

JERZY SZYMIK
Uniwersytet Śląski
Wydział Teologiczny

Awake, my heart and think... Truth as a foundation for life

Obudź się, moje serce, i pomyśl... Prawda jako fundament życia

1

„O Lord God, You are God, and Your words are true” – king David prayed (2 Samuel 7,28, NKJV). „God is the truth alone, His words can never be wrong. That is why, in everything with an absolute trust, we can entrust ourselves unto truth and faithfulness of His word. The commencement of sin and the fall of man began with a lie of the one who tempted, that caused doubt in God’s word, His favor and faithfulness” (the Catholic Church’s Catechism /215). That is the foundation.

Today’s world is a place of a never ending debate, crossing worldviews, harsh polemics, brilliant analysis, deep visions, daring punch-lines, and the tolerance to hold to ones point of view with a respect for someone else’s. The truth of Christ can be sensed in this realm, it can be thought of, discussed and effectively talked about. Can it be that after – more less – two hundred years of multiplying modern refutes towards the Christian faith, living with the devastations done in human’s minds and hearts by such as Ludwig Feuerbach, Fredric Nietzsche, Carl Marks and their clever students, after Auschwitz, Katyn and Kolym, after space flight, and *in vitro* experiments – can a faith in Christ be still confessed, revealing at the same time its spiritual, intellectual and practical power? As the truth?

„The only truth is to learn how to be freed from unhealthy passion for truth” – we read in Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*¹. There is a need to resign from asking questions about truth – say those who take such stand – otherwise we will fall into the claws of fanaticism, fundamentalism, and the pride of those who consider themselves to have it all. That is the only way to save the world from the stakes...

¹ Cyt. za: J. Ratzinger, *Wiara – prawda – tolerancja. Chrześcijaństwo a religie świata*, tłum. R. Zajączkowski, Kielce 2004, s. 149 (tłum. własne).

But the true God cannot be the source of evil. „In Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5, NIV). You can’t divide a question about truth from the question about goodness: „if we are not capable to discern right from wrong, than we will lose the skill to know the truth, and in the consequence the ability to discern good from evil”² – teaches Benedict XVI. Jesus is truth, He will not take anything from you, but will give you everything. Do not be afraid of Him – repeats the Pope of the youth of all the world.

2

„What is the truth?” – asked Pilate. It is a question that comes from a seemingly sterile zone of tolerance. The effects? I have been listening to the description of the conversation of Pilate and Jesus, for many year now, with a taste of an internal disguise. This unpleasantness has for sure got its double bottom. I have an impression that the sentences are too penetrative in my own case; I feel as though a too strong light was shining straight in my eyes. I have been considering now for a while, why this conversation causes so much pain in me – and I am speaking of it very honestly. I think there are a few reasons, some of them are noble, but the main reason that the scene reveals, is a an uncovered weakness, that a man tends to instinctively defend himself from. It unveils our game with God, a primitive game, game which I am not hesitant to call this game a ‘play for a fool’. These externals, these layers of polished courtesies, this seemingly intellectual glitter, this mumble. These questions – shallow, pretending to be deep: „What is truth?”, „Are you the king?”, „Aren’t you going to answer?”, „Shall I crucify your king?”. Each one of those sentences mean something else that they mean. It is just a sham for the conversation, a classical falsity of a heart. Behold a scoundrel pretending to be a thinker.

Yet the truth of Pilate’s heart and intensions are simple: you will not stand in my way, convict, one of many; whatever I will do with you – save your life (gladly), flagellate or order to kill you – I will do it to save myself. To stay in the life’s mainstream (I am using this word intentionally, let it symbolize here the social transitions, succeeding times and growing aspirations). I would save you willingly, intriguing Jewish king, interesting interlocutor... If there is such need... I will not let myself be pushed aside – even if I was to kill you – thinks Pilate. Although aloud it sounds „What is the truth?”. Namely, Pilate, the truth is obvious: you will kill and in this way you will not allow yourself to be pushed aside. It will go off well. This is the truth about yourself.

² Tamże, s. 171 (tłum. własne).

3

A while ago, in the sixties, in Paris, in the times of civilization and the council acceleration, in the times of dynamic political and cultural transformation, Czeslaw Milosz paid a visit to a famous French theologian, father Marie-Dominique Chen. Father Chenu spoke with excitement: „Dear Sir, speaking of changes! The civilization is speeding like a coasted train and a man can't jump on it! He feels that the train is running away, but he can't catch it”. Milosz replies to it: „But why? Why to speed? Why to rush? Why to jump? Why to catch? In the name of what?”.

„What good is for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36-37, NIV).

Therefore each of us is to search for this game in ourselves – in your own heart and life. This Pilate's style move in our own blood: to do whatever, even as far as killing God, only for the sake of not losing the luxurious feeling of participating in one's own downstream of life.

I will not stay in the corner, I will push aside any anachronism virtues – modesty, decency, letting someone else in my place; I will catch up with the transition, modernization processes, with the new shape of the world, I will jump on that train, I will catch it – I will pay any price to do it. First of all, I will not allow anything to be taken away from me. Then later on, if it's only possible, it can also be God. Or the devil – adds the devil.

To this seemingly sterile realm of tolerance, in which the question „What is truth” being asked, at some stage sooner or later the crime enters: murder of the Only Righteous One. To resign from the question about truth will destroy the world. The question for truth is the question about the „to be or not to be” for the modern culture and civilization.

One more time Ratzinger:

„Today the disqualification of people, treated as naïve and arrogant, who claim to know the truth, has become a slogan of its self. It is believed that this kind of people are not open for dialogue, and at the same time they can't be treated seriously. It is believed that the truth cannot be „owned” be anyone. Everyone can only search for it. There is a need to ask: what kind of search is it then, that will not achieve its purpose? (...) the accusation for arrogance should be rather turned around: isn't the statement, that God cannot give us the gift of truth, cannot open our eyes, isn't it a real sign of arrogance? Isn't the statement, which says that we were born blind and the truth is not to interest us, an indication of contempt for God? Isn't considering us as convicts to roam in the darkness, a degradation of mankind and his longings for God? All of this leads to a realistic arrogance, which is based on the fact that we want to take God's

place and ourselves define, who we are, what we do, what we would like to make out of us and the world. To search and to know does not exclude itself³.

4

The Lack of possibility to divide of God and truth – God is truth, truth is God – is the foundation. It is the source of trust in the truth (about us, life, about reality), reality that life is not roaming in the darkness, purposeless journey to nowhere. And that also is the source of humility towards truth, because if God is truth – God as God – than you can't rule the truth or use it as weapon against anybody. You cannot create it nor own it, it is never „ours” (and „not yours”), it is God's. It's not us who own it, but it owns us. The questionable power of the intellect is not enough here. It needs to be fallowed. We need to search out within us and convert us this Pilate's move, this tendency. So that we can understand anew, who in the scene of the trial of Jesus is being right, where lies the truth – whether in the pseudo-intellectual mumble, or in Jesus' „yes, yes – no, no”; on the side of the one who will kill the other, to save himself, or the one who allowed to be killed to save others. To convert in us the Pilate's move.

So that we can understand, that there are prices, that are not worth to be paid; competitions, in which it's not payable to be part of, jobs, that are not worth to take; places to be, trains that we shouldn't jump on. Let them speed without us.

So that we can save, not our own positions and careers, not our own part in the *mainstream*, access to the fruit jams and connected with it luxuries and desires, but Christ. And in this way ourselves.

5

To the question: „Where do you live?”, Jesus answers his disciples: „Come, and you will see” (J 1:39). It can be understood in a fallowing way: it is not possible, to explain to you where I live, where I live (where is the resting point of my life, who am I, what do I want from you, to what am I calling you). Words and arguments, ideas and discussions – will not suffice. You need to follow me and only then you will see and understand, who am I and what I want from you; you will see and understand, who you are and how can you be fulfilled. You need to come from this seemingly safe and for a longer while a barren zone of agora and follow me. To follow me is the only possible way to understand who am I, who you are and what does it mean „behold! a man”.

„The Kingdom of God cannot be «brought» nor conservatively, nor progressively, nor evolutionally, nor revolutionarily, we can only open ourselves

³ Tenże, *W drodze do Jezusa Chrystusa*, tłum. J. Merecki, Kraków 2004, s. 74-75.

up for it through conviction and faith. Only in an external and internal poverty, helplessness and infirmity a man can stand before the divinity of God. He can only pray: «May your Kingdom come»⁴.

There are such regions of life and the human's case, where the sterile neutrality of debate will not suffice... A meaning, that man can come up with and dispute about, has no sense in the end. The rule is „from Beginning”, from the creation, the following: „the meaning, that is the foundation, that our whole existence is based on, cannot be created; it can be only received”⁵. The meaning cannot be produced; it can be only received and entrusted to. In Christianity the gift proceeds the act, following proceeds understanding.

6

A Silesian poet, from the baroque times, Andreas Gryphius, wrote in one of his poems: *Wach auf mein Herz und denke* – „Awake my heart and think”. Wisdom from knowledge differs, that it not only knows, but knows why it knows and what to do with what it knows. And one more thing: wisdom from its „nature” is more humble than knowledge. To think with heart, to love with mind – that's what the truth teaches.

That it's possible – we know from God. The bible defines God as good (Mk 10:18) and this kind of understanding reaches the top in the John's words „God is love” (1J 4:8). Truth and love are this same – that is *Veritas Dei*. That is the highest guarantee of the tolerance, that is the way to deal with the truth, that its only weapon is its self, and that is love.

7

„I am the way the truth and the life” (J 14:6). Jesus speaks these words, that are beyond time, then and now, to him and to her, to each one of us. „Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life” (J 6:68).

⁴ W. Kasper, *Bóg Jezusa Chrystusa*, Wrocław 1996, s. 180 (tłum. własne).

⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Wprowadzenie w chrześcijaństwo*, tłum. Z. Włodkowa, Kraków 2006³, s. 71 (tłum. własne).

