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FROM THE ARK OF YAHWEH  
TO THE CHURCH  
OF THE TRIUNE GOD

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## INTRODUCTION

**I**t should be remembered that the Church is a mystery. Not only because it encompasses heavenly and earthly reality, but also because it expresses in itself the Triune God that reveals and that gives, as well as man who pursues and accepts Him. However, this *mysterion* is in part accessible by the human nature of the eternal Son of God, who is Jesus Christ. The invisibility of the Holy Trinity has been given its historical concretisation in the incarnation event, whose study cannot be separated from the history of Israel and that of the contemporary Church.

The history of the Hebrews is a religious one, with which the emergence of the Church of the Holy Trinity is inseparably tied. This is why we speak of its five stages of emergence—embedded into a holistic perspective of the redemption and salvation of man and the entire world—namely: 1. the timeless idea of God the Father, 2. continuation in the Old Covenant, 3. establishment by Jesus (a shift from the notion of the Kingdom of God to the human-divine ecclesial reality), 4. the coming of the Pentecost, 5. the current pursuit of eschatological fulfilment.

Correct ecclesiology emerges from an in depth study of both the Old and the New Testament. It is therefore not about the sole use of the historical and critical method's achievements,

but also spiritual meditation over the entire Scripture and its ecclesial interpretation. Only in this understanding of biblical exegesis can the beginnings of the Church be found. The literal and historical study of the Scripture is insufficient to justify the emergence of Jesus' congregation. We must also ceaselessly renew our understanding of the very beginnings of the Church using up-to-date hermeneutics and transfer them to contemporaneity, so that the essence and mission of the Church shall not be falsified in the eyes of Christians themselves in a period of the liberal and Neo-Marxist conscious of the Old Continent's inhabitants. Through this, the Church shall make itself genuine in its internal understanding in the community of believers and in the face of the surrounding world. The Risen Lord encourages the Church today as He Himself encouraged Paul of Tarsus: 'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome' (Acts 23:11 New International Version).

The Church that exists today, and which has found itself in a completely new cultural, societal and political situation, must renew itself at its sources. This is not about a nostalgic or dream like return to the roots, but about being faithful to and continuing Divine Revelation. In the twenty first century, the Church does not need to be identical to the one from the first century, but should have its identity. The excessive stress placed on the eschatological dimension of interpreting Jesus' message, which is featured so prominently in certain Catholic and Protestant theories of Western Europe, does not appear to be fully satisfactory. Likewise, the perspectives of Protestant theologians in European conditions—who wish to see the Church as merely an ordered structure and its social teachings—are also unsatisfactory. The destruction or the



dimming of the Marian character in German speaking churches has excessively pronounced their institutionality. Visions of the Church in America, where prophecy, the charism and freedom are highlighted and set against biblical priesthood, worship and institution, are also going the wrong way. Similarly, confinement to the spiritual aspects of His mission, as practiced by Orthodox theologians, is not fully integral. In turn, seeing a moral message in Christ's Church, which is excessively accentuated by theologians from Central and Eastern Europe, reduces its mission. Jesus did not confine Himself to preaching about the apocalypse, nor was He a social revolutionary that stopped at the spiritual or moral sphere. Every sciolist who cuts out honeycombs from the hive of theology dies from the stings of its bees.

We are dealing with liberal hermeneutical individualism in the case of most of these not necessarily correct theological postulates. The essence and teaching of Jesus cannot be reached without accounting for the very beginning of the Church and the communal interpretation of His words, gestures and actions, and in separation from understanding synagogue Judaism. The history and impact of Jesus and His Church should therefore be read in the light of the Old and New Testament, as well as throughout the entire development of the ecclesial faith of the community of believers. Furthermore, understanding the Church should not be confined solely to the Bible, but it should also be referenced to the actions of the Holy Spirit, which continually brings Christians into the novelty of their faith. The apostle admonished the original church thusly:

'We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning

star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Paul 1:19–21).

The first correct hermeneutical criterion, based on the conscious of the Church—as observed by J. Ratzinger—is the continuity and unchanging nature of its mission. Furthermore, the second criterion is the discrete removal of elements that are not of the Revelation, and that are sometimes alien or even hostile to it, and are promoted by various scholars and are a form of this or other temporary ideology.<sup>1</sup>

We should also remember that the novelty of the Church stems from liturgy, ceaselessly practiced in the space of the believers. It is during liturgy that the Church's existence and renewal takes place. It is through prayer, seen as continued contact with the Holy Trinity, that the discovery and strengthening of the bonds with the Saviour takes place. We are to form not our Church, but the Church of the Triune God. This results from prayer, humility and service to others. Knowledge merely creates religiology, yet theology requires knowledge which stands in the salutary service of faith towards the ecclesial community. 'For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God' (1 John 5:4–5).

*Fr Andrzej Napiórkowski*

Krakow, Mary, Benefactress of the Faithful 2019

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Vom Wieder auffinden der Mitte. Grund orientierungen*, (second ed.), Freiburg–Basel–Wien 1998, pp. 127–130.