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Preliminary communication

MARTYRDOM AS A SIGN OF IMITATION OF JESUS CHRIST – A TESTIMONY TO AUTHENTIC LIFE

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Abstract

The article starts from the basic understanding of martyrdom in the image of Jesus Christ, which is the model of every martyrdom. Therefore, it is quite understandable that, in their own deaths, martyrs join Christ the Pastor, conforming themselves and celebrating God with the testimony of their own lives for the truth. We shall rely on some of the thoughts and ideas in understanding the meaning and the significance of martyrdom as found in certain elements of the theology of martyrdom in the Bible, in the texts of the Second Vatican Council and St. John Paul II.

The fundamental question is: What is martyrdom founded on? The answer is that it is founded on the death of Jesus, on his supreme sacrifice of love, consummated on the Cross, so that we would have eternal life (cf. John 10: 10). Christ is the suffering servant (cf. Isaiah 52: 13-15) who gave himself as a ransom for many (cf. Matthew 20: 28). In this sense, the theology of martyrdom or the theology of the cross gives a deeper meaning to Christians suffering and death reflected in the image of Jesus Christ, the perfect example of guiltless and innocent suffering.

It is precisely from the perspective of understanding the life of Christ that we can assert that martyrs are those who follow the Lord to the very end, freely accepting death for the salvation of the world in a supreme test of love and faith (cf. LG, 42). It is only in this context that it becomes clear why martyr-witnesses are the most excellent witnesses of the authentic life permeated with Jesus Christ.

Key words: Jesus Christ, image of God, imitation, martyrdom, the humankind

Introduction

The history of the Church has been deeply marked by martyrdom in the name of fidelity to Christ, and we see this especially in the proclamations of martyrs

during the pontificates of the Roman bishops – popes,¹ as well as in particular churches.² Martyrs represent in the most concise way the fundamental meaning of suffering and pain. As their bodies suffer, they conform themselves to the suffering Christ who had already laid down his life for all people. From this fundamental event of the cross of Christ it becomes clear that martyrs do not live for themselves nor within themselves, but in Christ the Saviour and Redeemer.

This article consists of four parts and focuses on the meaning and significance of martyrdom from a Christocentric perspective that essentially marks the life and death of martyrs. It attempts to present the Christian understanding of martyrs. A life given out of love for Christ is a manifestation of the most sublime and radical call to imitation. Martyrdom thus represents a fundamental theological category and enables the hermeneutics of understanding the meaning and significance for human life. In the final part, we also show the importance of the demands of the truth in relation to society, the individual, the past, the present and the future, with the insight that the light of eternity already reflects the rays of hope and sense of martyrdom.

1. Martyrdom and imitation – meaning and significance

The term martyr is originally of Greek origin (Greek *mártys*, *márturos* – witness, martyr, sufferer, victim, casualty) and primarily denotes a witness.³ Even the philosophical conception of the relationship between morality and self-sacrifice contains the idea of dying in the name of ideals in a committed ethic of life.⁴

¹ Cf. Robert J. BARRO – Rachel M. McCLEARY, Opening the fifth seal: Catholic martyrs and forces of religious competition, in: *American Enterprise Institut – Economics Working Paper*, 1 (2020), 1-37, available at: <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Barro-McCleary-Opening-the-Fifth-Seal-WP.pdf> (Accessed: 1.IX.2021).

² Cf. Josip GRBAC – Silviya IVANČIĆ, Moralno promišljanje o mučeništvu blaženoga Miroslava Bulešića, in: *Riječki teološki časopis*, 22 (2014) 1, 67-88.

³ »A martyr (Greek: μάρτυς: witness) is a person who, in a theological context, sacrifices his or her own life out of devotion to his or her religious affiliation, accepting the suffering of torture and violent death. While the Greek and Latin terms (*martyr*) refer to the testimony of faith, the Croatian term (*mučenik*) emphasizes the external sign (torment) of that testimony, which partly obscures the meaning. Martyrdom (μαρτύριον: testimony) in Christianity, witnessing to the faith professed by the believer by enduring physical suffering and death in the name of the faith.« In: Adalbert REBIĆ (ed.) *Mučenic, mučeništvo, OPCI RELIGIJSKI LEKSIKON*, Zagreb, 2000, 607-608; Another interesting study on the theology of martyrdom: cf. Thomas SCHIRRMACHER, Towards of Theology Martyrdom, in: https://www.thomasschirrmacher.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Towards_a_Theology_of_Martyrdom.pdf (Accessed: 1.IX.2021).

⁴ Cf. George KATEB, Morality and Self Sacrifice, Martyrdom and Self-Denial, in: *Social Sciences*, 75 (2008) 2, 353-394.

The Christian understanding of the concept and content of martyrs reveals a triptych in relation to martyrdom, violence and dignity.⁵ Furthermore, in Christianity, this term denotes those who remain faithful to Christ even at the cost of their lives.⁶ The term confessor (*confessores*) later came into use. In order for someone to bear the title of a Christian martyr, clear proof is needed that the person was killed out of hatred of religion (*in odium fidei*). Another important criterion is unwavering witnessing to Christ in the moment of death.⁷ We can therefore say that torment and suffering enter the interpretation of the meaning of martyrdom and martyrdom as testimonies.⁸ By suffering and enduring death, injustice and violence, martyrs bear witness to the truth.⁹ Martyrs are witnesses to the greatest love, following Christ until the point of giving their own lives up and hence testifying to the truth of the gospel.¹⁰ The essential aspects that form the framework for understanding Christian martyrdom can be summarized in four fundamental characteristics:

- 1) *Christological perspective* – martyrs follow the example of Christ by giving their own lives for their brethren as an explicit sign of love.
- 2) *Church dimension* – martyrdom takes place in the Church, which in its nature reflects the imprinted image of Christ (*forma Christi*).
- 3) *The gift of life* – martyrs, as an expression of the profound imitation of Christ, bestow upon themselves the strength of their own convictions and confirm that love is capable of giving itself for others.

⁵ Cf. Alease BROWN, Martyrdom, violence and dignity, in: *Estudios Teológicos*, 59 (2019) 1, 133-151; Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, Religious Freedom for the Good of all Theological Approaches and Contemporary Challenges, 81, available at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20190426_liberta-religiosa_en.html (Accessed: 2.IX.2021).

⁶ Cf. Servais PINCKAERS, *The Spirituality of Martyrdom. To the Limits of Love*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2000, 39-63; cf. Todd M. JOHNSON – Gina A. ZURLO, Christian Martyrdom as a Pervasive Phenomenon, in: *Society*, 51 (2014) 6, 681-684; Cf. Paul MIDDLETON, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*, T&T Clark, New York, 2006.

⁷ Cf. Božo GOLUŽA, Mučeništvo kao jedno od obilježja prvih kršćanskih vremena, in: *Hercegovina*, 5 (2019), 43-44.

⁸ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1994, 18.

⁹ Cf. FRANCIS, *Maiorem hac dilectione – On the offer of Life. Apostolic letter issued Motu Proprio* (11 July 2017), available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio_20170711_maiorem-hac-dilectionem.html (Accessed: 10.IX.2021).

¹⁰ Cf. Sławomir NOWOSAD, Christian Martyrdom Never Expires: Some Theological and Ethical Aspects of Obedience *Usque ad sanguinem*, in: *Seminare*, 39 (2018) 4, 22-25.

- 4) *The truth of the Gospel* – martyrs do not die by themselves – their deaths are the result of persecution. By their death they bear witness to the faith in the Risen One, which is the ultimate truth and the fulcrum of their lives and existence.¹¹

The Old Testament Scriptures¹² bring us the idea of martyrdom that we can find across various books, especially the book of Maccabees.¹³ At the heart of understanding the idea of martyrdom lies the notion of a righteous who testifies to the Law of God and the faith of the forefathers in the God of Israel.¹⁴ We find a special understanding of sacrifice and its meaning in the persona of the »Servant of Yahweh« (cf. Isaiah 42:6; 49:8) who is presented as a perfect example of a martyr – with his death he brings liberation from evil and violence that cause death and martyrdom.¹⁵

The Scriptures of the New Testament reveal and show us the meaning of suffering with the persona of Jesus Christ.¹⁶ Thus in the Gospels we find witness speeches (cf. Mark 14: 55-56, 59, 63; Matthew 16: 24-27; Luke 4: 22; Acts 1: 8). In line the very idea of imitation as presented to us by the Gospel, we can state that, at its core, it represents faith in Christ Crucified.¹⁷ The foundation of the understanding of martyrdom as a testimony in a theological-anthropological key expresses the conviction and witnessing for the truth of the Christian faith and the Church.¹⁸ Martyrdom thus manifests the power

¹¹ Cf. Rino FISICHELLA, *Mučeništvo*, u: ENCIKLOPEDIJSKI TEOLOŠKI RIJEČNIK, Zagreb, 2009, 687.

¹² Cf. Hector Ricardo FRANCISCO, *The Old Testament in the First Discourse on Martyrs*, in: *Scrinium*, 17 (2021) 1, 110-133.

¹³ Cf. Marie-Françoise BASLEZ, *The Origin of the Martyrdom: from the Book of Maccabees to the First Christians*, in: Géza G. XERAVITIS – József ZSENGELLÉR (eds.), *The Books of the Maccabees: History, Theology, Ideology. Papers of the Second International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Pápa, Hungary, 9-11 June 2005*, Brill, London – Boston, 2007, 113-130.

¹⁴ Cf. Darko TEPERT, *Starozavjetna teologija žrtve i ideja mučeništva*, in: Dražen ŽIVIĆ (ed.), *Victor quia victima. Nada za Hrvatsku*, Zagreb – Vukovar, 2012, 67-68; Cf. Adalbert REBIĆ, *Vjera u prekogrobni život u Starome zavjetu i kasnom židovstvu. Starozavjetna (individualna) eshatologija*, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 52 (1982) 2, 350-362.

¹⁵ Cf. Jean GALOT, *Soteriologija. Isus osloboditelj*, Đakovo, 1997, 113-115. For more on the understanding of Old Testament martyrdom, see: Nikola BIŽACA, *Zapažanja o teologiji mučeništva*, in: *Služba Božja*, 49 (2009) 251-272.

¹⁶ Cf. Nikola BIŽACA, *Zapažanja o teologiji mučeništva*, 252-257.

¹⁷ Cf. Tomislav SMILJANIĆ, *Mučeništvo – svjedočanstvo za istinu evanđelja. Teološko-moralne implikacije mučeništva u svjetlu kristocentričnog ustrojstva kršćanske vjere*, in: Danijel PATAFTA – Nedjeljka s. Valerija KOVAČ (eds.), *Sv. Nikola Tavelić – njegovo vrijeme i trajna poruka. Zbornik radova četvrtog međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa »Franjevački velikani« o sv. Nikoli Taveliću, Šibenik, 20. – 21. listopada 2017.*, Zagreb, 2019, 157-159.

¹⁸ Cf. Veronika s. Nela GAŠPAR, *Teološko poimanje mučeništva*, in: Mile BOGOVIĆ – Josip DUKIĆ – Jure KRIŠTO – Miljeno STOJIĆ – Mate RUPIC (eds.), *Mučeništvo i mučenički*

of witnessing that belongs to the very essence of the Church. Driven by the grace that is God's gift, witnessing and martyrdom express the most authentic path of Jesus Christ.¹⁹ If faith in Jesus Christ signifies a lifelong path and if it leads out of the sins of the world (cf. Hebrews 11, 8:22 with 13:13) and introduces communion with God, then it is evident that witnessing to Jesus Christ signifies a decisive orientation towards Christ who has already passed the path of martyrdom, suffering and death, and stands before us as the one who leads us to God.²⁰ Therefore, believers, when imitating Jesus Christ, do not hopelessly strain their hope, as that would imply they would need to draw their strength of imitation from themselves, but receive the power of following and suffering for the truth of the faith from Christ.²¹ They follow the path of Christ and let Christ take them into the communion of life on this path of witnessing.²² It is therefore quite understandable that the path of imitation and witnessing to the Crucified Christ sums up the theological life of faith, hope and love.²³ By accepting faith, we accept God and the word of God given to us in Christ.

The theme of imitation is rather decisively presented in the Gospels and is considered to be their focal point.²⁴ Imitation is extremely demanding and even presupposes a violent death (cf. Luke 21: 12-19). Therefore, to imitate Jesus Christ means to accept the destiny that Christ the Lord himself went through, which implies trials and persecutions (cf. Matthew 10: 17-39).²⁵

Observing the early history of the Church we shall notice that it abounds in martyrs²⁶ who gave their lives for bearing witness to Jesus Christ in a time of severe and terrible persecution. As Luke the Evangelist testifies, the martyrdom of St. Stephen the First Martyr (cf. Acts 9: 55-60) happened as early as the apostolic age. It was precisely Stephen the Martyr who is described as a faithful witness of Jesus Christ, as his martyrdom is described following the

tragovi kroz Hrvatsku prošlost. Zbornik radova s međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa održanog u Zagrebu 13. ožujka 2014. godine, Zagreb, 2015, 43-50.

¹⁹ Cf. Karl RAHNER, Martyrdom, in: Karl RAHNER (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology. The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1975, 937-939.

²⁰ Cf. Rudolf SCHNAKENBURG, *Osoba Isusa Krista u četiri evanđelja*, Zagreb, 1997, 44-49.

²¹ Cf. Michael FIGURA, Martyrdom and the Following of Jesus, in: *Communio*, 23 (1996) 1, 101-109.

²² Cf. Thomas SÖDING, *Pogled u prošlost radi budućnosti*, Zagreb, 2004, 103-105.

²³ Cf. Ivan ANTUNOVIĆ, *Teologalne kreposti*, Zagreb, 2020, 84-101.

²⁴ Servais PINCKAERS, *The Spirituality of Martyrdom*, 40-44.

²⁵ Cf. Walter KASPER, *Isus Krist*, Split, 1995, 119-120.

²⁶ Cf. Alan VINCELETTE, On the Ethics and Theology of Martyrdom: Lessons from the Early Christians, in: *Cultural Encounters*, 15 (2020) 2, 5-37.

example of Jesus Christ whom he imitated up until his own death.²⁷ We also know that as early as the Primitive Church of Jesus Christ, in the period from the first to the third century, martyrdom was the main form of bearing witness to the faith, as martyrs represented role models of the Christian life and the imitation of Jesus Christ.²⁸ Among these martyrs, St. Ignatius of Antioch († 107), St. Polycarp († 155) and St. Justin († before 167) particularly stand out.²⁹ A martyr's death thus becomes the most sublime form of bearing witness. The very meaning of the term implies the following: »A witness is someone who does something, resolutely and consciously, someone who 'bears witness'. And does so for someone, in favour of someone. 'A witness' and 'bearing witness' are by their nature active words and involve one personal relationship with another person or persons. A martyr is a person who suffers, endures something, someone who is tortured and tormented«.³⁰

At the heart of Christian witnessing and imitation is the person of Jesus Christ, who determines the relationship between faith and love. Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God speaks to us through the Gospels, which are a clear witness.³¹ It is also important to point out that the path of imitation and witness clearly sets the norm of faith inferring that Christian witnessing and imitation focus on the person of Jesus Christ.³² From the person of Christ as a source, the power of the Holy Spirit is poured into the Christian life, which shapes the authentic image of Christ in it. The Holy Spirit provides gifts aimed at bringing people into the trinitarian life (cf. John 14: 23). By the gift of grace and the act of baptism, the Holy Spirit shapes the »new man« (Ephesians 2:15), the »inward man« (Romans 7:22), the »perfect man« (Ephesians 4:13), capable of bearing witness to Christ.³³

Since at the moment of death the martyr loves Jesus Christ, witnessing to him and his act of salvation before people, imitation turns into martyrdom as an act of love.³⁴ A martyr who accepts Christ and his cross becomes »capable of

²⁷ Cf. BENEDIKT XVI., Stjepan prvomučenik (Opća audijencija u Auli Pavla VI., 10. siječnja 2007.) in: BENEDIKT XVI., *Apostoli i prvi Kristovi učenici*, Split, 2011, 125-129.

²⁸ Cf. Nikola BIŽACA, *Zapažanja o teologiji mučeništva*, 259-262.

²⁹ Cf. Juraj PAVIĆ – Tomislav Zdenko TENŠEK, *Patrologija*, Zagreb, 1993, 23-24.

³⁰ Tomislav Janko ŠAGI-BUNIĆ, *Vrijeme suođgovornosti. Knjiga prva*, Zagreb, 1981, 542.

³¹ Cf. Paolo PROSPERI, *The Witness of the Martyrs in the Early Church*, in: *Communio*, 41 (2014) 1, 14-19.

³² Cf. Dylan PAHMAN, *The Sweat of Christian is the Seed of Martyrdom: A Paradigm for Modern Orthodox Christian Witness*, in: *Journal of Orthodox Theology*, 6 (2015) 2, 99-115.

³³ Cf. Servais PINCKAERS, *Pavlov i Tomin nauk o duhovnom životu*, Zagreb, 2000, 55-56.

³⁴ Cf. John Anthony BERRY, *Tested in Fire: Hans Urs Von Balthasar on the moment of Christian Witness*, in *Melita Theologica*, 62 (2012), 146-150.

accepting suffering, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love.«³⁵ Martyrs lay down their whole lives for Christ, showing that faith and love forever unite them with Christ, and that bears witness in a rather special way to the fundamental sacrament of the Christian faith – baptism. Thus, an imitator and martyr can say together with St. Paul: »It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.« (Galatians 2:20). In this sense, the Christian understanding of the martyrdom and imitation of Jesus Christ takes on its Christological character through the gift of faith. It testifies to the saving meaning of Christ's death for all people without exclusivity.³⁶ The martyr's death merges with Christ's death and is transformed into a new life.³⁷

Observing the imitation of Christ and martyrdom, we can say that the Crucifixion, in which martyrs find their identity, and at the same time find the right path, is at its centre. Jesus Christ who is the role model of all martyrdom gave his life, out of which a new life is born for all people. He testifies with his life that God and his love save people from mortal anxiety and fear. God, therefore, reveals the deepest meaning of suffering, the martyrdom that finds its meaning and significance in the immortal love of God.³⁸ In one catechesis, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI explains the meaning and significance of Christian martyrdom: »On what is martyrdom founded? The answer is simple: on the death of Jesus, on his supreme sacrifice of love, consummated on the Cross, that we might have life« (cf. John 10: 10). Christ is the suffering servant (cf. Isaiah 52: 13-15) who gave himself as a ransom for many (cf. Matthew 20: 28). He encourages his disciples, each of us, to accept our cross every day and follow it on the path of complete love for God the Father and the human race: »And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.« (Matthew 10: 38-39). It is the logic behind a grain of wheat that dies in order to sprout and bring new life (cf. John 12: 24). Jesus »himself is the grain of wheat which came from God, the divine grain that lets itself fall to the ground, that lets itself sink, be broken down in death and precisely by so doing germinates and can thus bear fruit in the immensity of the world« (Benedict XVI, Visit to the Evangeli-

³⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Spe salvi – Saved in Hope. Encyclical Letter on Christian Hope* (30 November 2007), Libreria Editrice Vaticana – Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007, 37 (Hereinafter: SS).

³⁶ Cf. Walter KASPER, *Isus Krist*, 133-145.

³⁷ Cf. Tomislav Janko ŠAGI-BUNIĆ, *Vrijeme suodgovornosti. Knjiga prva*, 545.

³⁸ Cf. Nikola DOGAN; Ludost križa. Teologija mučeništva, in: *Crkva u svijetu*, 41 (2006) 4, 445.

cal Lutheran Church of Rome [14 March 2010]). A martyr follows the Lord to the very end, freely accepting death for the salvation of the world in a supreme test of love and faith (cf. LG, 42).³⁹

Hence, the following question arises: from what source does a martyr draw inspiration to endure bodily torments and fears, anxiety and pain? The answer lies in the understanding of the source: »From deep and intimate union with Christ, because martyrdom and the vocation to martyrdom are not the result of human effort but the response to a project and call of God, they are a gift of his grace that enables a person, out of love, to give his life for Christ and for the Church, hence for the world. If we read the lives of the Martyrs we are amazed at their calmness and courage in confronting suffering and death: God's power is fully expressed in weakness, in the poverty of those who entrust themselves to him and place their hope in him alone (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:9). Yet it is important to stress that God's grace does not suppress or suffocate the freedom of those who face martyrdom; on the contrary it enriches and exalts them: a Martyr is an exceedingly free person, free as regards power, as regards the world; a free person who in a single, definitive act gives God his whole life, and in a supreme act of faith, hope and charity, abandons himself into the hands of his Creator and Redeemer; he gives up his life in order to be associated totally with the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. In a word, martyrdom is a great act of love in response to God's immense love.«⁴⁰

From the Christocentric understanding of martyrdom and imitation, at the centre of which stands the person of Jesus Christ, it is clear that Christians do not live natural lives but are renewed by the grace of Christ. Thus, they are given a new identity that signifies their whole persona restored to the image of Christ. Taking a given identity is a call to imitation that also includes martyrdom. By the gift and grace of the act of baptism, the Christian died for sin and evil, but is at the same time capable of enduring death and martyrdom for the most radical imitation of Christ.⁴¹ This understanding of martyrdom infers that it is, in its essence, God's intervention that enables people to achieve the

³⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *The Significance of Martyrdom*, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo, Wednesday, 11 August 2010, in: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100811.html (Accessed: 14.IX.2021).

⁴⁰ BENEDICT XVI, *The Significance of Martyrdom*, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo, Wednesday, 11 August 2010, in: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100811.html (Accessed: 2.IX.2021).

⁴¹ Cf. Nedjeljka s. Valerija KOVAČ, *Mučeništvo kao zahtjev Kristom preobražene egzistencije*, in: Danijel PATAFTA – Nedjeljka s. Valerija KOVAČ (eds.), *Sv. Nikola Tavelić – njegovo vrijeme i trajna poruka. Zbornik radova četvrtog međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa »Franjevački velikani« o sv. Nikoli Taveliću, Šibenik, 20 – 21. listopada 2017.*, 132-139.

fullness of identity as a synthesis of their harmony with God. Conforming to the suffering Christ allows a martyr to achieve the fullness of identity in the resurrection of Christ, who gifts the martyr a saved life.⁴² By suffering, dying, and resurrecting, Jesus accomplished the act of saving the humankind and the work of God. Two core determinants arise from this fundamental event:

a) with his death, Jesus accomplished the work of redemption and his vocation

b) the work of God is realized through the death of Jesus.⁴³

Only in Christ's death and resurrection does a martyr reach the newness of life, because God gives the martyr the final realization of meaning and happiness as well as the ultimate communion with God. People alone cannot save themselves nor achieve the fullness of life. They are given that in the person of Christ. Through God's saving intervention, the unity of the Divine and human life is realized, of which St. Peter, the apostle, says that we are »partakers of the divine nature« (2 Peter 1, 4).

2. Martyrdom as a sign of Christ's disciples in the texts of the Second Vatican Council

If we consider the Council's doctrine of Christian martyrdom, we can notice that in several places it mentions martyrdom in very concise terms. Bearing in mind the rich tradition and history of martyrdom, it is quite understandable that the Council discusses martyrdom in the context of the discourse on Christian love.⁴⁴ Specifically, when discussing the Christian vocation in point 40, the Council points out that all Christians are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity, which aims to promote a lifestyle that corresponds to Christian dignity, i.e., to develop and promote a more humane manner of living in society.⁴⁵ Christians have always lived within a social order, even when they had to endure persecution and suffering for their beliefs. Christ the Lord himself lived in a certain socio-political and religious environment where he suffered and was tortured; the same environment in which he was buried and

⁴² Cf. Nikola DOGAN, *Ludost križa*, 449.

⁴³ Cf. Jean GALOT, *Soteriologija*, 130-135.

⁴⁴ Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964), in: VATICAN COUNCIL II. The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents, New Revised Edition, Liturgical Press, Collegville, Minnesota, 1996, 42, (Hereinafter: LG); cf. Tomislav Janko ŠAGI-BUNIĆ, *Vrijeme suodgovornosti*, 544.

⁴⁵ Cf. LG, 40.

resurrected.⁴⁶ The Council encourages the living of holiness deriving from the gift received and fitted to Christ, so that people increasingly conform themselves to Christ by accomplishing the will of the Father and thus build a life of service to others and the glory of God.⁴⁷ Thus, Benedict XVI rightly said: »Our relationship with God is established through communion with Jesus—we cannot achieve it alone or from our own resources alone. The relationship with Jesus, however, is a relationship with the one who gave himself as a ransom for all (cf. 1 Timothy 2:6). Being in communion with Jesus Christ draws us into his 'being for all'; it makes it our own way of being. He commits us to live for others, but only through communion with him does it become possible truly to be there for others, for the whole. Love of God leads to participation in the justice and generosity of God towards others.«⁴⁸

Further on, in point 41 the Council discusses the specificity of the Christian holiness of those led by the Spirit of God. Listening to the voice of the Father, they imitate the poor and humble Christ so that they would deserve to be partakers of heavenly glory thanks to that the imitation. Therefore, Christian action in accordance with the gift of the Spirit should be accomplished in a way that excludes hesitation on the path of a faith that inspires hope and acts with love. The Council also encourages shepherds to set an example with their lives to those they lead on the path of holiness, encouraging them not to be afraid to lay down their lives for the fellow man (brothers and sisters) so that their imitation of Christ in the Holy Spirit would make them role models and encouragement on the path to holiness.⁴⁹ It is clear that Christian holiness is closely connected with martyrdom and suffering, for which Christ the Lord serves as the role model. The relationship with Christ facilitates the development of the grace that God gives to people without asking for merit. Freedom and openness to grace make it possible to understand the power of martyrdom which manifests holiness in a specific way. The act of giving life, as Christ did, represents an act of love and non-violence that manifests the miraculous redemptive love of the cross that God shows to man. It is precisely by the power of the cross that martyrs are trained to make a non-violent sacrifice through which they conform to their Master.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Cf. Walter KASPER, *Isus Krist*, 133-135.

⁴⁷ Cf. LG, 40.

⁴⁸ Cf. SS, 28.

⁴⁹ Cf. LG, 41.

⁵⁰ Cf. Nedjeljka s. Valerija KOVAČ, *Mučeništvo kao zahtjev Kristom preobražene egzistencije*, 139-146.

The key text of the Council's doctrine of martyrdom can be found in point 42 which we include here for a better and clearer understanding, as it outlines the essence of martyrdom in a synthetic way. The text reads: »Since Jesus, the Son of God, manifested His charity by laying down His life for us, so too no one has greater love than he who lays down his life for Christ and His brothers (cf. 1 John 3:16, John 15:13). From the earliest times, then, some Christians have been called upon—and some will always be called upon—to give the supreme testimony of this love to all men, but especially to persecutors. The Church, then, considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the fullest proof of love. By martyrdom a disciple is transformed into an image of his Master by freely accepting death for the salvation of the world—as well as his conformity to Christ in the shedding of his blood. Though few are presented such an opportunity, nevertheless all must be prepared to confess Christ before men. They must be prepared to make this profession of faith even in the midst of persecutions, which will never be lacking to the Church, in following the way of the cross.«⁵¹

With regard to the text above, it is noticeable that the Council connects the testimony of Christ with the testimony of love for God and the fellow man. If martyrdom represents the greatest proof of love and readiness to sacrifice, then it is quite clear that it is closely connected to the act of love. Although, in the most radical sense it is given only to few, one should not lose sight of the daily sacrifice of love of so many brothers and sisters who quietly, unobtrusively out of love for Christ, give to their fellow men through gestures of love and kindness. The Council encourages the faithful to always remain true to Christ, even if it means scarifying their lives, because Christ is the only true Good that can make a person happy.⁵²

Understanding Christian martyrdom is of crucial importance, because it is essentially founded in love, revealing a unique relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. Out of love for Christ, martyrs testify that the person of Jesus Christ is at the centre of their lives and that they are ready, precisely because of this unique gift and relationship, to give their lives for this testimony of the Love that permeates the lives of martyrs.⁵³

Another important piece of text is presented in point 50: »The Church has always believed that the apostles and Christ's martyrs who had given the

⁵¹ LG, 42.

⁵² Cf. Rudolf BRAJČIĆ – Ivan KOPIĆ – Nikola M. ROŠČIĆ – Anton Strle Dimitrije DIMITRIJEVIĆ, *Dogmatska konstitucija o Crkvi, sv. II.*, Zagreb, 1981, 608.

⁵³ Cf. Tomislav Janko ŠAGI-BUNIĆ, *Vrijeme suodgovornosti*, 544-545.

supreme witness of faith and charity by the shedding of their blood, are closely joined with us in Christ, and she has always venerated them with special devotion, together with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the holy angels.⁵⁴ Commenting on this text, I. Bodrožić emphasizes that the connection between martyrs and the Church is rather obvious. In more specific terms, by recognizing the importance and uniqueness of the martyred witness, the Church points to two fundamental determinants that outline the very essence of martyrdom – faith and love. This testimony is not only manifested in a speculative and theoretical sense, but it is an expression of the uniqueness and wholeness of life by which the martyr testifies for Christ. Martyrs are shaped inwardly by Christ and, following the example of their Master, treat their enemies with forgiveness, not allowing their own hearts to be captured by the evil and violence inflicted on them, but forgiving their tormentors as Christ had done on the cross.⁵⁵

An important text compiled at the Council can be found in point 11 of the *Declaration on Religious Freedom Dignitatis humanae*. The text reads: »As the Master, so too the Apostles recognized legitimate civil authority. 'For there is no power except from God', the Apostle teaches, and thereafter commands: 'Let everyone be subject to higher authorities... He who resists authority resists God's ordinance' (Romans 13:1-5). At the same time, however, they did not hesitate to speak out against governing powers which set themselves in opposition to the holy will of God: 'It is necessary to obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29). This is the way along which the martyrs and other faithful have walked through all ages and over all the earth.«⁵⁶ Ivan Bodrožić states that this text presents martyrs as credible witnesses and as those who defend freedom of belief, aware that there is no freedom of belief without freedom of conscience. He also points out that this text reveals the tense relations between the Church and the civil authorities, manifested over many centuries.⁵⁷ Referring to another text on the martyrdom of the same *Declaration* in point 14, Bodrožić indicates that this text clearly shows the role of a Christian-shaped conscience that teaches people the moral good they are obliged to follow.⁵⁸ If the conscience is a sanctuary and

⁵⁴ LG, 50.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ivan BODROŽIĆ, *Teologija mučeništva u svjetlu Drugoga vatikanskoga sabora i učenja Ivana Pavla II.*, in: Mile BOGOVIĆ – Josip DUKIĆ – Jure KRIŠTO – Miljenko STOJIC – Mate RUPIC (eds.), *Mučeništvo i mučenički tragovi kroz Hrvatsku prošlost. Zbornik radova s međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa održanog u Zagrebu 13. ožujka 2014. godine*, Zagreb, 105-106.

⁵⁶ *Declaration on Religious Freedom Dignitatis Humanae* (7 December 1965), in: VATICAN COUNCIL II., *The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, 1, (Hereinafter: DH).

⁵⁷ Ivan BODROŽIĆ, *Teologija mučeništva u svjetlu Drugoga vatikanskoga sabora i učenja Ivana Pavla II.*, 106.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

a place where people are intimately connected with God and in whose heart the voice of God the Creator resounds, then they are obliged to follow such a voice that resounds within them.⁵⁹ If a person bears the mark of the image of God, which is explicitly stated by Christian anthropology based on the source of Christian Revelation and Scripture, then it is quite clear that moral actions that are in accordance with that mark ensue.⁶⁰ The understanding of people as the bearers of the inalienable dignity that has its source in God infers that Christians testify through their martyrdom that the divine law is inscribed in the hearts of people by conscience and works always faithful to God and a clear conscience that justifies him before torturers and persecutors.

The third important text is provided in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* in point 21. It goes like this: »Many martyrs have given luminous witness to this faith and continue to do so. This faith needs to prove its fruitfulness by penetrating the believer's entire life.«⁶¹ Bodrožić also emphasizes that this text, in the context of the Council's discussion on contemporary difficulties in the world, encourages the faithful to live their faith more consistently in the many challenges and difficulties they face. The Church is the one that bears witness first and thus becomes that attractive force which acts in the world by transforming it. It sheds its strength and the light of faith on those who are distanced from the Church and do not believe, in order to bring all people to Christ the Saviour. It is clear from the Council's teaching that martyrs belong to the very essence of the Church, and that the Council encourages all believers to live the faith in Christ the Saviour and Redeemer of people and the world with greater devotion. The Council sees martyrdom as a constant presence that seeks witness to Christ at all times and marks the most excellent and the most radical way of witnessing to a faith that is taught out of love.⁶² Only love is able to overcome fear and helplessness in the face of evil and violence, and to transform life into incorruptibility and wholeness precisely through the inexpressible power of the cross of Christ.

⁵⁹ Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), in: VATICAN COUNCIL II., *The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, 16, (Hereinafter: GS).

⁶⁰ Cf. Eberhard SCHOCKENHOFF, *Natural Law and Human Dignity. Universal Ethics in an Historical World*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington. D. C., 2003, 228-235.

⁶¹ GS, 21.

⁶² Cf. Ivan BODROŽIĆ, *Teologija mučeništva u svjetlu Drugoga vatikanskoga sabora i učenja Ivana Pavla II.*, 108.

3. Martyrdom – a sign of witness in the contemplations of John Paul II

St. John Paul II speaks on the subject of martyrdom in several places. We are not able to exhaustively list all the places where this topic is mentioned, but for the purposes of illustration and needs of this article we shall highlight a few texts and considerations in which the importance of martyrdom for the life of the Church is clearly visible. Today, the issue of truth is crucial for the human-kind, as it lives in the relativism of primarily moral truth, not capable to delve deeper into the meaning of people's own lives and existence. The issue of truth is fundamental to the Christian faith⁶³, from which the witness of martyrs throughout the history of the Church derives. The relation to truth therefore equals the relation to love and the way in which people follow Christ.

The first text is the one we find in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. In point 32, St. John Paul II clearly describes the essence of martyrdom. He stands on the foundations of an already well-known Catholic tradition in which martyrdom is viewed as a relationship to the truth. It is therefore quite evident that he sees martyrdom as the most complete witness to the truth.⁶⁴ That text reads: »... martyrs, who are the most authentic witnesses to the truth about existence. The martyrs know that they have found the truth about life in the encounter with Jesus Christ, and nothing and no-one could ever take this certainty from them. Neither suffering nor violent death could ever lead them to abandon the truth which they have discovered in the encounter with Christ. This is why to this day the witness of the martyrs continues to arouse such interest, to draw agreement, to win such a hearing and to invite emulation. This is why their word inspires such confidence: from the moment they speak to us of what we perceive deep down as the truth we have sought for so long, the martyrs provide evidence of a love that has no need of lengthy arguments in order to convince. The martyrs stir in us a profound trust because they give voice to what we already feel and they declare what we would like to have the strength to express.«⁶⁵ St. John Paul II finds it is quite obvious that the martyrs are witnesses to the truth and that the relationship to the truth that is Christ (»I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.« John 14: 6) fundamentally determines their lives and actions even when they are enduring pain and suffering. It is obvious here

⁶³ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Vjera, istina i kultura – razmišljanja uz encikliku Fides et ratio*, in: Joseph RATZINGER, *Vjera – istina – tolerancija*, Zagreb, 2004, 165.

⁶⁴ Cf. Ivan BODROŽIĆ, *Teologija mučeništva u svjetlu Drugoga vatikanskoga sabora i učenja Ivana Pavla II.*, 109.

⁶⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio. Encyclical letter on the Relationship between Faith and Reason (14 September 1998)*, Pauline Books&Media Sydney, 1998, 32, (Hereinafter: FR).

as the Apostle Paul stated, that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (cf. Romans 8: 33-39). Hence, martyrs are credible witnesses whose lives and deaths show the credibility of the truth for which they gave their lives. Their very lives become an eloquent speech and truism of what they gave their lives for. Everyone is able to receive the truth, first within themselves, their conscience, reason, freedom, which is then reflected in life in its entirety. Martyrs, therefore, without any doubt, inspire confidence so that we too may be encouraged to live the truth. And the truth is more than obvious in the life of a martyr. That is why St. John Paul II emphasizes the following in the Bull of the Indication of the Great Jubilee *Incarnationis mysterium*: »A sign of the truth of Christian love, ageless but especially powerful today, is the *memory of the martyrs*. Their witness must not be forgotten. They are the ones who have proclaimed the Gospel by giving their lives for love. The martyr, especially in our own days, is a sign of that greater love which sums up all other values. The martyr's life reflects the extraordinary words uttered by Christ on the Cross: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!' (Luke 23:34). The believer who has seriously pondered his Christian vocation, including what Revelation has to say about the possibility of martyrdom, cannot exclude it from his own life's horizon. The two thousand years since the birth of Christ are marked by the ever-present witness of the martyrs. This century now drawing to a close has known very many martyrs, especially because of Nazism, Communism, and racial or tribal conflicts. People from every sector of society have suffered for their faith, paying with their blood for their fidelity to Christ and the Church, or courageously facing interminable years of imprisonment and privations of every kind because they refused to yield to an ideology which had become a pitiless dictatorial regime. From the psychological point of view, martyrdom is the most eloquent proof of the truth of the faith, for faith can give a human face even to the most violent of deaths and show its beauty even in the midst of the most atrocious persecutions.«⁶⁶

St. John Paul II was deeply aware of the transformative power of the truth of the faith witnessed by the lives of many people (both women and men), that even today the Church of God recognizes in them the most authentic witnesses of Jesus Christ and the Gospel; throughout their lives, they were entirely on the side of the Truth and the Good. He also reminds the whole Church that it was born of the blood of martyrs and that their witness will never be forgotten.

⁶⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Incarnationis mysterium*. Bull of Indication of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (29 November 1998), Pauline Books&Media, Sydney, 2000, 13, (Hereinafter: IM).

In the history of the Church, the martyrology only further grew, thus bearing clear witness that the Church had role models who witnessed to Christ in every historical epoch. Therefore, St. John Paul II asked the local churches to do their best not to forget the memory of those who suffered martyrdom.⁶⁷

In the *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Europa*, St. John Paul II recalled the importance of the awareness of martyrs as witnesses to the faith. They represent signs that are observed in the life of the Church and witnesses of the Christian faith should not be forgotten. These witness-martyrs lived the Gospel in the midst of numerous persecutions and enmities at the cost of shedding their own blood. St. John Paul II sees them in the history of the Church as an eloquent and magnificent sign to be considered as well as imitated. They exhibit the vitality of the Church; they are the light that stands before us because it is precisely through their lives that the light of Christ shone in the darkness. St. John Paul II considers martyrdom to be the highest embodiment of hope, as the martyrs proclaimed the Gospel of Hope by laying down their own lives. They celebrate the Gospel of Hope because, by giving their lives, they offer the greatest sacrifice as spiritual worship (cf. Romans 12:1). The martyrs serve the Gospel of Hope with their lives because they express love and service to the humankind precisely through obedience to a moral law that promotes and respects the human dignity and freedom of every person.⁶⁸

We have already pointed out the close connection between truth and martyrdom.⁶⁹ In the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, St. John Paul II touches upon the relationship between martyrdom and moral truth.⁷⁰ The fundamental relationship that arises from the relation of faith and morality shines in the unconditional observance of the requirements arising from human dignity rooted in the Bible.⁷¹ It is precisely martyrdom, as a confirmation of the inviolability of the moral norm, that reflects the sanctity of God's law, but at the same time the

⁶⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente. Apostolic Letter on Preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000 (10 November 1994)*, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/jubilee/documents/hf_jp-ii_doc_19981129_bolla-incarnationis-mysterium.html, 37, (Hereinafter: TMA) (Accessed: 20.XII. 2021).

⁶⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Europa. Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Jesus Christ Alive in His Church – the Source of Hope for Europe (28 June 2003)*, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa.html, 13, (Hereinafter: EE). (Accessed: 25.XII.2021).

⁶⁹ Cf. John R. BERKAM, *Truth and Martyrdom: The Structure of Discipleship in Veritatis Splendor*, in: *Sacred Heart University Review*, 14 (1994) 1, 1-9.

⁷⁰ Cf. Elvis RAŽOV, Ivan Pavao II., o mučeništvu, in: *Obnovljeni život*, 69 (2014) 2, 231-243.

⁷¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis Splendor. Encyclical Letter on Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching (6 August 1993)*, Sydney, 1993, (Hereinafter: VS).

inviolability of the personal dignity of every person,⁷² created in God's image. Martyrdom, therefore, exposes every lie and deceptive light, for it reveals those deeds that trample on human dignity as morally evil. Martyrdom not only reveals the violation of the dignity of a suffering person, but also shows the people who commit violence against others as the ones who, by such acts, commit violence against themselves, against their own dignity.⁷³

St. John Paul II holds martyrdom to be a special sign of the holiness of the Church because fidelity to God is attested by the blood from which the moral truth about the humankind shines through.⁷⁴ Thus the truth expressed by the Council becomes clear: »...only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.«⁷⁵ Without this light of moral truth, the fundamental distinction between good and evil, between victims and criminals, gets lost. Martyrs bear witness to the moral truth as the truth of good with their lives, and all believers are called to always turn to these witnesses of moral truth, encouraging themselves on the path of good thanks to the insight that the truth of Christ the Lord reflects on the faces of the faithful.⁷⁶

All of the above infers that the essence of martyrdom is the relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. Martyrdom is rooted in the witness to Christ: »The witness of the martyrs have succeeded, and often still do, in opening the door to God's mystery and thus illuminating the very core of Christian identity as well as human existence as such.«⁷⁷ To further clarify, all the truths of the Christian life are deeply connected to the person of Jesus Christ. People were created free, in the image of divine freedom, and they are able to discern the truth and live by it precisely in line with the pursuit of good, inscribed in their very being.⁷⁸ The core of martyrdom is faith that gives a unique feature where the person of Christ is the source of the believer's life, but also the strength to endure martyrdom for the truth. Person and truth are inseparable in Christ. Martyrs know and see in the light of faith that »the beauty of the saving love of

⁷² See also a very valuable article: cf. Eberhard SCHOCKENHOFF, Koliko je nedodirljivo ljudsko dostojanstvo? Veza između ljudskog dostojanstva, osobe i naravi na području bioetike, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 77 (2007), 1, 5-21.

⁷³ Cf. VS, 92.

⁷⁴ Cf. Vincente CARCEL ORTI, Pope John Paul II's Teaching on the Martyrs of our Century, in: https://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01031997_p-56_en.html (Accessed: 27.XII.2021).

⁷⁵ GS, 22.

⁷⁶ Cf. VS, 93-94.

⁷⁷ Cf. Veronika. s. Nela GAŠPAR, Teološko poimanje mučeništva, 49.

⁷⁸ Cf. Christopher C. LUND, Martyrdom and Religious Freedom, in: *Connecticut Law Review*, 50 (2018) 4, 959-985.

God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.«⁷⁹ Believers (martyrs) know that with their baptism they join the death and resurrection of Jesus by receiving a whole new life from the water and the Holy Spirit that shapes a new person in them. The grace of the Holy Spirit in the believer reshapes the freedom to perceive the fundamental values of the Truth and the Good precisely in order to gain a real life through faith, a life that can endure the burden of the cross because the believer knows that the act of baptism represented the protection from the greatest destructive force opposing the dignity and freedom of people, i.e., the force of sin and death.⁸⁰

4. Martyrdom – a demand to face the truth

At the beginning of the third millennium, St. John Paul II reminded the Church and the whole world of the cruelty of crimes, hatred, violence, trampling on human dignity and human rights, and pointed out that the twentieth century, scarred by two world wars as well as the experiences of concentration camps and horrible bloodshed, left a deep mark on the face of humanity, and that we all need to face the truth that begins with the cleansing of memory in order to open up space for conversion.⁸¹

It is precisely the cleansing of the memory that allows the Church and the world to open up to the possibility of a clearer awareness of lived experiences. Without this awareness of the past and its horrors, sin, evil, failure, hatred, violence, bloodshed and disgrace of human dignity, one cannot move forward, unless people, i.e., all humanity, are cleansed of inconsistencies, infidelities and mistakes. Acknowledging and dealing with past hardships in which much moral and physical evil and violence had been committed is an act of courage, which simultaneously helps believers strengthen their faith and makes them cautious and prudent to deal with the challenges that today threaten with equal violence and death.⁸²

⁷⁹ FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium. Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (24 November 2013), Sydney, 2013, 36, (Hereinafter: EG).

⁸⁰ Cf. Michael FIGURA, *Martyrdom and the Following of Jesus*, 104-105.

⁸¹ Cf. TMA, 18.

⁸² Cf. TMA, 33; cf. Jure KRIŠTO, *Kršćanski mučenici u totalitarnim režimima XX. stoljeća*, in: *Mučeništvo i mučenički tragovi kroz Hrvatsku prošlost. Zbornik radova s međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa održanog u Zagrebu 13. ožujka 2014.*, 119-153; Cf. Paul HORWITZ, *Against Martyrdom: A Liberal Argument for Accommodation of Religion*, in: *Notre Dame Law Review*, 91 (2016) 4, 1309-1340.

When we talk about facing the truth, it is necessary to take into account the fact that to this day, »lies blind us with good reasons and create space for acts of violence. That is why enduring violence does not suffice. It is not enough not to retaliate in the same manner. Violence must be exposed, highlighted and brought before the light of goodness.«⁸³ By facing the injustices and suffering violence, the martyrs testify and manifest a new life that arises from the requirement of living in line with the truth.

In the Croatian-speaking area, a significant analysis in terms of dealing with the totalitarianism of communism and its cruel criminal nature in the twentieth century was undertaken by T. Matulić. In his work *Nevjera i vjera* [Disbelief and Belief – Heart-to-Heart], especially in Chapter 2, entitled *Crime and Faith – Heart to Heart*, Matulić systematically confronts the demand for truth.⁸⁴ Here we shall outline ideas and thoughts that can facilitate better understanding of the moral and spiritual demand to face evil and help us understand the importance of living in truth. The author describes several stages for understanding the process of dealing with truth and justice. He cites ten steps (*hypertrophy of guilt, criminals deny guilt, facing guilt for crimes, condemnation of crime and not love for the criminal, Croatian reconciliation in the waiting room, interpretations themselves, totalitarian godless metaphysics, who exalts himself will be humiliated, the past is in the future, it's high time for forgiveness and reconciliation*) that are key to healing from a troubled and violent past. Certainly, when dealing with the crimes of totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, it is necessary to pay tribute and preserve the memory of the innocent victims of the totalitarian regime in the context of Yugoslav communism.

The evil that has befallen the Croatian people, and the Church in particular, has its origin in the malignant face of disbelief, which showed its cruelty in the Croatian War of Independence. This realization is extremely important to us because it allows us to see the origin of terrible crimes that were not concluded at the end of the Second World War but had their continuation in the denial of guilt and victims. The dignity of the victim is related to identity, name and surname. Therefore, not mentioning or memorialising the crime even more ruthlessly tramples on the dignity of innocent victims. The fundamental satisfaction is and remains the demand for the truth, justice and love. Otherwise,

⁸³ Ante VUČKOVIĆ, Nasilje, in: Ante VUČKOVIĆ, *Riječju probuđeni*, Zagreb, 32005, 106-107.

⁸⁴ Cf. Tonči MATULIĆ, *Nevjera i vjera u četiri oka. Maske bogova u svjetlu mladosti Božjeg lica*, Zagreb, 2012, 51.

the victims are denied fundamental moral rights as well as the inalienable human rights and freedoms.⁸⁵

When it comes to crimes, what is noticeable in the Croatian context and society is the hypertrophy of guilt, which results in insecurity when dealing with the inflicted and suffered evil. It is quite obvious that a malicious ideology has captured people in a way that denies the truth instead of confronting it.⁸⁶

It is commonly known that the committed evil is denied and that the logic in relation to the victim is distorted. A completely irrational process is at work in which Christian believers, instead of encouraging enemies of the faith and the Church to face their crimes, make friends with them. It is unacceptable to go beyond the committed evil and deny the truth about the innocent victims that were killed, and to create a false dialogue and compassion instead of sincere repentance and condemnation of the crime.⁸⁷

One of the fundamental requirements that are absolutely necessary when discussing victims and crime today is facing guilt for the crimes committed. This means taking responsibility for the evil and injustice done. A crime against a person is also a crime against God because people were created in God's image, and it is the light of faith given to people that enables facing the crimes that were committed. It is clear that for a long time there has been no will nor desire to face guilt and take responsibility, which has had devastating consequences for society as a whole.⁸⁸

A key condition in relation to crimes is their condemnation and the healing of criminals from the committed evil. Every concealed and denied crime further intensifies injustice and tramples on dignity. Without the condemnation of crime and the healing of criminals from evil, there can be no guarantee of a bright and blessed future for the individual and the nation as a whole. Forgiveness as a condition of reconciliation is possible only on the basis of truth and taking responsibility for the evil and the injustice that have been done.⁸⁹

Without facing the terrible burden of crime and guilt, any mention of reconciliation becomes a mockery that distorts historical facts, as well as a source of new violence that can erupt uncontrollably. Moreover, denying and twisting theses or reducing reconciliation to mere formality is a terrible and perfidious play. It is impossible for a healthy and meaningful future to be born out of such

⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 54-56.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 57-59.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 59-61.

quagmire, in which the only valid dialectic is that there are no innocents, i.e., everyone is guilty.⁹⁰

The father of modern nihilism, F. Nietzsche, was one of the first to put forward the thesis that there is no truth but only endless interpretations. In more concrete terms, this plague affected the attitude towards innocent victims of the totalitarian ideology of Yugoslav communism. When it comes to crimes, it is not possible to reach a unified and clear stance in the political and social context. The inability to take responsibility and the guilt are the results of endless distortions of truth that is clearly and recklessly denied. The entire public space is caught in a maze of interpretations that do not lead to a goal. There is no way out in that fashion. This skill of interpretation is one of the key signs of totalitarianism and at the same time speaks of the moral misery that underlies the contemporary society.⁹¹

An important question we face today is: How is it possible that morally inferior socio-political greats imposed themselves from the ashes of the morally inferior metaphysics of communism? The answer to this question lies in the fact that the whole society is still trapped in the metaphysics of a totalitarian worldview that has not disappeared but has only changed its appearance. The dominant worldview is still the one in which guilt, taking responsibility and confrontation with the committed evil is denied.⁹²

There is no doubt that a serious confrontation with evil and violence has not yet happened. From this it can be deduced that today's contemporary moral disorientation that seeks to re-value all values still faces the demand for truth. Believers who must not allow themselves to be introduced into the distorted paradigm of a pluralistic society in which all truths and lies are equally valid are especially called upon to have a valid attitude towards the truth.⁹³

It is often said today that we need to let go of the past and turn to the future. There is more and more talk of leaving the past to historians. The starting point for these malicious persuasions is lobotomy. Any break with the past is directly related to new violence in which one subtly seeks to empty memory as part of one's identity. The Christian understanding of the future is deeply rooted in the understanding of the past but also of the present from which the future is born.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 61-62.

⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 65-66.

⁹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 68-69.

The discourse on the need for forgiveness and reconciliation that goes beyond mere mechanistic denial of evil and crime implies the demand that any reconciliation necessarily encompasses truth, freedom and responsibility. From this demand, a double perspective is born: one entails opening the question of the causes of the totalitarian character, while the other entails opening the question of the consequences of that same totalitarian regime's actions. As long as the truth of one's own crimes is denied, as long as facts and personal biographies are distorted, even greater violence will occur.⁹⁵ The entire Christian life, and especially the life of the martyrs, can be understood only as a walk towards the One and Triune Love which is God.⁹⁶ The pledge of the present and the future lies in the past and the revelation of the truth, especially in relation to the martyrs and numerous innocent victims. The Christian faith professes the embodied truth revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. This means that all Christian moral action finds its deepest motives, inspirations and motivations in the person of Jesus Christ, from whom concrete ethical and moral norms follow as a necessary framework for imitation.⁹⁷

In lieu of a conclusion

Our research has shown the importance and necessity of facing the truth. The martyrs gave their lives for the truth and only the truth has the ability to liberate people from lies and denial of guilt for committing crimes. In this context, the discussion on martyr witnesses reveals even more that we need the light of truth, but also a serious confrontation with crimes and injustices. Martyr witnesses vividly show us the path that has always been an expression of witness to Christ in the Church, although many of them have not been canonically declared martyrs. Their lives showcase the fundamental truth of the Christian faith where the disciple always conforms himself to his Master. The martyrs represent a profound synthesis of faith and life that emerges from the union with the cross of Christ who redeemed the humankind and the world. The martyrs reflect Christ's call to imitate him, which results in an authentic testimony of faith. Martyrdom in the light of imitating Jesus Christ is the realization of Jesus' most demanding call to imitation, which we find in the Beatitudes. Only in the

⁹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 70-71.

⁹⁶ Cf. BENEDIKT XVI, *Svjetlo dragocjene uljanice. Govor na molitvenom bdijenju na Trgu bana Jelačića u Zagrebu 4. lipnja 2011.*, in: BENEDIKT XVI., *Ljubljena Crkvo u Hrvata, Varaždinske Toplice*, 2011, 29.

⁹⁷ Cf. Sławomir NOWOSAD, *Christian Martyrdom Never Expires*, 26.

light of Christ's truth as the only key to understanding martyrdom can we say that Christ, through his cross as well as resurrection, overcame all evil, sin and violence committed against people in the name of ungodly ideologies of the twentieth century and throughout the whole human history. He reconciled us once and for all with God so that we may live in the truth that gives freedom to the children of God. In the abyss of suffering, a new light is born out of God's love, which transforms this mortal and transitory life into eternal communion with the God of the Triune Love. The salvation bestowed upon the humankind is the final revelation of God's mercy toward people trapped sin, death, and violence.⁹⁸ Martyrdom, which grows out of love and unity with the Crucified Christ, testifies to the deepest reason for the incarnation of God, which is the only way to root out the evil in the hearts of people.

Sažetak

MUČENIŠTVO KAO ZNAK NASLJEDOVANJA ISUSA KRISTA – SVJEDOČANSTVO AUTENTIČNOG ŽIVOTA

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Izlaganje polazi od temeljnog razumijevanje mučeništva u slici Isusa Krista koji je uzor svakog mučeništva. Stoga je posve razumljivo da se mučenik u vlastitoj smrti pridružuje Kristu patniku, njime se suobličuje i proslavlja Boga svjedočanstvom vlastita života za Istinu. Poslužiti ćemo se nekim mislima i idejama u razumijevanju smisla i značenja mučeništva kako ih nalazimo nekim elementima teologije mučeništva koje nalazimo u Svetom pismu, u tekstovima Drugoga Vatikanskoga koncila i sv. Ivana Pavla II. pape. Temeljno pitanje jest na čemu se zasniva mučeništvo? Odgovor na to pitanje jest da se ono zasniva na Isusovoj smrti, na njegovoj žrtvi najviše ljubavi, izvršenoj na križu da bismo mi imali život (usp. Iv 10, 10). Krist je trpeći sluga (usp. Iz 52, 13-15), koji je dao samoga sebe kao otkupninu za mnoge (usp. Mt 20, 28). U tom smislu teologija mučeništva ili teologija križa daje dublji smisao kršćanskom trpljenju i smrti koje se zrcali u slici Isusa Krista savršenog uzora svakog nedužnog i nevinog trpljenja. Upravo iz razumijevanja Kristova života možemo reći da je mučenik onaj koji slijedi

⁹⁸ Cf. FRANCIS, *Misericordiae vultus*. Bull of Indication of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (11 April 2015), Sydney, 2015, 2.

Gospodina sve do kraja, slobodno prihvaćajući da umre za spas svijeta, u najvećem dokazu vjere i ljubavi (usp. LG 42). Tek u ovom kontekstu postaje i razumljivo zašto su mučenici-svjedoci najizvorsniji svjedoci autentičnog života prožetog Isusom Kristom.

Ključne riječi: Isus Krist, čovjek, slika Božja mučeništvo, nasljedovanje.