

Christological Guidelines

Conception of a Dynamic Criterion for Internal and External Identity of Christian Revelation in the Process of Inculturation

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The fundamental question of the reflection here proposed is: How and why the very different ways of Christian life and of religious, social and cultural experience, emerging in history or expected for the future, may be considered *verae formae christianitatis* – right, founded and legitimate modes of receiving and living the Christian revelation. We treat then of a system of external guidelines and criteria, which derives, however, from an internal criterion of identity of Christian revelation.

A criterion of this kind should be necessarily bound to the central and fundamental event of the Christian revelation – i. e. to the Paschal event of Jesus Christ. This bond may be expressed by the following formula: *Dei revelatio perfecta et confirmata est in vita ac morte et resurrectione Christi Jesu, effuso Spiritu Sancto. Dum autem pascha Christi Jesu vivitur – Dei revelatio recipitur.* The formula can be concentrated and at the same time *universalised* in the following mode: *Dei revelatio recipitur, dum pascha Christi Jesu vivitur.*

The expression *pascha Christi Jesu* should be understood in the following remarks as a synthetic formula concerning the whole event of Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God, as given to his Church to live it. Also whenever we say *to live the Paschal event of Jesus*, we mean the mystery of incarnation and salvation as still received by the Church, in all her trinitary and social, sacramental and historical (cultural) dimensions. No detailed description of these dimensions will be given.

The reflection here proposed consists of two parts. The first part expounds the conception of an *internal* criterion for the identity of Christian revelation. This is an attempt to define more precisely the main christological guidelines contained in the formula *pascha Christi Jesu vivitur*. In the second part we try to elaborate a set of *external* theological guidelines – useful for the evaluation of more practical problems emerging in the processes of inculturation of the divine revelation, as done in the Paschal event of Jesus Christ.

Both the internal and the external guidelines here proposed, should not be held as rules to be applied directly to answering particular questions or deciding on whether a new way of living the Christian revelation is true or not. They only draft a framework within any problem of this type which must be considered, and a point of reference, which cannot be ignored.

I. THEOLOGICAL CONTENTS OF THE FORMULA *PASCHA CHRISTI JESU VIVITUR*

The definition of the theological contents of this formula shall necessarily contain four references: 1' to history and to the proclamation of the pre-Paschal Jesus; 2' to the resurrection of the Crucified One as a constitutive event for the Christian faith (way of life); 3' to the *constitutive history* of the human encounter with the deed of God in Jesus Christ – normative for the Church of all times; 4' to the existing and possible abundance of ways to live the Paschal event of Jesus Christ in the Christian Churches of all times.

1. REFERENCE TO THE HISTORY OF JESUS AND TO JESUS' PRE-PASCHAL PROCLAMATION

Two essential observations are proposed:

1' The key-word of Jesus' proclamation – about the *coming of the kingdom of God* – contains at the same time a reference to all precedent history of God's nearness (a historical experience bound to a certain *culture of common faith* – the experience of Israel as the people of the Covenant), and a certain *criticism* of the same history. The entirely new dimension in the proclamation of Jesus consists in the bond between the nearness of the kingdom and his own coming. From the point of view of hitherto *culture of common faith* (which did not admit such a particular connection between a human person and the ultimate revelation of God) a bond of this kind could be considered and actually was considered a scandal by the religious authorities of Israel. No one but God himself can remove the tension and decide about the justice or injustice of the words and facts of Jesus (whether his words and facts were really wanted by God).

In this way, in the proclamation of Jesus (taken here *in contracto*) we can already find an outline of the Paschal experience: the tension between an existing culture of faith and a new reality, which surpasses the traditional imagination and concepts, but which will be verified and justified by the act of God's self-revelation.

2' The proclamation of Jesus *in extenso* was, therefore, his mode of *inculturating* the key-experience of himself and of bringing his followers to live likewise. The eschatological radicalism of his message and a criticism of any genuine but insufficient way of answering God's expectations (cf. Mt 5,21.22) – should be

considered an essential dimension of Jesus' own way of *inculturating* the message he proclaims.

2. REFERENCE TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE CRUCIFIED ONE AS A CONSTITUTIONAL EVENT OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

The event of the resurrection of crucified Jesus is the very and proper origin of the Christian faith as such. We find and hear in the Paschal event God's supreme and ultimate word not only about Jesus-Son (and through him about us) but also about Himself. Here occurs, therefore, the radical and complete self-communication of the Divine One to Jesus crucified and dead (and through him to us). In this becomes revealed the essence of God (love). At the same time this event reveals the definitive thought of God about every human person; who is loved, called to life and saved from death, a new creation thus taking place. We shall consequently recognise, therefore, that the entire contents of Christian faith consist in proclaiming and living *in extenso* what happened *in contracto* in the historical Paschal event of Jesus.

The expressions *in extenso* and *in contracto* are used here not only in a descriptive sense, but also a conceptual-systematic one. The *contractum* means not only a *shortened* contracted form but carries a certain sense of contradiction and defiance (*ex metu mortis contractus, in dolore contractus*), and can eventually be read as even *contra-actum*. The original event of the Christian faith is, therefore, an act *not comprehensible in itself*. It is a *contra-dictum* and *contra-factum* – a provocation of the human spirit in every dimension of its possible activities. We face here the same tension of which we had spoken in the context of the proclamation of the pre-Paschal Jesus – but brought to its ultimate consequence.

Every *forma christianitatis* born henceforth from the Paschal experience will be an attempt to reveal, to live and to embody in community the sense of the provocation encountered, when the crucified Jesus was found and proclaimed living. The constitutional and exemplar sense of all the ways to do so consists in such an essential bond with the Paschal event of Jesus.

The essential elements of this event are therefore: 1' its eschatological radicalism (the ultimate and complete human *yes* to God given in Jesus); 2' a sense of contradiction to most former religious and faithful expectations and rules – but, moreover, the sense of a superabundance of God's saving presence in human life and death (*effusio Spiritus*); 3' the openness of this event to any subsequent history – and the inherent possibility that every human history and culture participates *Spiritu eius praesente* in the Paschal mystery of Jesus.

For that reason, it shall be possible to judge and to evaluate every new form of Christian (ecclesiastic) life, emerging in history or expected in the future, in the light of the existing (traditional) forms of Christianity. But it is also possible to judge and

to evaluate the former traditions and all their contents in the light of new experiences of the Church still living the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.

3. REFERENCE TO THE *CONSTITUTIVE HISTORY* OF THE HUMAN ENCOUNTER WITH THE DEED OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST – NORMATIVE FOR THE CHURCH OF ALL TIMES

The prime experiences of Easter prolonged in the life of the apostolic Churches form the *constitutive history* of the human encounter with the revelation (the self-communication of God) which took place in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This *constitutive history* of the encounter with the deed of God in Jesus (the constitutive history of the Church) can, therefore, be read as an interpretation of the divine *provocation* communicated to us in the Paschal event of Jesus. The revelation, confirmed in the event of Easter, becomes interpreted after all by the new shape of common life, which emerges from the encounter with the dead and risen Jesus. The new shape has both verbal and sacramental dimensions (proclamation and Scriptures, as well as the assembling of the Church of Jesus, her ensuing common activities, and above all the celebration of the risen Christ). It is, therefore, up to the multiform community of the growing Church to find the *extensum* of various possibilities and the shapes in which Easter can be lived. The Christian communities expressed their fundamental experience in a diversity of cultural forms – it is sufficient in this context to point to the diversity of the original traditions of the Gospel. But the criterion of the identity of the growing Church still consisted in their belonging to the dead and risen Christ.

Since such a belonging to Christ will be described by the Churches of the New Testament above all as a sacramental experience (the re-reading of Scriptures which is really accomplished in the sacramental acts: baptism, the breaking of bread, reconciliation and the laying of hands), sacraments will be a privileged place for receiving God's revelation in the communities of the Church also in all her future history.

In view of subsequent theological concepts it is essential to comprehend properly the principle of belonging to Christ's *death and resurrection* as conceived in the framework of faith and life of the early Churches (see Romans 5-6 and 2 Corinthians 4-5). This principle becomes the basis for the re-reading of former theological concepts – such as creation and eschatological fulfilment of history. The reference to Christ's death *and* resurrection remains also essential for understanding, why the early Churches were so bold in re-interpreting the established religious tradition. Their attitude can be perceived as a readiness to *die* to a genuine but already insufficient shape of faith and life. The feeling of insufficiency can be seen and understood in this context as the consequence of Jesus' eschatological radicalism: the answer that must be given to God on following him, requires a radical renewal of the common life in all its dimensions. It is still the Spirit of Jesus that makes the Church capable of giving such an answer.

4. REFERENCE TO THE EXISTING AND POSSIBLE ABUNDANCE OF WAYS TO LIVE THE PASCHAL EVENT OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES OF ALL TIMES

The three references presented above trace a line which can be easily extended towards every new encounter of the nucleus of Christian revelation, as given in the Paschal event of Christ, with any existing or growing culture alien to the former Christian tradition. The point of identity still remains the same: to live and to realise in community the self-communication of God, which took place in the dead and risen Jesus – i. e. to live and to realise the Paschal event of Jesus Christ. The event of Jesus is open to every possible human history, and every subsequent encounter of this type is expected to retain a sign of identity the three above indicated dimensions: an eschatological character, a sense of contradiction to the existing genuine but insufficient human traditions, and a sacramental form of participation in the Paschal event of Jesus.

In this way we already see emerging the essential elements of a criteriology for evaluating every possible process of receiving the Christian revelation in the environment of a new human culture, using a *language* quite diverse from the languages, in which the mental experience of revelation has been expressed so far.

II. A DYNAMIC CRITERION FOR THE IDENTITY OF CHRISTIAN REVELATION IN THE PROCESS OF INCULTURATION

It seems possible to develop – on the foundation traced above – *descriptive*, *essential guidelines* and *specific guidelines* of the criterion for the identity of Christian revelation founded on the Paschal event. We shall also try to develop a dynamic criterion of catholic identity in the process of inculturation.

1. THE *DESCRIPTIVE* GUIDELINES

We propose here three historical reminiscences, which can be considered examples of a spontaneous application of the Paschal criterion for discovering new cultural shapes of Christian faith and life:

1' Culturally conditioned historical evolution of the image of Jesus Christ *universorum rex* (Pantocrator);

2' *Lucernarium* at the beginning of the Easter Vigil celebration;

3' Slavonic (Byzantine) religious painting (15th century – Andrei Rubl'ov).

The three reminiscences will be presented here in an outline, just to show the historically proved and ecclesiastically confirmed possibility of using a dynamic criterion of the identity of Christian revelation founded on the Paschal event.

Ad 1' Culturally conditioned historical evolution of the image of Jesus Christ *universorum rex* (Pantocrator)

– is an example of dialectics between a fundamental identity of *imago Christi* and historically conditioned changes. The cardinal moments of the evolution we have in mind are:

- a) the image of the One sitting on the throne (Rev 21,5) along with its entire eschatological sense;
- b) the theological and artistic vision of Christ the Pantocrator as it appears in the first great triumph of Christian culture in the 4th and 5th centuries;
- c) the image of Christ the Victor on the chariot of the Cross in Romanesque art;
- d) the gradually emerging modern and spiritually oriented image of Jesus Christ *universorum rex*, up to its liturgical expression in the feast introduced by Benedict XV (including the political and civilisation context of the origin of this feast following the first World War).

It is to be noted that in the subsequent stages of those processes, cultural elements far detached from the core of the Paschal event were incorporated. However, they were accepted and transformed inasmuch as was congruous with the experience of this event. It can, therefore be shown on at least one selected example that also negative criteria operated within the processes, enabling a more or less spontaneous rejection or correction of any fallacy in the course of development. One such example can be found in the failed attempt at inculturation of the image of Christ the Ruler, known as *Heliand*, created for the use of Germanic tribes. The text of interest here originated in Fulda, on the border of Franconia and Saxony, in mid 9th century, a time crucial for the reception of the Gospel by the Saxons. At the order of Emperor Louis the Pious, in a monastery whose abbot at that time was Hrabanus Maurus, a kind of new gospel was devised, presenting Jesus as a Germanic chieftain. The attempt, however, did not fulfil the hopes placed in it, and was eventually dropped. It is an instance of a situation when a basically right and systematically carried out project of inculturation was questioned on grounds of transgressing the limits of an intelligible union with the essence and message of the Paschal event of Jesus Christ.

Ad 2' *Lucernarium* at the beginning of the Paschal Vigil celebration

– can be seen as an example of an experiential, religious *and* cultural reference in creating a liturgical shape of living God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

The origins of *lucernarium* can be traced back to the ancient and common custom of lighting lamps in the household, which was not just a technical, but essentially a symbolic act. This custom, which already in Jewish culture received certain liturgical significance, developed further in connection with the liturgy of the Church, especially in the Gallic and Visigothic churches, where it became a frequent, even

daily practice. It was then adopted by the Roman liturgy as an exceptional rite performed only at the beginning of the Paschal Vigil, but its original symbolic roots were preserved (e.g. the striking of fire from a rock). In this specific role the rite acquired a new symbolism, as a visualisation (albeit somewhat theatrical at times) of the victory of the new light of Christ over all the darkness of this world. The *praeconium paschale* which emerged in this context was an elaboration of this symbolism. Initially, the hymn was composed individually by the deacons of the local churches in a relatively free manner, although following an already existing overall pattern. Eventually, a unified text was accepted in the Roman liturgy, theologically akin to the spirit of Eastern Christian tradition, but containing also other cultural references. One of the most characteristic references of this type is the *Virgilian* praise of the bee – the maker of *this column of wax*, the Paschal candle. This praise, once much extended, has been considerably contracted by the recent reforms of the liturgy of the Paschal triduum. As a result all the elements which could obscure the fundamental sense of the liturgical experience of the victory of Jesus Christ over darkness and death have been removed. The entire process is an excellent example of the *self-regulatory* effect of the reference to the Paschal event of Jesus, both in what pertains to the symbolism of fire, candle and light, as well as the accompanying proclamation of faith, and can be seen equally well in the content and the subsequent stages of enrichment and purification of the rite of *lucernarium*. This is the reason why it has been recalled here.

Ad 3' Slavonic (Byzantine) religious painting (Andrei Rubl'ov)

– can be seen as an example of creating a new theological language – with references to biblical images and to the changing socio-cultural and political context of Christian experience.

Rubl'ov's icons are an exceptionally successful combination of the established and already well-developed theological and cultural tradition, and a contemporary new experience, both individual (personal) and social. It can be shown how deeply the theological and artistic development of his paintings was influenced by the historical, political, social and cultural events in Russia during his lifetime. It can also be shown that this *trial by circumstances* brought to light elements of the already existing theological and artistic tradition which had so far been unnoticed, or not expressed explicitly, so that, for instance, the icon of the Holy Trinity painted by Rubl'ov deserves to be called a new theological revelation of the truth about the Trinity. It can finally be shown that also in this case the liturgical experience of Christ's Paschal mystery was the point of reference and at the same time the criterion for the integration of the former and the new cultural experience.

2. THE *ESSENTIAL GUIDELINES*

The key of the reflection here proposed is: Each new *forma christianitatis* emerging in history should be defined and judged by their reference to the Paschal event of Jesus Christ lived by the Church (by the Churches – in the Churches). The judgement shall be realised accordingly to a rule, which in their principal lines can be formulated as follows:

- a) *Approbatum et recipitur*: each form of human life and culture, which
 - 1' contains (explicite or implicite) an intelligible reference to the Paschal event of Jesus Christ;
 - 2' can be considered as corresponding to the fundamental and constitutive sense of the Paschal event – as it is lived (realised) today by the Christian Churches.
- b) *Reprobatur etiam si (via facti) recepta*: each form of human life and culture which contradicts or deforms the fundamental and constitutive sense of the Paschal event of Jesus Christ.

The first task, in this context, is to reflect on *the fundamental and constitutional sense of the Paschal event of Jesus Christ*, so that the issue can be useful for developing the criterion of catholic identity, sought here. We will do this in three subsequent formulations. In each one a theological position (a positive formulation) corresponds to a negative formulation, which indicates the limit of what is properly Christian.

1' The fundamental sense of the Paschal event – God's choice in favour of human life.

In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is realised a definitive election of every man or woman and of every human community to salvation (i. e. to their life – as it is desired by God and at the same time by the person or community involved). The election is absolute, at least in the sense that it cannot be surpassed by any other human choice or desire. The election, therefore, is not a relative one (historically or culturally) and can never be considered as relative. Every attempt to consider the bond between Jesus (both pre-Paschal and risen) and the emerging new view of the life of a human person or community as relative on the historical or cultural level contradicts the principle here formulated.

2' The critical sense of the Paschal event – death as a revealing event.

The death of Jesus on the cross can be considered an essential and *positive* event of God's self-communication. In the death of Jesus becomes revealed the ultimate goal of divine deed in human history – God's love to the end. The event of death – in all its sense of contradiction to every genuine but insufficient human desire of life – is to be henceforth accepted as a revealing event. Accepting *death*

as a revealing *event*, means not only accepting the specific message of dying Jesus (his love = sacrifice for (all) another's life), but also the fundamental message of God's self-communication. Consequently, no theological concept can be appropriately formed, when no reference to the revealing event of death as willed by God himself is made.

Even the concept of creation, as founded in the OT and furthermore as re-read in the NT, contains a reference of this type. It is so, because the dimensions of transition and passing (given in the images of breath and dust, but eventually also in the idea of creating by word) are important for this concept. Also when Paul's theology speaks about the Paschal event as a new creation, this not only does not contradict the former concept, but all of its features are recapitulated and brought to their full meaning. The same can be said about the way the concept of creation is used in the Acts of Apostles – at least that God the Creator reveals Himself in the Paschal event of Jesus (see Acts 4,27-31; 7,49-53; 17,24-31).

Now that a critical dimension of this kind – *crucial* in the genuine sense of this word – is essential for the Paschal event of revelation, being ready for *death with Christ* – i. e. at least for self-criticism (self-questioning) – must be considered a criterion of the fidelity of every new *forma christianitatis* emerging in history to the essence of the Paschal event as constitutive for the Christian way of life.

Such a self-questioning must not be, therefore, considered a deficiency of certitude or instability in the faith lived and expressed by the Church. Rather it must be directly willed by the Church receiving God's revelation at every time of this reception – i. e. in all the Church's history already experienced or yet to be experienced. Wherever the will and the consent to this kind of self-questioning is deficient, wherever the *death* (to a genuine but insufficient shape of life) is not accepted as an essential dimension of the faith lived by the Church, the fidelity to the revealing call of God becomes endangered.

3' The constitutive dimension of the Paschal event – the Spirit of Jesus dead and risen.

Let us note an analogy: Only God can decide about the justice or injustice of the words and facts of pre-Paschal Jesus (and he decided by raising Jesus from the dead), God himself decides in a definitive way about the justice or injustice of every new *forma christianitatis* (whether universal and complex, or particular and local). His decisions are communicated to us in the same way as He makes us know the justice of Jesus – by a believing community experiencing the active presence of Jesus. This is the source of the Church's faith in the revealing presence of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus dead and risen.

This kind of presence of the Holy Spirit is in a sense always *dialectic* – the Spirit speaks to the Churches by accepting and including their experiences in the discourse (cultures and shapes of life of the human communities in which the Church

subsists). At the same time the Spirit provokes a renewal of the former traditions, and what is more, their profound change. The outcome is a new reality, unforeseen so far, but still corresponding to the primary cultural patterns and at the same time essentially bound to the fundamental experience of the revelation in Jesus dead and risen.

Since the Church, as a human community, is aware of her own deficiency in controlling processes of this kind in all their dimensions, and since she remains convinced about her own perseverance in the faith of Jesus Christ, she believes that the Spirit of Jesus acts in her womb until the end of times, and perceives herself as subjected to the judgement of the Spirit. Whenever the decisive dimension in a judgement about a new shape of being Christians (or living together the Paschal faith) becomes a purely human interest (e. g. competition between ecclesiastic communities or institutions, the tendency to dominate over others or to impose one's own conviction, ignoring the Spirit speaking to all the Churches), the faith of the Church (her reception of God's revelation) runs the danger of losing the goods prepared by God.

Such are the three dimensions of the *essential guidelines* of a dynamic Paschal criterion of catholic identity in the processes of inculturation. The directive sense of the three dimensions can be understood only by applying them to situations, tensions and theological questions emerging in the encounter of the revelation accomplished in Jesus Christ with diverse cultural realities, in which the Christian Churches are to live the Paschal mystery. The *essential guideline* must, therefore, be completed by some more specific guidelines.

3. SOME SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

We propose here guidelines corresponding to three principal fields of specific Christian activity: theological-theoretic, ecclesiastic-social and liturgical-cultural. These guidelines are not immediately applicable criteria. We will only point to the necessity to formulate criteria of this type: not only for the assessment of doctrinal utterances (as it has been practised by the Church), but also for the assessment of ecclesiastic expressions on all possible grounds. We also try to indicate the principal points of reference by formulating appropriate criteria for the five fields named above.

1' Theological-theoretic level

No language and no (theological) concept, which may emerge in the course of history, can be refuted by principle. The verification of possible theological languages can be realised by examining their correspondence to the *constitutional language*, but also to the *definitive* language of the Church. *Correspondence* does not necessarily mean *identity*. The languages in which the Church of the first decades expresses her Paschal experience are not identical, but substantially corre-

sponding. It can be the Church's authority as such to decide, whether a correspondence of this type occurs. A definitive pronouncement in such matters belongs to the apostolic authority. But her pronouncement can be prepared by non definitive local and regional pronouncements.

The limits which it is necessary to respect in processes of encounter between the revelation as done in history and diverse human cultures consists primarily not in the conformity or nonconformity of a language or a theological formulation to the precedent languages or formulations, but only in a possible contradiction to the essential sense of Church's Paschal experience, or in an unacceptable deformation of the mentioned sense.

The sense of the catholicity and apostolicity of the Church must be considered in this context. She cannot renounce; a person called to her community. The Church cannot renounce even a *possible* (as yet unrecognised) contribution of every person called to the common Christian experience to be the Church of the dead and risen Jesus, in its manifold expression.

The expression of *the whole of man* responding with faith to the revealing claim of God (DV 5), can be perceived in this perspective not only in the sense of individual integrity of a person responding with faith through the intelligence and will. This expression can also be perceived in a social-universal sense. *The whole of man* means every human person and mankind as a whole, from whom God expects the response of faith. In this mode the personalistic concept of revelation involves a principal openness to the diversity of possible languages and human experiences.

It will then be possible to accept a state of missing identity of a theological language, concept or theological formulation to the *constitutional* language of the Church, as long as the expression here concerned remains judged as non-contradictory to the *definitive* language of the Church. Persisting in *not yet definitive* remains also a genuine and necessary characteristic of the process of receiving revelation – the fundamental reference of this process to the event of Christ dead and risen being even definitive.

2' Ecclesiastical-social level

Here too the fundamental Paschal experience remains the principal reference: i.e. God's choosing in favour of every human life (see above 2. 1'). In the context of the processes of inculturation let us also note here the criterion of non-competitiveness of ecclesiastical communities or institutions (see above 2. 3'). Reference of this type will only be possible through a deeper reflection on the apostolicity of the Church in relation to her catholicity.

On this level it is necessary to consider after all the critical sense of the reference to the Paschal event. Every form which is said to appear as the Church of the risen Christ should be judged from the point of view:

1' of the severity of His death;

2' of the Paschal joy, which still remains in the memorial of His death – and so becomes exceedingly profound.

This criterion should be applied above all to the modes of social communication in the Church – on every possible level. It is a specific feature of ecclesiastical life that it has created, practically from its very beginning, distinctive forms of verbal and non-verbal communication. First of all, what is meant here is the language of the profession and teaching of faith. But it also holds true for language taken in a broad sense, comprising the institutional and legal forms of Christian and ecclesiastical life, as well as elements of Church *decus* and *decorum*, including gestures, signs, objects, robes, places, etc. It should be noted that within the framework of inculturation processes, the language of the Church (Churches) in the broad sense undergoes a kind of dialectics: new cultural elements usually adopted in a natural way becomes gradually archaic, particularly in the liturgical context. In consequence, they might become autonomous and begin to function as independent sacral entities, which may lead to the loosening or even breaking up of their bond with the fundamental experience of the Paschal event of the revelation. The role of the guidelines discussed here is to enable the control and correction of such processes.

3' Liturgical-cultural level

Now that the history of the orthodoxy and orthopraxis of the Church celebrating and experiencing her participation the Paschal event of Jesus is at the same time the history of languages and cultures in which this participation could be expressed, all that has been said above about the openness to different languages and cultural experiences also remains valid on the liturgical level. The difference (and the difficulty) consists here in the missing definitive language of the Church celebrating the Paschal mystery (all the liturgies used hitherto being considered non definitive and reformable). There is also a necessity to find a criterion of identity of the Christian liturgy, regardless of the possible multiformity of liturgies. The essence of such a criterion can only be found in the correspondence between an emergent form of sacramental liturgy and the Paschal event of Jesus on two levels: the level of the central sign of identity of the act of the Church celebrating (sacramental matter), and the level of the profession of the Paschal faith (sacramental form). The *material* correspondence disappears, where reference to the fact (the action) of pre-Paschal Jesus cannot be recognised. The *formal* correspondence disappears, where the Paschal faith of the Church in its proper and definitive expressions cannot yet be recognised (faith in Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour – and/or the formula of faith in the divine Trinity).

In this context is also necessary to consider the sense of diverse cultural expressions of Christian faith. There is a certain analogy between the phenomena occurring on this level and the situation described on the doctrinal level. Here too

we can speak of a visible correspondence between a cultural event – a human creation, which considers herself Christian and the revelation of God in the Paschal event of Jesus (*qua* history of the dead and risen Jesus and *qua* the Paschal faith of the Church). It does not seem necessary to formulate at this point detailed criteria emerging from such an analogy for the various dimensions of creativity and for different types of Christian art. But one does observe a certain need of criteria of this kind, at least analogous to the criteria used for judging doctrines. There can exist (and often really does exist), also in the field of Christian art officially presented in the churches, a type of infidelity (or of a *haeresis latens* in the images of the salvation and the presence of God), which can obscure and deform the Paschal faith of the Church.

CONCLUSION

The main aim; of the reflection proposed here was to point to the fundamental event of Christian revelation – the Paschal event of Jesus Christ – in a manner that can be useful for resolving problems of Christian identity emerging in the process of inculturation. It is not possible to indicate rules, criteria or directives to be applied directly in all possible cases of this type. But it is possible to have a dynamic basis for every decision to be made in this field: a permanent dialogue between the today and the past of Christian culture, realised on all levels of ecclesiastical life and constantly judged by reference to the act of God in Jesus crucified and risen.