



Summary of lecture by Tomislav Žigmanov:

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

Divided God: Public debate, 20 JULY 2007

Even today, we still need to discuss about the most numerous religions and to speak in favour of an honest and open dialogue. There is one well known fact which also pushes us to do so and this is that throughout of all human history practicing of a religion was far apart from its primary mission, which by default can be summed in: acting of peace making" Still, nowadays, the religion is being, to some extent, functionalised and thus, quite opposite to this it has come down to the tense and disorderly factor in the relations between people, nations, cultures and states... A German theologian, Karl Joseph Kuschel encounters the contemporary symbols of this "raw" between the religions in the following (non religious) factors: "nationalism, hate towards strangers, religious fanaticism and exclusionism."

And what does it appear to be the greatest problem here? By all means, we are dealing here with some form, nevertheless radical one, of *betrayal* of its own mission. When practicing religion the followers, thus, do not proceed with foundations of religious values, principles and normative assumptions, which I believe that is known to everyone, have, universalistic force and primarily humanistic character such as are: peace, love, goodness... These noticeable *defects* occur due to *human frailty* which can be manifested in following manners: ethical maxims are in life interpreted in the light of their particular phrases; further the understanding and acceptance of the basic moral norms of religious paradigms is in its nature, functional; there is a thoroughly instrumental approach in their practicing, and sometimes deeds which might be established on these values are consciously being suspended.... In this sense it becomes clear why the history of practicing of the religions used to have characteristics of violent fanaticism, paralysing fatalism, unreasonable exclusionism, desire for absolute, expressions of mutual aggression and rejection among one another... Nevertheless, the awareness of this issue when the deficiencies in inter-religious relations are being thematized, usually fails to present itself. Such as the very fact that the man is, according to the religious view of the world, primarily and substantially imperfect, that the one is frail, inclined towards a sin....

The awareness of the aforementioned negative characteristics of the religious practicing exists for some time already among many people in different religions and churches throughout the world. And in their finding of thorough commonness in their own deficiencies, constraints, defects with the awareness of essence of their own religious mission, they are making efforts together to approach each other, to enter into a dialogue and be involved in collective activities. These attempts have a common term that describes them as *ecumenical*. The term *ecumena*, itself, etymologically in Old Greek means *the whole inhabited earth*. Therefore the ecumena in this context

and from this view is first and foremost represented as the awareness which is always contemplating and reasoning through the view of *global* entwinement with other cultures and religions and with religions of its own culture and on this grounds it establishes its workings.

However, we would like to stress the *absence* of these ecumenical efforts in our region. Namely, we do not have any significant efforts made, except the random ecumenical endeavours regarding the opening of a dialogue and developing of some kind of closeness between Christian denominations themselves. Such state is probably reflecting several factors: stressing of the historical *burden* in the relations, peripheral experience and general trial of these religious paradigms, different elements of *frustrations* due to scarceness and *xenophobia* as a consequence, delusions of *ethnophiletism* as a reflection of lateness in creation of nations... For a dialogue and cooperation between religions to take place, we primarily need *self-criticism* of each religion of its own past but also the present (e.g. through open confession that in every religion there do exist followers, who instead of the cooperation and understanding practice arrogance and confrontation, and also needed is witnessing of different kinds of exclusionism). On the other hand, in order to establish ecumenism the effort has to be made which would lead to *acquainting, studying and learning about* those others.

This, once again, implies attitude towards *the other one*, who is different from one. The forms and manners of *getting acquainted* with the other one are numerous. Namely, it includes cognitive and perceptive acquaintance and many different forms of practical acquaintance. Nevertheless, out of all these the one that is the most demanding by criteria and the most complex is a true *acceptance* of this other one. In the Christian understanding of the world this comes from the thesis about one father of all people and from the idea of primeval *equality*. Namely, all forms of particular differences which are of this world, usually turn out to be meaningless when compared to, on one side equality of people in being individuals, and undifferentiated spiritual trait owned by all people, and on the other side, the existence of one father (the God), this pushes us to experience the other one as *the brother*, i.e. that the community of people in Christianity is a community of brothers, regardless of the worldly particularities. This kind of understanding of worldly differences as the unworthy ones is even more strongly confirmed by the Christian point of view on Salvation. Namely, Christian paradigm of the teaching on Salvation “ shows specifically overall, inclusive structure (...) Jesus, literally said, shows *an endless concern for everyone*” (A. Losoncz). Thus, with regard to this it can be concluded that Christianity does not in the slightest, know for any exclusive kind of one- sidedness towards the other one who is different from oneself or oneselves in some particular trait. It, individually, as the only and primary relation establishes *love and solidarity* with the others, in all senses and with regard to everything.