

SUMMARY



Mary in the service of Christian humanism

Pope Francis's project

Christian humanism recognizes exceptional dignity of a human being, which is rooted in God, the Creator and the Savior. He is our Father and we are His children, called to participate in His life and His actions. Recognizing God as an origin of all being and as a highest moral lawgiver affirms both our immanence in the world and our responsibility for our own fate. We are called to live in communion with God, other people and the whole creation. It is guided by the law of love.

The biblical story of Cain and Abel shows that it is possible to betray this calling. The question God asked Cain after he had killed his brother: "Where is your brother Abel?" (Gen 4:9a) is repeated in every generation. And alas, the same Cain's dramatic answer returns: "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9b). What is worse, at the onset of the third millennium human indifference towards God, neighbors and the whole creation is intensifying. It poses a realistic temptation for Christians as well. False humanism coupled with practical materialism, relativistic and nihilistic thoughts make a human being believe that he is his own creator as well as a creator of life and society; he feels self-sufficient and strives to stand in for God or even get rid of Him. Retiring into himself causes callousness of a human heart, which loses the ability to express brotherhood or compassion. The loss of the bond creates a feeling of spiritual orphanhood.

In the face of ever increasing wounds, when many people do not know how to heal them, or they do not believe healing is possible, pope Francis appeals for "a revolution of tenderness", which is a path to renew Christian humanism. He urges Christians to create it. It is going to help convert callous hearts into open hearts full of love. Only "seeing with our hearts" enables us to say "no" to globalized indifference and provisional thinking. In connection to this, the pope proposes life based on intimate relationship with Mary. The present times are Her times. It is well worth joining Mary in Her school, since She teaches the alphabet of Christian humanism.

This issue belongs to main themes of Francis's teaching. It is not all about the doctrine, but rather about life attitude. He assumes that Mary is the best image of Christian humanity in the practice of daily life. We need Her genius and womanly style in order for the theological reflection to be less abstract or theoretical, but delicate, descriptive, and practical.

Francis's project of Mary's humble participation in the work of Christian humanism has not been examined as yet. Actually, it is a concept of crucial importance to his Mariology. This present monograph aspires, at least partially, to fill the gap. It does not embrace the whole subject and is not exhaustive. It is a valuable contribution, which helps to comprehend the originality of pope Bergoglio's Mariology. I discuss the main motifs of the papal project. Each of the eleven chapters is devoted to a different topic. I make use of the materials already published in collective works or in Polish theological periodicals. This present version is corrected and complemented. I include new contributions that will enrich the book. The topics are so closely related that some of them inevitably overlap creating repetitions.

The analysis of pope Francis's teaching confirms that, for him, Mary constitutes "antibody" for the spreading culture of indifference and temporariness; it is a key to personal and social conversion of a human heart. What God expects of man and the Church is best manifested in Her. She addresses the needs of our times, because She shows that faith is not limited to the doctrine, but we need the heart of the mother, who is able to express the tenderness of God and listen attentively to the beating of the human heart. Mary's inspirations are not only received by Christians, but also are noticed by the secular society. That is why the pope, although proceeds from Christian, gospel beliefs, he tries to formulate his reflections in a way that is open for dialogue with all the people of good will. His strategy: to be closer to God, man, and the whole of creation cannot be fit in an integral system. He avoids theoretical considerations and focuses on the concrete, which opens up possible paths of the renewal.

For the pope so close to South American piety, Marian devotion is a requirement of Christian life. Love to Mary springs out of his personal experience of his family home. He is influenced by the Marian shrines he willingly frequented (Guadalupe, Aparecida, Luján). A certain kind of mystical experience is not alien to him as well. He is convinced that contemporary reality full of contradictions, can only be comprehended in the light of the gospel. It is not the light dispersing all darkness, but a lamp leading our steps through the night, and this is enough to walk with hope for the future. Attending "Mary's school" means attending a school of human and Christian life. She needs to be discovered anew from the perspective of the last Council.

In the face of the dangerous trend of submitting everything, including God, to the authority of human reason, or even in the face of the temptation of indifference towards God or His rejection, the pope responds by reminding us that the basis of real humanism is found in our filial turn to God. We can see the fruits of His works in life of Mary of Nazareth. She is a human face of His limitless goodness. Her womanly heart, beating like the heart of God, convinces us that He constitutes the first greatness in our lives. Only His tender care can win our hearts and free them from the chains of slavery. Boundless trust in Him allows us to become independent of any difficulties. He can perform miracles in our lives, if we are open to Him. Wisdom, the gift of the Holy Spirit, allowed Mary to keep and revive recollection of God in Her heart, and then awaken it in others. The canticle *Magnificat* is alive memory that God is a loving Father among us. He deserves our worship because He is our strength, and He deserves our gratitude for all He does for us. If we understand this and if we do this, we experience the fullness of joy.

Francis emphasizes, as well, that Mary is a model of all essential elements of a human person. Her hands, eyes, attitudes are living "catechism" of true humanity (body and spirit, will and reason, cognition and action, earthly and eternal life) and perception of life. We learn from Her courage and firmness, faithfulness and perseverance, stubborn patience and creativity, humbleness and sincerity. However, for the pope from Argentina, Mary is mainly a witness of hope, and that is why he extensively develops this subject. He persuades that we ought to say "yes" to the fullness of history, not

just to a part of it, and interpret it as the history of mercy; we ought to discharge ballast in order to discover what really matters in life; we ought to be able to wait, even when it seems pointless and God seems invisible due to the evil in the world. Hope is able to look further, beyond the horizon, towards heaven.

Social reference of man occupies most space in Francis's teaching. His encyclical *Fratelli tutti* is devoted to social brotherhood and friendship. Latin-American theology allows him to teach with hope about "people", characterized by mutual identity of social and cultural bonds. Within them we see the mysticism of the human encounter and support in order to make a pilgrimage together. The leading star of this closeness is Mary. Her motherly gaze sets us free from orphanhood and teaches us to consider ourselves as beloved children of God's people. Within this concept of closeness we can fit in the image of the Church-mother. It would be bereft of a womanly model without Mary. Through Her sacrifice we can see how sensitive we need to be for the needs of the neighbors. We are called to "touch" their sufferings ("feel pity"), accompany them in their loneliness, bring them consolation, share material possessions.

The Church cannot merely wait for people, but needs to go out to meet them, needs to "open the doors". The words: "going out" and "way" are Francis's favorite concepts and define the style of his pontificate. He maintains that Mary is an icon of the Church on the go. She is characterized by "the law of ecstasy" – going out, cut across limitations and boundaries, in order for the graces from God to manifest. We ought to follow in Her footsteps to the peripheries (geographical, existential, theological) in order to see, understand and sense all kinds of poverty, and then practically remedy it through acts of mercy. The pope is convinced that the present day is the *kairos* of mercy, in which the Church should show motherly face to the injured humanity. If it is filled with Mary's tender love, it will be able to show compassion for those in need. She touches the most sensitive feelings of our humanity, inspiring irresistible impulse to become a neighbor to them.

Francis also emphasizes harmonious unity of humanity and nature. The destiny of the humanity is inseparably connected with the environment, which is our shared home. One cannot separate the care about human dignity from the protection of the created world. *Laudato si'* is not a "green" encyclical, but a social one in which the pope appeals for ecological conversion, which aims for "integral ecology". In order to implement healthy relationships between man and the creation, one needs to follow in Mary's footsteps. She, the Queen of all creation, completely transfigured, in Her part of the creation achieved the fullness of its beauty and comprehends the sense of all things, helps to perceive the world with wiser eyes.

Mary – the pope emphasizes at the end with some predilection – does not only enlighten our thoughts and actions on the path of Christian humanism, but She is also the Mother of brotherhood and tender love. We are not alone, but we are people who have a Mother. She never fails us or never loses sight of us. She takes our problems to heart, holds us by the hand on daily basis, helps us to follow the path of the merciful Samaritan. With Her help, the Church is a home of all people, a home that receives and offers compassion. She, who took care of Jesus, now with motherly pain takes care of the wounded world. In Her, creatures facing suffering or even put to death by other humans, find the reflection of God's compassion, which is the only real solace.

Francis has never been a university theologian. He is first of all a priest, whose Marian teaching is more pastoral than theological, that is different from the Mariology of John Paul II or Benedict XVI, who deepened dogmatic motifs of the mystery of Mary. The pope from Latin America listens attentively to his own pastoral experience and to the wisdom of the people. He attaches a lot of significance to popular piety, which is predominantly grounded on Mary. It is important for Mariology to follow

this piety with attention, to promote it, sometimes cleanse it, focus attention to signs of Marian times. “New humanism” is grounded on discovering human needs and finding remedies. The originality of the pope’s reflections lies in the simplicity of the everyday language of the people of God. He uses numerous metaphors and images as well as notions from the field of mysticism. He argues that basically it is all about a renewed life practice. The revolution of tenderness will radically renew man touched by de-Christianization. The person of Mary represents how to reconcile what is human with what is God’s. She serves to reject anthropocentric immanence, which assumes that God’s affirmation means the reduction of His creation. Nowadays, it takes the Pelagian form, emphasizing the importance of man and his ability to self-fulfillment, or else it takes the gnostic form, according to which closeness to God presupposes some distance towards the body and some religious elitism (spiritual, intellectual). Mary teaches the art of encounter and heading in the same direction. She turns the Church into one family opened to the world of the poor. That is why the pope, especially at the end of his statements, calls for us to open our filial hearts to Her and to entrust Her with our joys, anxieties and sorrows, even if our love to the Mother is sometimes exaggerated.

Marian nature of the revolution of tenderness, connected with Christian humanism, is not opposed to the truth that its fullness is revealed in Jesus Christ, but it confirms this truth or even strengthens it. Mary, His student, is a clear sign, a teacher of human dignity and his social references, and as a Mother She helps the Church to discover anew its motherly heart, which is to be a home open for everyone. Choosing the Marian option, we let Her become “Marian solution”. It is worth counting on Mary, since She helps to make the world more human. Francis’s vision of the renewal of Christian humanism through deepened reference to Mary is not uncommon. Proposals are being put forward, especially among American Catholics, to embrace the Marian option (C. Gress, D. Calloway). It is not known whether or not they are inspired by the pope’s thoughts. It is certain that right now in the period of anthropological disorder, also in the Christian world, we have reasons to count on Mary, because She has the key to personal and social transformation of human life.

The book ends with an index of Francis’s Marian statements from the years between 2013 and 2021 and an index of monographs devoted to these statements.