



Tomislav Žigmanov:

**Toward a positive acceptance of religious differences
(a sketch for a phenomenology of the present state and problems)**

“God is the God of every person or of none at all!”

Karl-Josef Kuschel

1. The Mission at Hand – active peacemaking

Today more than ever, it is necessary (perhaps urgently needed, almost absolutely necessary, if we observe things and facts from the perspective of recent events) to talk about the most numerous religions and to insist on an open and uncompromising dialogue. We are led to this by the following generally known fact: during all of human history, religion in its practice was often far from its own *primary* mission, which can be programmatically summarized as *active peacemaking*. Said differently, during their histories, religions have often existed either in self-isolation or in aggressive confrontation with others or against others, and rarely have they acted as peacemakers! This is also true for those religious paradigms that have most often come into contact here in Central Europe: thus, for Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Likewise, even today, after hundreds of years of negative experience, religion has often been made functional in its existence by quite the opposite – it has been, and still is, reduced to a sort of *disturbing* or *disruptive* factor in the relationships between people, nations, cultures and states... In the Middle East peace does not rule between Jews and Moslems, recently in Bosnia and Herzegovina a brutal and bloodthirsty war literally raged between Christians and Moslems, the same was also recently true in Chechnya, and among other things between Christians themselves in Croatia. Northern Ireland is a real paradigm of a lasting conflict between Christians of different denominations. The events of September 11, 2001 not only introduced even more misunderstanding but actually, it seems, partially even re-opened the hatred between Christians and Moslems on a global scale, a hatred which neither of them contains within itself and certainly does not propagate.

The German Catholic theologian Karl-Josef Kuschel finds the modern features of this “fight” between these religions in the following (non-religious) factors: “nationalism, hatred toward foreigners, religious fanaticism and exclusiveness.” Moreover, this learned German claims that these factors have “attained the status of divinities and idols, become the object of an idolatry against which we must fight in the name of the true and living God.”¹ This seems somehow familiar, and in many ways it also seems to be a matter of urgency for us here in Central Europe, does it not?

2. Human Weakness – the source of betrayal of the mission

But what seems to be the crucial problem here? Of course, we are dealing with a sort of, indeed radical, *betrayal* of the true mission. In religious practice, the participants do not hold to the fundamental values of their religions, the principles and normative beliefs, that have, and I think that everyone knows this, a powerful universal tone and a powerful humanistic character, such as, for example, an emphasis

¹ Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Spor oko Abrahama: što Židove, kršćane i muslimane dijeli – a što ih ujedinjuje*, Svjetlo riječi, Sarajevo 2000, p. 26.

on love, peace, goodness, and so on. The definite *distortions* occur because of *human weaknesses* which are manifested in the following ways: in everyday life universal ethical maxims are flippantly reduced to their peculiar meanings, then one sees the functional conceiving and understanding of the fundamental moral principles of the religious paradigms, the practice of them is then approached in an ultimately instrumental way, and here and there actions based on those values are consciously suspended...

In that context it is thus clear why the history of religious practice sometimes shows the features of violent fanaticism, paralyzing fatalism, irrational exclusivity, the establishment of the demand for absoluteness, the production of mutual aggressiveness and the rejection of one side by another... All of this creates conditions in which misunderstandings multiply among the followers of the various religious paradigms: emphasis is placed on unimportant differences, historical troubles resurface, people fall into the trap of ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Yet, the common factor is that behind that possible weaknesses of the religious paradigms are not hidden in the background, since the nature of those weaknesses is universal and absolutely inclusive, but above and before all they are fundamentally, as we have already said, *human weaknesses*. That is, human imperfection is the main reason behind all such radicalism, meaning that human *sinfulness* is the cause of all evil and thus of the evil done within religions and between them.

And yet, there is a marked lack of consciousness about this when talking about the thematic flaws and other imperfections in the relations between religions. Indeed, according to the religious view of the world, humans are fundamentally and primordially imperfect, flawed, inclined to sin. In other words, this significant anthropological feature in all these worldviews – the fact of primary human sin, which is colorfully represented, for example in Christianity, with the sin of the East – is often overlooked. And this feature should be constantly refreshed in the lives of believers, that is, it should constantly raised into the consciousness and thus become a living truth, especially when one thinks of dialogue and cooperative relationships with religious counterparts, in which it appears to be a necessary condition. Why is it like that?

Example 1. Karl Jaspers: Because one who is in a state of sin and has a consciousness of that sin loses the following character flaws: pride and arrogance. "Pride is broken (...) arrogance becomes impossible", the German philosopher Karl Jaspers says in that context.² These character traits thus become impossible in the light of a consciousness of one's own sinfulness, and they are replaced by *humility*. In other words, behind this standpoint is the anthropological idea of human *conceit* as one of the main localities or sources of sin in the Christian conception, and of humility, the very opposite of conceit, as the locality of the sinless state of the human being. Here one is arguing in favor of the idea that the constant state of man in the perspective of "conceited" pride, which is one of the features of closed-mindedness and exclusivity toward other teachings, the comprehension of the Other as such, disappears if one is brought to a consciousness of one's own sinfulness. It is in that very act, in calling upon one's own sinfulness that we see the place which opens up the possibility of establishing dialogue, since in that way one suspends one's own purity and the need for it, the need for the absoluteness of one's own truths, the correctness of one's own ideas...

Example 2. Miroslav Volf: From quite another position and with other intentions about the problem of situating and giving status to *knowledge*, and thus of a dialogue relationship toward others based on the nature of that knowledge, we have the work of Miroslav Volf, a Croatian Protestant theologian and his work *Provisional Security – the Unique Christ and the Challenges of the Modern Day*.³ In that work one finds the same conclusions. Namely, in this work, the challenge of modern epistemology is discussed, its foundation on Descartes' famous principles and its defining of truth in terms of an understanding of Jesus' words that he is "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn.14:6), and what those words mean to the modern believer. In this, Volf takes the standpoint of "provisional security". His starting point is the following: "the only way that we can know whether and to what extent truth and goodness are with others" can be found in the conjecture "their point of view *from my own standpoint* in the light of what we understand as true and good."⁴ And even though in the faith Christ is given as the ultimate and absolute truth, still human cognition of him cannot be absolute cognition nor can it as a result contain the ultimate truth, and thus it consequently has a different relationship to the Other. As a solution, Volf thus offers the standpoint of the *provisional* validity of human beliefs. He says, "If we understand our

² Karl Jaspers, *Pitanje krivice*, SamizdatFreeB92, Beograd 1999, p. 25.

³ Cf. *Filozofska istraživanja* br. 49, Zagreb 1993, pp. 441-450.

⁴ Ibid. 448.

viewpoint as being provisionally true, we will have to suppose that other viewpoints are *possibly* true. Because, if we do not have the right to accept absolutely that right and good are with us (even though we believe this to be the case), we do not have the right to say that truth and good are not with others.”⁵ In this, of course, is an implicit recommendation of a position of non-absolute exclusivity toward others but, because of the flaws of the values of our own beliefs, a much more tolerant and open relationship toward others.

3. On the Ecumenical Movement in the World

Many people in various religions and churches all over the world are aware of the abovementioned negative features of religious practice. Not just the everyday people, but even their leaders! And actually finding fundamental fellowship in their own flaws, limitedness, faults, that is in their own *sinfulness*, and at the same time turning a blind eye to the insignificant differences among them, and with a consciousness of the essence of their own religious purpose and mission, they have been drawn to a variety of efforts to draw closer to one another, to engage in dialogue and even in cooperative activities.

These efforts are usually called *ecumenical*.⁶ The very concept “*ecumena*”, from an etymological standpoint, originally in classical Greek signified *all the inhabited earth*. Thus in and from that context it indicates above all the consciousness that always reflects and thinks through the fact that one is globally intertwined with other cultures and religions in one’s own culture and religion, and one acts based on that. In doing so, one must do so without a single hint of any sort of hierarchical status among them. In other words, the *ecumena* thinks just or only about the responsibility of all people within one single and necessarily equal world community, and must act in that way and that way alone – “anyone who thinks ecumenically, therefore thinks in terms of universal interrelatedness, thinks historically about humankind, responsibly about humankind.”⁷

Yet, here we will emphasize the fact that such ecumenical efforts *do not exist* among us. Indeed, in this region there are no significant ecumenical efforts, except here and there, and they are therefore sporadic ones, some other merely cosmetic ones, in developing dialogue and some sort of drawing closer even between the Christian denominations (the degree of distrust and rivalry is still too high!), much the less between the three abovementioned religions whose common forefather was Abraham. This situation is probably the result of several factors: the emphasis on historical *burdens* in the relationships, then a rather *marginal* experience and general testing of these religious paradigms, various *frustrating* elements caused by small numbers of members, *xenophobia* as a result of that, the error of *ethnocentrism* as an expression of belatedness in nation building... All of these are at hand, and for ecumenism one needs a critical view of one’s own past, an avoidance of religious fanaticism, the development of a consensus on common values and an active readiness to stand up for the general good. This, unfortunately, is often missing here, or rather it cannot be brought about because of the existence and predominance of the factors mentioned above.

Above all, for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, the abovementioned attribute of the *self-critical standpoint* of a religion toward its own past, but also toward its present, is most necessary (for example, through open admission that in all religions there are believers who extol arrogance and conflict instead of cooperation and understanding, and thus making all sorts of exclusivity evident). In other words, at the beginning of every ecumenical project there must be a reflection on *taking part in the blame for all the existing evil in the world by each religion individually* and then *a clear statement of intention to overcome that state*.⁸ The latter can be achieved, according to Kuschel, only if those who believe, regardless of their religion, hold to the following necessary moral-ethical principles, which actually follow on from those very values: *first*, is a dedication to a culture of *nonviolence* and especially of respect of life, then *second*, a dedication to a culture of *solidarity* and justice in the world economic order, *third*, a dedication to

⁵ Ibid. 448.

⁶ Here we are using the concept “ecumenical” in the broadest possible sense: the totality of that which is related to activities whose function is to establish dialogue and cooperation among all world religious communities in order to bring them together on necessarily equal footing.

⁷ Karl-Josef Kuschel, *ibid.* p. 212.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

tolerance and life in truthfulness, and *last* a dedication to a culture of *equal rights* and the partnership of men and women.⁹

On the other hand, in order for the *ecumena* to be established, it is necessary to invest effort in *becoming familiar with and studying* the other religions. Clearly, there is no theological agreement without comprehensive mutual knowledge and lasting mutual readiness for learning more, from this standpoint. There is no ecumenical dialogue unless the existence of others is taken as a given and unless one stops looking at others only from one's own point of view. In other words, Kuschel says, "a theology is needed which allows people in religions to maintain their own truth statements in a reasonable way without excluding or Satanizing other demands for the truth."¹⁰ All of this becomes possible, in fact, as we have already said, if one's own sinfulness is raised into consciousness, thus removing the element of immaculateness and the desire for absoluteness. It is indeed "an all-encompassing *knowledge* about one another, mutual *respect*, mutual *responsibility* and mutual *cooperation*. The fundamental theological prerequisite for this is that people in religions see each other mutually as members of a single human family of whom God demands and seeks a special path toward God."¹¹ (emphasis mine)

A Concrete example: In the introduction of the Charta Oecumenica,¹² it states explicitly in that sense "we must not be satisfied with this situation...we intend to do our utmost to overcome the problems and obstacles that still divide the churches." In the second part which talks about the visible fellowship of the churches in Europe, the following claim is made: "we must reappraise together the history of the Christian churches, which has been marked by many beneficial experiences but also by schisms, hostilities and even armed conflicts. Human guilt, lack of love and the frequent abuse of faith and the church for political interests have severely damaged the credibility of the Christian witness. Ecumenism therefore begins for Christians with the renewal of our hearts and the willingness to repent and change our ways. The ecumenical movement has already helped to spread reconciliation." Toward the end, when speaking of mutual responsibility in Europe of all religions, they follow with this, "Through the centuries Europe has developed a primarily Christian character in religious and cultural terms. However, Christians have failed to prevent suffering and destruction from being inflicted by Europeans, both within Europe and beyond. We confess our share of responsibility for this guilt and ask God and our fellow human beings for forgiveness. Our faith helps us to learn from the past, and to make our Christian faith and love for our neighbors a source of hope for morality and ethics, for education and culture, and for political and economic life, in Europe and throughout the world." A little later when discussing Judaism, they say, "We deplore and condemn all manifestations of anti-Semitism, all outbreaks of hatred and persecutions. We ask God for forgiveness for anti-Jewish attitudes among Christians, and we ask our Jewish sisters and brothers for reconciliation", and of Islam "Muslims have lived in Europe for centuries. In some European countries they constitute strong minorities. While there have been plenty of good contacts and neighborly relations between Muslims and Christians, and this remains the case, there are still strong reservations and prejudices on both sides. These are rooted in painful experiences throughout history and in the recent past", and the stand is taken for a commitment to meet Muslims with respect and to work together with them on mutual problems.

4. Outweighing the Particular – the modern state in Central Europe

⁹ The measure for this was established in the *Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration*, passed by the Parliament of World Religions on September 4, 1993 in Chicago. It was adopted by representatives of most major religions. This declaration itself rests on the fact that in each of them, in spite of possible differences in content, there are very similar ethical foundations, which take the form of demands on believers to act on directive in certain ways.

¹⁰ Karl-Josef Kuschel, *ibid*, p. 221.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 217.

¹² A large number of Christian Denominations adopted a minimum of mutual principles and the groundwork by which they must treat each other, aimed at increasing their sense of community. On April 22, 2001 in Strasbourg they signed the so-called *Charta Oecumenica*. In the name of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), the presiding president, Czech Cardinal Miroslav Vlk signed his name, and in the name of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) it was signed by Metropolitan Jeremie. With this Charter, these European churches committed themselves to nurturing their fellowship, which was growing between them in spite of everything. More can be read about this in my paper "On the Charta Oecumenica *here and now*", in: *Religija & tolerancija*, no. 1, Novi Sad 2004, pp. 46-54.

When creating the modern nation states, which went on in parallel with powerful secular overtones, there was still not a complete cessation of the importance or of the productive influences of religious factors on the events and developments in society. In that way the religious affiliation of societal members was still at the heart of all kinds of relations and discourse, since a significant differentiation in society was carried out along the lines of religious affiliation. This was especially marked in those states that departed from the *anti-Soviet* social project in the form of socialism at the end of the 20th century. Indeed, they even found significant support for the construction of a new social project in the facts of different religious conceptions, such as was the case with Serbia as well. These conceptions were usually found in recalling and consciousness-raising about the historical religious heritage, and then through lending significance to religious institutional forms in modern political practice and, ultimately, in the implanting of religious values and principles in the programs of political parties. In this way, actually, emphasis was again placed the significance of the religious dichotomy in society, thus having an influence on concretely positioning the religions in the social dynamic and taking up positions in the political structures and in the distribution of power in society.

And yet, these processes and phenomena belonged only to the sphere of the *phenomenological*. Therefore, it seems important to ask ourselves what it is that is hiding *behind* that phenomenology, or what is the *essence* of the discourse about any form of existence in such social relations? Simply stated, we are talking about the relationship to *the other*: The focus in the process of social construction is on establishing *the other*, who significantly differs from me in some ways. The actual possible relationships that appear toward the continuation of the other are in fact *multifarious*, which then means that not only the theoretical-receptive stand toward the other survives, but that the relation to the other is brought about in an essentially different way – and that is above all through the entire wealth pulsing in the practical aspects of human life.

The very possibility of the existence of some sort of meeting of the other in the form of a collective subject lies in the idea that the conceptual models establishing the identity of each socially determined being in modern society are often, if not exclusively, those of the group, so that otherness is also produced in an abstract form. In other words, the establishing identity matrices in a social milieu, which are often plural, leave a powerful collective mark as a product on their members (the so-called collective identity, in the form of language, religion, culture, gender...), but at the same time they make it possible to communicate with the existence of the other in an abstract form, one that certainly serves as a signifier of almost all the members of a certain group. In that way, for example, it is enough to know one of the collective indicators (nationality, religious affiliation...) about a person so that they then can be seen as one who is already a “familiar” other.¹³

Another factor that is quite significant is, because of the existence of the plurality of identity models, in these cases socially determined constructions of identity, the establishment of significant *particular* differences between people, on the basis of which it is possible to see quite a variety of differentiations among members of a society. It is essential that we keep this in mind, because it has long been known that each individual, particular culture (and every such religion), establishes the strict plausibility of its demands for a single, “our”, truth, which then unifies the produces its own conceptual world, not only for the individual as such but for the whole society. The existence of the individual human in the active network of the effects of the identity matrix in society sets the conditions for the reception of the particular collective identity model for the members of that society. In addition, the production of a social reality with such features also has the pretense of assimilating (or often in a brutal way) *excluding* the other and the different that are found in the milieu.

In fact, the very process of establishing an identity matrix develops through a complex and varied socialization of members of society, thus through the very *belonging* of the individual to a given

¹³ Still, we are duty bound to mention the following: the *other* does not always seem to be who they really are in truth, but only as we actually give them attributes. Indeed, our standpoint is that the cognition of the other as they really are, is in fact impossible. It is impossible not just because of the flawed character of our own cognitive powers (which would be the classic Kantian standpoint), but also because the other always has in themselves an outer layer that is never quite transparent. In other words, it only seems that the other is significantly different, but not in the complete certainty of the knowledge of all that is different, that is, how that other really is, but because of the essential non-transparent other in question, within the limitations of our conceptualization of the other (which is the therefore the classical hermeneutic standpoint), that has as a consequence the relativization of the differences and thus an open and well-intentioned approach to the other.

social matrix that is adopted in various indirect ways from one's earliest childhood. Such a person is then said to be somehow *rooted* in some form of particularity (national, religious, cultural...). And yet, we should also not overlook the abovementioned fact that the process of establishing a collective identity always develops in a concrete social milieu in which access to the very power of establishing identity is varied, and this sets the conditions for the creation of *inequality* in the process – the matrices of the majority that are adopted have an advantage over those of the minority.

5. Toward a positive acceptance of the other – the case of Christianity

The forms or ways of *meeting* the other, which can thus take on different forms in each reality, can be multi-faceted. Thus, we are dealing with the cognitive-receptive and therefore with the varied from the domain of the practical. However, the tolerant real *acceptance* of the other is the most complex demand of all in terms of these criteria. At the same time, it speaks also of *the most essential* form of relations toward the other. Indeed, the phrase “complex demand” indicates that the true acceptance of the other presupposes the deconstruction of all, and thus obviously “our”, *one-sidedness*, which is an essential part of all particular identity matrices (national, religious, ethnic...). Of essence in all one-sidedness is its tendency to exclude which is primarily focused on that which is one's own. Of course, because of the nature of the other, meeting them in the sense of accepting and allowing them to exist and being with them does not occur only on the level of the relationship between individuals, but rather also takes place on the level of the collective, in a concrete social atmosphere. Here mediation is also much more complex, since it dovetails into the power structure of a given society and is dominantly burdened with the standing production-ideological relations, but also with the existing paradigms of the *weltanschauung*, which are not always connected to the principles of Christian values, and this is, as we all know, often the case.

As a starting point in our interpretation, we shall take up the position that Christianity as a paradigm of religion and faith addresses every person on earth. Since Christianity has historical experience in its own development in facing the problem of encountering and contacting the other, it then means that Christianity is familiar with the problem. We find this in texts that illustrate the Old Testament Jews as foreigners, that is, their situation as the other. As an illustration of this we can quote a passage from the OT, “Then you will live a long time in the land where you are nomads” (Jer. 35:7).¹⁴ Of course, here the focus is on a concrete form of the earthly sojourn of the believer in a foreign land, and the meaning of the earthly stay of the “foreigner” radically changed in the NT, such that the entire particularity of the this-worldly slife of the human became ephemeral in every way – as a sojourn in an inappropriate place, and the life of the human on earth becomes that of a stranger. This is because the NT paradigm for the true home of the believer is connected to heaven, as confirmed by Paul's words, “But our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20), or also “And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth” (Heb. 11:13).

However, we are also interested in the question of the *nature* of the relationship toward strangers.¹⁵ The OT concept can be summarized in the following statements: “Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt” (Ex. 23:9); then, “I love foreign gods, and I must go after them” (Jer. 2:25); “Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow” (Jer. 22:3); and “So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against... those who...deprive aliens of justice” (Mal. 3:5). Obviously, all the quoted examples indicate that a positive acceptance of foreigners is deeply rooted in Christianity, as far back as the OT. It can then be concluded that positive and open “communication with a foreigner (and that in the light of salvation!) is a paradigmatic principle in Christianity.”¹⁶

The abovementioned NT paradigm of the heavenly homeland of the believer consequently results in the position “of the necessity of deconstructing the belonging of the human in the world, deconstructing the build up of concepts that define the process of taking action in the world.”¹⁷ This greatly empowers the teaching about the single father of all people and the idea of their primordial

¹⁴ All Biblical quotes are taken from the NIV (on-line version): <http://www.biblegateway.com/>.

¹⁵ Cf. Alpara Losonca, *Mogućnosti hrišćanske kulture*, u: *Habitus*, br. 3-4, Novi Sad, 2001. We should note that a large portion of our interpretive paradigm borrows heavily from his principles, and this will be clearly indicated later in this paper.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

equality. Indeed, all forms of this-worldly particular differences appear to be worthless in relation to, on one hand, the principle of human equality as *individuals*, the undifferentiated spiritual essence that all people have,¹⁸ and on the other hand the existence of a single father (God) leads us to the understanding of the other as a *brother*, meaning that the community of people in Christianity is a brotherhood, regardless of their earthly particularities.

Such an understanding of the insignificance of this-worldly differences is even more powerfully affirmed by the Christian conception of salvation. The Christian paradigm of the teaching of salvation "indicates a specific all-encompassing *inclusive* structure (...) Jesus shows, literally stated, *infinite interest* in each person. The care he showed to everyone creates universal inclusion, which presupposes *compassionate* openness toward the uniqueness of each other person (...) The subjects of Jesus' attention were typically the displaced, that is, those who had found no rest and therefore were 'the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame' (Luke 14:21). In such an environment there is the development of abstracting from all the experiential traits of the person, that is, from empirical differences regardless of whether they have to do with professional status, economic position or ethnic affiliation, or even gender – Paul's famous claim proves this undeniably ('There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'; Gal. 3:28). (...) If innovation in Christianity's approach is to be sought, it should actually be defined by this radical universal inclusiveness."¹⁹

Obviously, from this it can be seen that Christianity does not recognize in the slightest any kind of exclusive one-sidedness toward the other, who is different from me or us because of some particular characteristic. Moreover, faith in the Christian form, as we have seen, explicitly does not allow this. Faith only and primarily presupposes a relationship of *love* and *solidarity* with others, in everything and in every aspect, if we are on the path to understanding Christianity in the spirit of the New Testament. We just have to remember Jesus' demand that we love everyone, even our enemies, as Matthew tells us (Mt. 5:44). As for the other model of relationships with others – that is, *solidarity* – we can say that the Christian nature of *solidarity* is such that it essentially stimulates the human believer to be in *solidarity* with all members of the community, believing in everything, including even pain, as testified to by the words of the Apostle Paul that claim that all are equal in faith even in those terms. Thus, understanding the community and believing in the metaphor of one body that Christ symbolizes, Paul says that if even one part of the body suffers, then everyone suffers with it (I Cor. 12:26).²⁰ This seems a bit absurd if one observes and understands the relationships of exclusive forms of the particular and the essentially this-worldly identity models and of the established *weltanschauung* paradigms that exist today.

This, in many ways paradoxical, principle of "love and solidarity in everything and in terms of everything" with others, especially from the conceptual context of the dispersive and exclusive particular secular models, becomes completely "logical" and seems to be *taken for granted* if one accepts the very *essence* of Christian teaching, which must be one of the characteristics of those who believe in it. Then it will be clearly seen that the *love* relationship is the most important one established toward the other in Christianity, and the task is to build that relationship toward others on an individual level. As it is generally known, the most important form of the Christian love imperative is in Matthew's gospel, "Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."^[a] 38This is the first and greatest commandment. 39And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself!" (Mt. 22:37-39). In other words, Christian love, as the driving and singular proper form of relationship toward the other, can be summarized in the vision of the Christian ethical paradigm in the famous "Golden Rule" of Christian morality, which says, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 7:12). This consequently means the radical acceptance of the other – an equally active relationship toward the other as one builds toward oneself.

For, the fundamental feature of Christian love is that it is primarily understood and defined as a *giving* relationship, and this is done "without the anticipation of return. In it there are no elements of a mutual structure, rather the giving is defined as *unconditional* love, that is, the unconditional state of openness in terms of love."²¹ And it offers what others lack – one must feed the hungry, give water to the

¹⁸ Cf. more about this in my article *Filozofijska recepcija problema odnosa religioznosti i pojmovna osoba i ličnost*, in the periodical *Crkva u svijetu*, br. 3, Split 2000, pp. 301-315.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

thirsty, clothe the naked, take in the traveler, as the Biblical example suggests. In this way, actually, the meaning of Christian love is laid bare, as a relationship of servanthood toward others and not ruling over them. Indeed the meaning of that Christian love is expressed in the inspirational statements "never enough", "always more" and "ever closer". In that sense, the words of St. Augustine are most appropriate, "Whoever once says 'that's enough", he is doomed to failure". Therefore, Christian love is not emotional and static, rather it is active in seeking the true acceptance of the other and what is good for them.