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Ecclesia in Europa: Biblical-Theological and Organizational-Structural Aspects of the Exhortation

Abstract: The present article discusses John Paul II's exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (2002), focusing first on the biblical sources of its systematics. In fact, the framework of the exhortation is defined by several passages taken from the Revelation of St. John; however, the text is also filled with other biblical references. The origins of the Trinitarian theological inspiration in the exhortation relate to the preparations for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, since each of the three years preceding the Jubilee was dedicated to one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. On the one hand, the exhortation expresses hope for the European continent, whose unique source is the person of Jesus Christ; on the other hand, it does not obfuscate the problems the Church in Europe faces, for instance, abandoning the sacrament of reconciliation and the moral principles of premarital purity, favouring new ecclesial movements at the expense of a parish pastoral model; excessive activism accompanied by a lack of contemplation. The exhortation welcomes the process of European integration and its organizational and institutional guarantees. Thanks to the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), this dynamic also finds a reflection in the Catholic Church itself. However, the exhortation takes a critical view of abortion and euthanasia, as forms of attack on innocent human life.

Keywords: Synod, exhortation, Europe, hope, Christ, Trinity, Revelation of St. John, Catholic Church, ecumenism, sacraments, pastoral care, parish, celibacy, liturgy, European Union, institutions

1. The circumstances surrounding the publication of the exhortation

Pope John Paul II's post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* was issued after the Second Special Assembly of the European Synod of Bishops. The first Synod took place in 1991, shortly after the fall of communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe; the second was celebrated in 1999 and inspired by the "magnet" that John Paul II saw as an extraordinary worldwide pastoral opportunity, namely, the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. It is thus no coincidence that the central theme of the first Synod of 1991 was the regained freedom in the former Eastern Bloc; it was celebrated under the motto "So That We Might Be Witnesses of Christ Who Has Set Us Free." Similarly, the entry into the third millennium was the inspiration for both the motto of the Second Synod for Europe, and the subtitle of the subsequent exhortation: *Jesus Christ alive in his Church, the source of hope for Europe*.¹

The Synod proclaimed that the celebration of the Jubilee and the entry into the third millennium were signs of hope; however, this hope seems to have been undermined in Europe. The synodal *Instrumentum laboris*, whose many suggestions the Pope incorporated into the final text of the exhortation, states for example that it would be necessary "to proclaim this message of hope to a Europe which seems to have lost sight of it."² At the time the wall separating the West and the East fell, Europe was full of expectation; less than a decade later one could notice rather an atmosphere of uncertainty and groping. By organizing the Second Synod on Europe, John Paul II wanted to offer a sign of hope and determination. It is worth noticing that Benedict XVI's theologically profound encyclical *Spe salvi* (2007)³ also dealt with the same theme; in fact, the focus of John Paul II's exhortation on the Church in Europe in many ways anticipated Benedict's encyclical. Nevertheless, the exhortation is not so much about an eschatologically oriented, that is, supernatural (theological) hope,⁴ but mainly about the hope in the lives and perspectives of the

¹ JOHN PAUL II: *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Europa"* (23.06.2003).

² *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 2, according to the "Instrumentum laboris 3." *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 1999 — Appendix, p. 3.

³ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 99 (2007), pp. 985—1027.

⁴ "Definition: *Spes est virtus infusa, qua certa cum fiducia propter omnipotentiam Dei auxiliantem expectamus at consecramur tam aeternam beatitudinem quam media ad eam consequendam necessaria*. Hope is an infused virtue, by which, given God's assisting omnipotence, we expect eternal beatitude with certain confidence, and strive for it as

people of one particular continent at the turn of the millennium. Thus it resembles the Constitution *Gaudium et spes* of Vatican II, written in the optimistic atmosphere of the 1960s: the will to embrace the whole world and convey it a message of hope, albeit perhaps in a somewhat reductive perspective.⁵ Precisely in order to grasp the atmosphere of hope credibly, the tone of the exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* is not unnecessarily negative, but rather realistic and sober: “With a *loving gaze* the participants in the Synod did not hesitate to look at the present reality of the Continent, noting both its light and its shadows.”⁶

2. The Revelation of Saint John as a biblical pattern of the exhortation

The extraordinary nature of the exhortation is also expressed by the surprising biblical framework of the whole text, that is, by the various passages taken from the last book of the New Testament canon, the Revelation of Saint John. Given the challenges the text presents for both exegesis and homiletics, it would seem rather unlikely that the Apocalypse could be the linchpin of an ecclesiastical document dealing with the current problems of the Church and the European continent, almost two millennia after it was written.⁷ Each of the six chapters of the exhortation uses a motto, that is, a short passage from the Apocalypse. However, those are not passages from the most dramatic, darkest visions, but rather from parenetic and hymnic utterances.

well as for the means necessary to attain it.” J. SKOBLÍK: *Přehled křesťanské etiky*. Praha 1997, p. 128.

⁵ “This positive attitude, however, lacks real theological depth. The document shows how the Christian expectation of the future age was here and there mixed with hopes of a technical or civilizing character, and no mention of sin was made in the draft. Indeed, this can be seen as a serious shortcoming, for an effort to build a better world which no longer asks about the intrinsic nature of the evil it seeks to eliminate is unrealistic and doomed to failure.” K. SKALICKÝ: *Radost a naděje*. Řím 1968, p. 240.

⁶ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 3.

⁷ “There are times when the Revelation is rather silent, and times when it begins to be better understood. If we have the impression that there is something darkly incomprehensible defying our understanding when we read it, it is good news about the times in which we live. If the Revelation begins to ‘speak’, we must only allow the text to tell us the good news. The apocalypse is good news for a bad time.” J. MRÁZEK: *Zjevení Janovo*. Praha 2009, p. 12.

The first chapter of the exhortation, "Jesus Christ is Our Hope," quotes the words of the Risen One from the opening chapter of the Revelation, where he lets himself be recognized by John and comforts him: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one."⁸ Just as the Risen One once addressed John, He now addresses Europe. He is a sign of hope for her, even though her population often finds themselves in despair: "This loss of Christian memory is accompanied by a kind of *fear of the future*. Tomorrow is often presented as something bleak and uncertain. The future is viewed more with dread than with desire. Among the troubling indications of this are the inner emptiness that grips many people and the loss of meaning in life. The signs and fruits of this existential anguish include, in particular, the diminishing number of births, the decline in the number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and the difficulty, if not the outright refusal, to make lifelong commitments, including marriage."⁹

The motto of the two chapters of the exhortation are excerpts from the letters to ecclesial communities.¹⁰ The task of these seven specific local communities in Asia Minor was to listen to what the voice, mediated by the written prophetic word, had to say. This is presented in totality, and thus applicable to the whole Church, not just to these individual local communities.¹¹ The second chapter, entitled "The Gospel of Hope Entrusted to the Church of the New Millennium," is introduced by part of a verse from the fifth epistle addressed to the church community in Sardis: "Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death."¹² Indeed, the point is a realistic view of the state of Europe, which has largely abandoned its Christian roots: "The serious situation of indifference towards religion on the part of so many Europeans, the presence of many people even on our continent who do not yet know Jesus Christ and his Church and who are not baptized, the secularism which poisons a wide spectrum of Christians who habitually think, make decisions and live, 'as if Christ did not exist', far from extinguishing our hope, make this hope more humble and more able to trust in God alone. It is from his mercy that we receive *the grace*

⁸ Rev 1:17—18.

⁹ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 8.

¹⁰ Cf. Rev 2—3.

¹¹ "John's letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor never existed as separate letters. Their whole was not created by collecting and combining John's correspondence, and the letters lack the usual letter form. All indications suggest they are a literary whole, intended to address not only the seven congregations together, but the entire church of their day." V. A. Žák: *Apokalypsa. Výklad knihy Zjevení Janova*. Praha 2005, p. 20.

¹² Rev 3:2.

and call to conversion.”¹³ The subtitle of the fifth chapter, “Serving the Gospel of Hope,” devoted to the *diakonia* to be served by the Church in Europe, draws from a letter of one of the ecclesial communities, namely that of Thyatira: “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance [...]”¹⁴ In this context, the Pope addresses the Church herself: “The appeal to exercise an active charity, which the Synod Fathers addressed to all the Christians of the European continent, represents the happy synthesis of an authentic service of the Gospel of hope. I now propose it anew to you, the Church of Christ in Europe.”¹⁵

The third chapter, “Proclaiming the Gospel of Hope,” is devoted to the Church’s proclamatory role. It is introduced with the call “Go, take the scroll which is open [...] take it and eat.”¹⁶ For many centuries, the Church spread the Gospel through its mission *ad gentes*; however, a paradoxical situation has now set in, with some of the later evangelized continents showing a greater vitality of faith than Europe itself. Europe is now in urgent need of a “new” evangelization. Here again the Pope exhorts the Church: “*Church in Europe*, the ‘new evangelization’ is the task set before you! Rediscover the enthusiasm of proclamation. Hear today, addressed to you at the beginning of this third millennium, the plea heard at the beginning of the first millennium, when a man of Macedonia appeared in a vision to Paul and begged him: ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us!’ (Acts 16:9).”¹⁷

The fourth chapter, entitled “Celebrating the Gospel of Hope,” is introduced with a quotation from the hymnic doxology where all creation responds to the voices of heavenly liturgy echoing from the earth: “To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!”¹⁸ Indeed, this section of the exhortation is devoted to the liturgy: “It consists in rediscovering the sense of ‘mystery’; in renewing liturgical celebrations so that they can be more eloquent signs of the presence of Christ the Lord; in ensuring greater silence in prayer and in contemplation; in returning to the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance, as wellsprings of freedom and new hope.”¹⁹ The Pope addresses the Church on the European continent also on this matter: “For this reason, I urgently invite you,

¹³ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 26, according to the “Final Declaration of the Synod of Bishops.” *L’Osservatore Romano* 4, 23 October 1999, p. 5.

¹⁴ Rev 2:19.

¹⁵ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 104.

¹⁶ Rev 10:8—9.

¹⁷ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 45.

¹⁸ Rev 5:13.

¹⁹ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 69.

*the Church living in Europe: be a Church that prays, praises God, recognising his absolute primacy, magnifying him with joyful faith. Rediscover the sense of mystery: live it with humble gratitude; testify to it with conviction and contagious joy. Celebrate the salvation which comes from Christ: welcome it as a gift which makes of you its sacrament; make your life a true spiritual worship pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1)."*²⁰

The theme of the third chapter is *martyria*, the witness of the ministry of the word; the fourth, *leiturgia*, celebration, worship; and, finally, the fifth, *diakonia*, the ministry of love. This order also has a logical sequence: firstly, the Word of God is proclaimed, then celebrated in sacramental signs, which leads Christians to acts of love: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."²¹ The remaining one is *koinonia*, the fraternal communion of Christians and their coexistence with all "people of good will" on the European continent. This is the subject of the sixth chapter, "The Gospel of Hope for the New Europe," accompanied by the motto of the final, eschatological section of Revelation: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven."²² Nevertheless, the sixth chapter of the exhortation deals more with fostering human coexistence on this earth and on the European continent. Indeed, the Church has always had something to say in this respect: "There can be no doubt that the Christian faith belongs, in a radical and decisive way, to the foundations of European culture. Christianity in fact has shaped Europe, impressing upon it certain basic values. Modern Europe itself, which has given the democratic ideal and human rights to the world, draws its values from its Christian heritage."²³

In papal documents a conclusion is usually manifested by a Marian climax, that is, commemorating or invoking the Virgin Mary.²⁴ The final part of the exhortation, "Entrustment to Mary," is dedicated to the Mother of God; it is based on the following verse from the Book of Revelation "A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun."²⁵ In fact, especially the Catholic tradition has imprinted the reading of the twelfth chapter of Revelation with a Marian seal, which

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ Mt 25:40. All the biblical quotes are taken from *The Revised Standard Version of the Bible: Catholic Edition*, available at <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.

²² Rev 21:2.

²³ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 108.

²⁴ "The Roman theologian Carlo Passaglia SJ has compiled a rich inventory of the extant designations of the Virgin Mary, especially concerning her purity and holiness, from all the available tradition. This tradition has also entered the papal encyclicals." H. M. KÖSTER: "Die marianische Spiritualität religiöser Gruppierungen." In: W. BEINERT, H. PETRI: *Handbuch der Marienkunde*. Regensburg 2004, p. 463.

²⁵ Rev 12:1.

in non-Catholic settings is far from being accepted. However, an ecclesiological exegesis of the passage about the “woman clothed with the sun” allows for a conciliatory view.²⁶ Indeed, the exhortation itself accepts such a conception: “*The woman*, clothed with the sun, in travail and ready to give birth (cf. Rev 12:1—2), can be seen as the Israel of the Prophets which gives birth to the Messiah ‘who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron’ (Rev 12:5; cf. Ps 2:9). But she is also the Church, the People of the New Covenant, subjected to persecution and yet protected by God.”²⁷ In the following section, the Pope moves onto a Mariological re-designation: “The woman who gives birth to her son also brings to mind the Virgin Mary, especially at that moment when, transfixed by suffering at the foot of the Cross, she begets her Son anew as the victor over the prince of this world. She is then entrusted to John who in turn is entrusted to her (cf. John 19:26—27), and thus she becomes the Mother of the Church.”²⁸ The Pope also refers to the living Marian veneration which has taken a visible root in Europe: “Thanks to the countless Marian shrines dotting the nations of the continent, devotion to Mary is very strong and widespread among the peoples of Europe.”²⁹

3. The Trinitarian inspirations in the exhortation

The celebration of the Second Synod for Europe was undoubtedly influenced by the preceding Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and their preparations. John Paul II had decided to dedicate each of the preceding years to one of the persons of the Trinity: the year 1997 focused on Jesus Christ, 1998 on the Holy Spirit, and, finally, 1999 on God the Father. The celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000 thus saw a concentration on the Trinitarian divine fullness. This was also reflected in the theological attention given to the Trinity by the Synod on Europe and in the exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*: “The Synod wished to set forth once more the figure of Jesus, alive in his Church, who reveals God as Love, a communion of

²⁶ “In Mary, the entire people of God is as if ‘concentrated’. However, the Reformers themselves held that everything said about Mary also applies to the Church and vice versa. This place should not thus be read ‘more Protestant’ than the Reformers did.” K. BERGER: *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*. Gütersloh 2001, p. 1026.

²⁷ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 122.

²⁸ Ibidem, no. 123.

²⁹ Ibidem, no. 124.

the three divine Persons.”³⁰ Although the traditional theological elaboration on the relations of the persons of the Holy Trinity based on metaphysical vocabulary is not the subject of reflection in the exhortation,³¹ the biblical expression meaning ‘communion’ (*koinonia*, *communio*) still has a sufficient communication potential. This model of unity in plurality also represents a model for the authentic construction of structures which would otherwise run the risk of becoming empty: “Jesus Christ is our hope because *he reveals the mystery of the Trinity*. This is the core of the Christian faith, and it can still make a significant contribution, as it has in the past, to the creation of structures which, inspired by the great values of the Gospel or measuring itself against them, are capable of promoting the life, history and culture of the different peoples of the Continent.”³²

In the exhortation, the Holy Trinity is conceived as inspiration of the processes that have taken place in Europe and continue until today: “[The Church] consistently desires to respect the legitimate autonomy of the civil order. Nevertheless, she has the task of reviving faith in the Trinity among the Christians of Europe, knowing full well that this faith is the herald of authentic hope for the continent. Many of the great paradigms of reference mentioned above, which are at the core of European civilization, have their deepest roots in the Church’s trinitarian faith. This faith contains an extraordinary spiritual, cultural and ethical potential which is also capable of shedding light on some of the more important questions discussed in Europe today, such as social disintegration and the loss of a meaningful point of reference for life and history. Hence the need for a renewed theological, spiritual and pastoral meditation on the mystery of the Trinity.”³³

The dynamic development of ecumenical relations among various churches in Europe the Pope attributes to the Holy Spirit: “We thank the Lord for the great and encouraging sign of the progress made by the ecumenical journey towards truth, love and reconciliation. This is one of the great gifts of the Holy Spirit to the European continent, where serious

³⁰ Ibidem, no. 4.

³¹ “In fact, the rejection of the old ontotheology means rejecting the game dealing with merely affirmative and non-paradoxical pronouncement of the divine. It opposes the diminution and glorification of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, if this old theology is applied reverently and no longer pretends to enunciate the divine, if it is iconic without ideology, and does not lead to the idolatry of the genius brain that constructs it all, if it is essentially apophatic, it is neither inimical to the eternal mystery of the Ineffable nor to the freedom of the divine image.” C. V. POSPÍŠIL: *Jako v nebi, tak i na zemi. Náčrt trinitární teologie*. Praha 2007, pp. 447—448.

³² *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 19.

³³ Ibidem, no. 19; cf. *Propositio*, 4,1.

divisions between Christians have arisen in the second millennium and which is still suffering from their consequences.”³⁴ According to the personal testimony of John Paul II, the Holy Spirit also encourages young people on their journey of faith: “I can still see clearly *the joyful faces of so many young people*, the true hope of the Church and of the world and an eloquent sign of the Spirit who unceasingly causes new energies to arise. I have met them during my travels to various countries and during the unforgettable World Youth Days.”³⁵

The Christological focus of the exhortation is centred on the Resurrection of Christ and the implicit hope for all Christians, the Church and the whole of Europe. Jesus is “the first-born of the dead”³⁶; the Church places him before the eyes of the faithful as the One in whom has already been realized what will be seen in us when he “change[s] our lowly body to be like his glorious body.”³⁷ However, already in this world Catholic Christians enjoy the means of supernatural life, especially in the sacraments. This is the theology of the Johannine scriptures, that is, the theology of the “realized” eschatology,³⁸ which is succinctly expressed for instance in the first of the Epistles attributed to John: “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.”³⁹ In terms of thus conceived active charity, the Pope mentions above all the “option for the poor” despite the fact that Europe is — next to North America — the richest continent in the world, given the available data: “The whole Church is called to *give new hope to the poor*. In the Church, to welcome and serve the poor means to welcome and serve Christ (cf. *Mt* 25:40). *Preferential love for the poor* is a necessary dimension of Christian existence and service to the Gospel.”⁴⁰

The problem of immigration in Europe was also a major issue already at the time the exhortation was issued; however, the situation escalated and many years later migration became a significant policy issue. The approach of John Paul II and the synod fathers of the time took seems balanced.

³⁴ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 17.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, no. 62.

³⁶ Cf. 1 Cor 15:20; Col 1:18.

³⁷ Cf. Phil 3:21.

³⁸ “The strong emphasis on the present arises from the elementary experience and conviction that the saving event in Jesus Christ is not a matter of the past, but is immediately present in its soteriological dimension, namely in the sacraments and in the action of the Paraclete. This spreads the temporal and spatial levels in John. [...] In the Paraclete, the heavenly Revelator also remains present in his communion after his exaltation, thus removing the essential distinction between heaven and earth.” U. SCHNELLE: *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*. Göttingen 2007, p. 703.

³⁹ 1 John 3:14a.

⁴⁰ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 86.

On the one hand, there is no doubt that “the phenomenon of migration challenges Europe’s ability to provide for forms of intelligent *acceptance and hospitality*.”⁴¹ On the other hand, the Pope says, “public authorities have the responsibility of controlling waves of migration with a view to the requirements of the common good. The acceptance of immigrants must always respect the norms of law and must therefore be combined, when necessary, with a firm *suppression of abuses*.”⁴²

In His Church, the Risen One is also re-presented in the act of celebration. In the context of the liturgy, the Trinitarian dimension finds yet another echo: “The liturgy must be experienced as the work of the Trinity. It is the Father who works in the celebrated mysteries on our behalf; he speaks to us, forgives us, listens to us, gives us his Spirit; to him we turn, to him we listen, to him we praise and invoke. Jesus does this for our sanctification and makes us partakers of his mystery. It is the Holy Spirit who works by his grace and makes us the body of Christ, the Church.”⁴³ Those who remove the element of mystery from the liturgy in undisciplined, arbitrary ways harm the very sacredness of the liturgy: “True renewal, far from depending on arbitrary actions, consists of constantly developing an awareness of the sense of mystery, in order to create liturgical moments of communion with the great and holy mystery of the Trinity.”⁴⁴ At this point, we see how necessary and indispensable liturgical and canonical discipline is, so that the mystery of God may be made manifest in the action of the Church. The practical alienation of the faithful from the liturgy presents yet another pressing issue: “Many of the baptized live as if Christ did not exist: the gestures and signs of faith are repeated, especially in devotional practices, but they fail to correspond to a real acceptance of the content of the faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus.”⁴⁵

4. The activity of the Catholic Church in Europe

As regards the sacrament of reconciliation for individuals, the Pope and the Synod Fathers were also aware of its disappearance of in many

⁴¹ Ibidem, no. 101.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Ibidem, no. 71.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, no. 72.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, no. 47.

Western European countries.⁴⁶ They tackle the situation with a call: “For this reason the Sacrament of Reconciliation needs to be revitalized in the Church in Europe. It must be reaffirmed, however, that the form of the sacrament is the personal confession of sins followed by individual absolution. This encounter between the penitent and the priest should be encouraged in any of the forms provided for *in the rite of the sacrament*. Faced with the widespread loss of the sense of sin and the growth of a mentality marked by relativism and subjectivism in morality, every ecclesial community needs to provide for the serious formation of consciences. The Synod Fathers have insisted on the recognition of the reality of personal sin and the necessity of personal forgiveness by God through the ministry of the priest. Collective absolutions are not an alternative way of administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation.”⁴⁷

The Pope also did not gloss over the fact that broad swaths of Catholics are abandoning moral principles in sensitive areas, especially as regards the education of young people to chastity: “With respect to *young people and engaged couples*, particular attention must be given to providing *education in love* through special programmes of preparation for the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony, as a means of helping them to live chastely as they prepare for this moment. In her educational activity the Church must also demonstrate a concern to provide guidance and support to newly-married couples after the celebration of their wedding.”⁴⁸ Abortion, too, remains a widespread evil in affluent Europe: “Together with the decline in the birth-rate, mention should be made of other factors that have obscured the sense of the value of life, and led to a kind of conspiracy against life. Sadly, among these factors must be numbered, first of all, the spread of *abortion*, also through the use of chemical-pharmaceutical preparations which make abortion possible without the involvement of a physician and in a way detached from any form of social responsibility. This is favoured by the fact that the legal systems of many European countries contain legislation permitting an act which remains an “abominable crime.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ “Is it not true that in many countries today, especially in Western Europe, we are witnessing a certain alienation, sometimes even disastrous, in relation to this sacrament? If, by God’s grace, the situation is different in your country, let us thank the Lord; however, let us work wisely to avoid the spread of this contagion any further, be it through the press, the media, schools or various meetings. Do not let yourselves be colonized; rather, be convinced apostles!” M. PIACENZA: “Spovedník — svedok Božej milosrdnej lásky.” In: *Kurz pre spovedníkov. Príspevky z prednášok konaných 6. — 8. septembra 2016 v Spišskej kapitule*. Trnava 2017, p. 21.

⁴⁷ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 76.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, no. 92.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, no. 95.

Moreover, John Paul II did not leave out some serious problems within the life of the Church itself. During his pontificate, new ecclesial movements (*movimenti*) came to prominence, and the Pope expected from them a new zeal and fervour in the service of the Church; however, their action should not overshadow the value of proper parish pastoral care. In addition, unnecessary divisions began to occur between the various movements and groups which tends to split the forces of goodness: "In this regard, the new movements and the new ecclesial communities must 'abandon every temptation to claim rights of primogeniture and every mutual incomprehension', advance along the path of more authentic communion between themselves and with all other ecclesial realities, and 'live with love in full obedience to the Bishops'. But it is also necessary for the Bishops 'to show them that fatherhood and that love which are proper to Pastors' and to acknowledge, maximize and coordinate their charisms and their presence for the building up of the one Church."⁵⁰ The parish pastoral model still remains indispensable: "In today's Europe too, both in the post-Communist countries and in the West, *the parish*, while in need of constant renewal, continues to maintain and to carry out its particular mission, which is indispensable and of great relevance for pastoral care and the life of the Church. The parish is still a setting where the faithful are offered opportunities for genuine Christian living and a place for authentic human interaction and socialization, whether in the situations of dispersion and anonymity typical of large modern cities or in areas which are rural and sparsely populated."⁵¹

The Pope also considered it necessary to affirm the willingness of the Catholic Church to continue to remain active in ecumenical relations, although even the exhortation did not completely conceal the problems involved⁵²; however, they had already been addressed more thoroughly in other contexts: "We give thanks to the Lord for the great and consoling sign of hope which is *the progress made in the journey of ecumenism* under the standard of truth, charity and reconciliation. This is of the great gifts of the Holy Spirit for a continent like Europe which gave rise to tragic divisions between Christians during the second millennium and which

⁵⁰ Ibidem, no. 29.

⁵¹ Ibidem, no. 15.

⁵² Regarding this issue, the Catholic Catechism for the German dioceses, approved by the Apostolic See, points out the following: "The motive may only be obedience to the will of Jesus Christ and the urging of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the path of the ecumenical movement does not follow pragmatic compromises or false irenicism which would obscure or dilute the truth of the Gospel and the purity of the Church's teaching. Rather, ecumenism presupposes renewal through prayer, conversion and sanctification." BERLINER BISCHOFSKONFERENZ: *Katholischer Erwachsenen-Katechismus. Das Glaubensbekenntnis der Kirche*. Leipzig 1989, pp. 247—248.

still suffers from their consequences. I am moved as I remember certain moments of great intensity experienced during the synodal labours and the unanimous conviction, also expressed by the Fraternal Delegates, that this journey — despite the problems which remain and the new ones which are emerging — cannot be halted, but rather must continue with renewed enthusiasm, with deeper determination and with a humble openness to mutual forgiveness on the part of all.”⁵³

A widespread scourge in the Catholic Church is excessive activism suppressing the Church’s own spiritual mission from which everything else has yet to unfold: “In a context where a temptation to activism is also attractive at the pastoral level, Christians in Europe must continue to *be a transparent image of the Risen Christ, living in close communion with him*. There is a need for communities which, by contemplating and imitating the Virgin Mary, the figure and model of the Church in faith and holiness, cultivate the sense of liturgical life and of interior life.”⁵⁴

The Pope was also concerned with constant attacks on priestly celibacy and demeaning its spiritual and pastoral value.⁵⁵ He deemed it appropriate to include a defence of the celibate way of life for priests into the exhortation: “Celibacy is esteemed in the whole Church as fitting for the priesthood, obligatory in the Latin Church and deeply respected by the Eastern Churches. In the present cultural context, it stands out as an eloquent sign which needs to be cherished as a precious good for the Church. A revision of the present discipline in this regard would not help to resolve the crisis of vocations to the priesthood being felt in many parts of Europe. A commitment to the service of the Gospel of hope also demands that the Church make every effort to propose celibacy in its full biblical, theological and spiritual richness.”⁵⁶ At the same time, John Paul II acknowledges that many priests are overburdened because of the shortage of vocations: “We cannot fail to see that the exercise of the sacred ministry today is fraught with many difficulties on account of the prevailing culture and the lessened numbers of priests, together with the increase of pastoral responsibilities and the fatigue which this can involve. Consequently, all the more *esteem, gratitude and support* is due to those priests who carry out with praiseworthy dedication and fidelity the min-

⁵³ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 17.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, no. 27.

⁵⁵ “Celibacy chosen for the kingdom of God — and priestly celibacy — is a state of love. It is possible only for those who have managed to integrate it into their spiritual life. It is an exclusive, permanent, total and radical choice of the one and supreme love of Christ.” Š. BORŽÍK: *Integrita duchovného povolania v premenách času Cirkvi*. Prešov 2002, p. 43.

⁵⁶ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 35.

istry which they have received.”⁵⁷ The need to nurture clerical vocations becomes even more acute: “Since the commitment of ordained ministers and consecrated persons is decisive, some mention must be made of the disturbing shortage of seminarians and aspirants to religious life, especially in Western Europe. This situation calls for everyone to be involved in an *effective pastoral programme of promoting vocations*. [...] To create a much-needed pastoral programme of promoting vocations, it is beneficial to explain to the laity the Church’s faith regarding the nature and dignity of the ministerial priesthood; to encourage families to live as true ‘domestic churches’, so that in their midst the variety of vocations can be discerned, accepted and nurtured; and to engage in pastoral work aimed at helping young people in particular to choose a life rooted in Christ and completely dedicated to the Church.”⁵⁸

5. Institutional aspects of European unification

In his exhortation, John Paul II devotes comparatively less space and attention to the purely institutional aspects of the Church in Europe, including the building of a political community of European nations. European institutions are not to be formed for their own sake, but for the good of the peoples who can thus come closer to one another. In this regard, the Pope refers to the statements made in the assembly hall when the visible signs of hope were discussed: “At the conclusion of their labours, the Synod Fathers described these signs in the following way: ‘We joyfully recognize the growing *openness* of peoples to one another, the *reconciliation* between countries which have been hostile and at enmity with each other for a long time, the progressive *opening up* to the countries of Eastern Europe in the process of seeking deeper unity. Mutual recognition, *forms of cooperation and exchanges* of all sorts are being developed in such a way that little by little, a culture, indeed a *European consciousness*, is being created. This we hope will encourage, especially among the young, a sense of fraternity and the will to share. We note as a very positive factor that the whole of this process is developing according to *democratic procedures*, in a peaceful way and in the spirit of *freedom* which respects and fosters legitimate diversity, encouraging and sustaining the process leading to the *growing unity of Europe*. We welcome with

⁵⁷ Ibidem, no. 36.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, nos. 39—40.

satisfaction all that has been done to safeguard the conditions and ways to respect *human rights*. Finally, in the context of the legitimate economic and political unity in Europe, while acknowledging the signs of hope seen by the attention given to the *rights and to the quality of life*, we sincerely hope that, in creative fidelity to the humanist and Christian traditions of our continent, there will be a guarantee of the primacy of *ethical and spiritual values*’.”⁵⁹

In hindsight, it must be said that the Synod Fathers were overly optimistic. Above all, it was impossible to even mention Europe’s Judeo-Christian cultural roots in the so-called European constitution, let alone invoke the divine assistance (*invocatio Dei*), as it is the case in the constitutions of various European states. The wish of John Paul II, expressed in his speech to the Office of the President of the European Parliament on 5 April 1979 and reproduced in the exhortation, has remained unheeded: “In the light of what I have just emphasized, I wish once more to appeal to those drawing up the future European constitutional treaty, so that it will include a reference to the religious and in particular the Christian heritage of Europe. While fully respecting the secular nature of the institutions, I consider it desirable especially that three complementary elements should be recognized: the right of Churches and religious communities to organize themselves freely in conformity with their statutes and proper convictions; respect for the specific identity of the different religious confessions and provision for a structured dialogue between the European Union and those confessions; and respect for the juridical status already enjoyed by Churches and religious institutions by virtue of the legislation of the member states of the Union.”⁶⁰

In fact, even the positive assessment of the unification process as a democratic process is not entirely appropriate, since excessive European structures, led by the European Commission, lack a direct link with and accountability to the electorate; thus they are often criticised for a “democratic deficit.” This is also due to the fact that, despite all the positives of the convergence of European nations, a single “European people” has not yet emerged, and the institutional bureaucratic component of the European Union is thus being shaped without the direct participation and democratic control of the citizens of the individual European states.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibidem, no. 12.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, no. 114.

⁶¹ “From a material point of view, the people (*dēmos*) is not just a collection of individuals or groups found in a given territory. Such a conception may have worked well in ancient despotisms or in medieval absolute monarchies, and it may still work today in dictatorial regimes. However, if we assume that the population does not consist of subjects but citizens who govern themselves through their elected representatives, it needs

Nevertheless, the participants of the Synod expressed their confidence in the action of the institutions, especially as regards the protection of human rights at the pan-European level: "The European institutions have as their declared purpose the defence of the rights of the human person. In carrying out this task they contribute to the building of the Europe of values and of law. The Synod Fathers called upon the leaders of Europe in the following words: 'Raise your voices in the face of the violation of *human rights* of individuals, minorities and peoples, beginning with the right to religious freedom; pay utmost attention to everything that concerns *human* life from the moment of its conception to natural death and to the *family* based on marriage: these are the foundations on which our common European home rests; [...] respond, with justice and equity and with a great sense of solidarity, to the growing phenomenon of *migration*, and see in it a new resource for the future of Europe; make every effort to guarantee young people a truly humane future with *work*, *culture*, and *education* in moral and spiritual values. [...]'."⁶²

The exhortation provides an overview of European institutions and makes no secret about the expectations the Church has of them: "In the work of creating a new face for the continent, *the role of international institutions* is in many ways decisive. Associated with and operating principally on European territory, they have left their mark on the course of historical events without being engaged in operations of a military character. In this regard I wish to mention first of all the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which works to maintain peace and stability, also through the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and through economic and environmental cooperation."⁶³ The OSCE proved its importance at a time when European countries in the former Eastern bloc were forced, through their participation in the so-called Helsinki Process, to sign up to human rights that they themselves did not respect. This process led, for example, to the establishment of the dissident Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia.⁶⁴

to be a cohesive community united by a sense of belonging, common identity, solidarity, patriotism, citizenship; in other words, a political nation." T. BŘICHÁČEK: *Unie blízka i vzdálená*. Praha 2014, p. 93.

⁶² *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 115.

⁶³ Ibidem, no. 113.

⁶⁴ "In the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the signatories undertook, among other things, 'to fulfil their obligations under international declarations and agreements [...] including those contained, inter alia, in the International Treaties on Human Rights, insofar as they are bound by them'. Czechoslovakia's ratification of the two basic international treaties and their publication in the Collection of Laws as international treaties 'applicable to Czechoslovakia' inspired a group of Czech dissidents to write a document called 'Charter 77'. Those

After briefly introducing the European Council, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission, John Paul II made a moral appeal to these institutions and to the European states themselves: "Together with the Synod Fathers, I ask these same European institutions and the individual states of Europe to recognize that *a proper ordering of society must be rooted in authentic ethical and civil values* shared as widely as possible by its citizens; at the same time I would note that these values are the patrimony, in the first place, of the various social bodies. It is important that the institutions and the individual states recognize that these social bodies also include Churches and Ecclesial Communities and other religious organizations. Even more so, in those cases where these already existed before the foundation of European nations, they cannot be reduced to merely private entities but act with a specific institutional import which merits being given serious consideration. In carrying out their functions the various national and European institutions should act in the awareness that their juridical systems will be fully respectful of democracy, if they provide for *forms of 'healthy cooperation'* with Churches and religious organizations."⁶⁵

However, the Catholic Church also creates structures at a pan-European level, as the exhortation also did not fail to mention: "There is need for genuine *cooperation between all the Particular Churches of the Continent as an expression of their essential communion*; a cooperation which is also called for by the new reality of Europe. Here mention must be made of the contribution offered by continental ecclesial bodies, beginning with the *Council of European Episcopal Conferences*. The Council is an effective means for exploring together appropriate ways of evangelizing Europe."⁶⁶ The Exhortation then goes on to recall some of the important competences this organism has: "An important role in the growth of this unity can be played by *continental organizations of ecclesial communion*, which need to be further encouraged. Among these a significant place must be given to the *Council of European Episcopal Conferences*, which is called on the continental level 'to provide for the promotion of an ever more intense communion among Dioceses and the national Episcopal Conferences, for the growth in ecumenical cooperation among Christians and the overcoming of obstacles which threaten the future of peace and the progress of peoples, for the strengthening of affective and effective

who signed the declaration had a profound impact on the November events of 1989." J. GRONSKÝ: *Dokumenty k ústavnímu vývoji Československa III. (1968—1989)*. Praha 2004, pp. 174—175.

⁶⁵ *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 114.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, no. 53.

collegiality and of hierarchical communion'. Together with the Council, acknowledgment must also be made of the service provided by the *Commission of the Episcopates of the European Community*, which, in following the process of consolidation and enlargement of the European Union, favours the sharing of information and coordinates the pastoral initiatives of the European Churches involved.”⁶⁷

6. Conclusions

The situation in the Catholic Church and in Europe has not changed much in the twenty years since the publication of the exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*. Benedict XVI, the successor of John Paul II, decided not to issue so many encyclicals and other Church documents as his predecessor did, since there is an extraordinarily rich treasury of those written by John Paul II. Indeed, it was his documents that Benedict XVI recommended for rediscovery and re-reading. What is more, the exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* has lost none of its relevance. This is a pity, because some of the shortcomings in the life and practice of the Church in Europe, pointed out by the Pope in the exhortation, could have been gradually and more thoroughly eliminated. There are certainly other negative sociological and political issues in Europe which continue to deepen and which the Church cannot directly influence; however, she has every right to address them. To sum it up, all of that suggests that it is still necessary to listen to the call to hope in Christ, that is, the objective this exhortation of John Paul II focuses upon.

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⁶⁷ Ibidem, no. 118.

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STANISLAV PŘIBYL

Ecclesia in Europa:
aspects bibliques-théologiques et organisationnels-structurels
de l'exhortation

Résumé

Le présent article examine l'exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* de Jean-Paul II (2003), en se concentrant principalement sur les sources bibliques de sa structure systématique. Le cadre de l'exhortation est défini par plusieurs passages tirés de l'Apocalypse de saint Jean, mais le texte contient également de nombreuses autres références bibliques. Les sources de l'inspiration trinitaire de l'exhortation remontent aux préparatifs du Grand Jubilé de l'an 2000, puisque chacun des trois ans précédant le Jubilé fut consacré à l'une des trois personnes de la Sainte Trinité. D'une part, l'exhortation exprime l'espérance pour le continent européen, dont la seule source est la personne de Jésus-Christ; d'autre part, elle ne minimise pas les problèmes auxquels l'Église en Europe est confrontée, tels que l'abandon du sacrement de la réconciliation et des principes moraux concernant la chasteté prémaritale, la préférence donnée aux nouveaux mouvements ecclésiaux au détriment du modèle de pastorale paroissiale, ainsi qu'un activisme excessif combiné à un manque de contemplation. L'exhortation accueille favorablement le processus d'intégration européenne ainsi que ses garanties organisationnelles et institutionnelles. Grâce au Conseil des conférences épiscopales d'Europe (CCEE), cette dynamique se reflète

également au sein de l'Église catholique. L'exhortation adopte également une position critique à l'égard de l'avortement et de l'euthanasie, considérés comme des attaques contre la vie humaine innocente.

Mots-clés: synode, exhortation, Europe, espérance, Christ, Sainte Trinité, Apocalypse de saint Jean, Église catholique, œcuménisme, sacrements, pastorale, paroisse, célibat, liturgie, Union européenne, institutions

STANISLAV PŘIBYL

Ecclesia in Europa: aspetti biblico-teologici e organizzativo-strutturali dell'esortazione

Riassunto

Il presente articolo esamina l'esortazione *Ecclesia in Europa* di Giovanni Paolo II (2003), concentrandosi principalmente sulle fonti bibliche della sua struttura sistematica. Il quadro dell'esortazione è definito da qualche brano tratto dall'Apocalisse di san Giovanni, ma il testo contiene anche numerosi altri riferimenti biblici. Le fonti dell'ispirazione trinitaria dell'esortazione risalgono ai preparativi per il Grande Giubileo dell'anno 2000, poiché ciascuno dei tre anni precedenti il Giubileo fu dedicato a una delle tre persone della Santa Trinità. Da un lato, l'esortazione esprime la speranza per il continente europeo, la cui unica fonte è la persona di Gesù Cristo; dall'altro, non nasconde i problemi che la Chiesa in Europa deve affrontare, quali l'abbandono del sacramento della riconciliazione e dei principi morali riguardanti la castità prematrimoniale, la preferenza accordata ai nuovi movimenti ecclesiali a scapito del modello di pastorale parrocchiale e un eccessivo attivismo unito a una mancanza di contemplazione. L'esortazione accoglie con favore il processo di integrazione europea e le sue garanzie organizzative e istituzionali. Grazie al Consiglio delle conferenze dei vescovi d'Europa (CCEE), questa dinamica trova riflesso anche all'interno della Chiesa cattolica. L'esortazione assume inoltre una posizione critica nei confronti dell'aborto e dell'eutanasia, considerati forme di attacco alla vita umana innocente.

Parole chiave: Sinodo, esortazione, Europa, speranza, Cristo, Santa Trinità, Apocalisse di san Giovanni, Chiesa cattolica, ecumenismo, sacramenti, pastorale, parrocchia, celibato, liturgia, Unione Europea, istituzioni