phrases which, speaking of eternity in God, reveal Trinitarian truths, are of particular value. “Home” and “heritage” are definitely Christological. The “House of the Father” is the reality into which one is introduced by the Son. It is an expression that makes us reflect on the participation of the saved in the communion of Divine Persons. The eternal inheritance carries the truth of man’s filiation, that is, of his destined place in the life of God. The “reward” reminds us that we hope to receive eternal life because of the merits of Christ, and our own actions count only when they are done together with Him.

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Abbreviations

CCC – Catechism of the Catholic Church [Polish ed.: Poznań 2002].

LG – *Lumen Gentium* Constitution.

GeS – *Gaudium et spes* Constitution.

DeV – Encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem*.

EV – Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*.

MnD – Letter *Mane nobiscum Domine*.

Keywords: eschatic, eschatological, kingdom, Father’s Home, eternal life, beatific vision

Z PROBLEMATYKI POJĘĆ ESCHATOLOGICZNYCH

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje temat stosowania terminologii eschatologicznej i jej rozumienia. Zastosowane pojęcia i punkt wyjścia prowadzonego rozważania wpływają na jego ukierunkowanie i rozłożenie aspektów. Jeśli jako punkt wyjścia przyjmiemy „rze-

czy ostateczne” uzyskamy antropologiczny obraz losów człowieka i jego powołania do wieczności. Wyjście od tajemnicy Boga i Jego planu wymaga zwrócenia uwagi na Osobę Chrystusa Przychodzącego i czyni eschatologię traktatem o Bogu Trójjedynym, dopełniającym swoje dzieło.

Niniejsze studium zwraca też uwagę na niuanse znaczeniowe niektórych pojęć odnoszących się do życia wiecznego, jak np. nowość, królestwo, dom Ojca, niebo, chwała czy szczęście wieczne. Te i inne wyrażenia zawierają, zakorzenione w Objawieniu i tradycji Kościoła, bogactwo znaczeniowe. Ich przemyślane i świadome stosowanie służy pogłębionej i twórczej, a zarazem precyzyjnej refleksji.

Słowa kluczowe: eschatyczny, eschatologiczny, królestwo, dom Ojca, życie wieczne, *visio beatifica*