

Contemporary Dilemmas of the Ecumenical Movement

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Humanity has experienced many tragedies in the micro- and macro-social aspect, and also crystallized in several movements, which in the face of postmodern drama of a man are trying to create a friendly atmosphere around relationships. One of them became an ecumenical movement that promotes openness among societies, respect for differences and encourages the dialogue. Suggested by the author's loss of interest in ecumenical ideas and lack of reception of inter-church documents, it results from the reduction of the role of religion in the institutional dimension. This is reflected in the processes of secularization and privatization, and consequently resignations of large social groups of being part to any church. Modern man is a result of pluralistic reality in a way that an individual is individually looking for religious and non-religious references and systematically distances himself from the models of religiosity proposed by the Churches. In this context, the proposed ecumenical movement, i.e., legitimized by religious institutions, loses its importance and is identified only as treatment that restores the prestige of Churches.

Keywords: ecumenical movement, ecumenism, modernity, institutionalism, religiosity, society, religion

1. Introduction

Contemporary social reality brings the enormity of events, initiatives, and treatments that inspire today's Europe inhabitant to the intellectual reflection on the future. On the one hand, we are witnesses of intensification of the idea of unification in the economic-military dimension, as exemplified by the European Union and NATO enlargement, and on the other hand of the growth of social marginalization, social exclusion and the increasingly visible delaminating of civilization. We note some actions towards integration, which are based on good faith, honesty, love, and people's justice but we also notice intensification of violence, terrorism and widespread exploitation of societies and communities in order to achieve their own selfish purposes.

The duality transformation presented here introduces in the average European citizen anxiety, impatience and fear. A modern man who faces such situation, is constantly looking for silence, the meaning of life and its purpose. He needs that internal order to overcome difficulties and adversities both in the individual and collective aspects. The outlined prospect of modernity is rooted in history, an integral part of which is the time. Modernity cannot be seen without the past, even that one which has generated many wrongs and evil to people. History is designed to discover errors and mistakes of societies, to seek peaceful ways and to walk in solidarity for the future. In this respect, the religion which has accompanied people virtually from the moment they appeared on Earth has a great role. It is extremely difficult to imagine the history of Europe without the Judeo-Christian idea influence that inspired and stimulated the development of the continent. Christian ideas

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were mostly expressed in the activities of churches and institutions established by them, which from the beginning of its existence were constantly creating the man and often were the forces inspiration that led to breakthroughs and reforms in a particular socio-historical reality. The ecumenical movement, which originated and developed on the continent, is part of religious character of Europe. It was created as a typical religious movement, which evolved over time towards a social movement. It is said that this expansion has resulted from the discovery of human values, which creates the movement. At the moment, the ecumenical movement is still not enough popular and present in the life of societies, to speak about his lasting presence in human consciousness. A good example might be just occasional reflections on this issue of the researchers in various fields of science as well as few publications in the socio-religious periodicals. This movement does not formally function in the life of the Christian churches. Current status and development is due to many lay people and clergy from various traditions, whose cherishing the tradition of the unity of the entire world shall be perceived rather as a hobby.

Having the above suggestions in mind, we decided to present the contemporary dilemmas of the ecumenical movement in the context of the functioning of social movements. We make this assumption due to the fact that social movements are the primary stimulus for change in modern societies, and the ecumenical movement is an excellent illustration of these changes taking place in the socio-religious sphere. We also sincerely hope that this publication will contribute to the intensification of research works on ecumenism and make researchers from different disciplines explore this issue.

2. Basic Aspects of Ecumenism

The fate of modern Europe is intrinsically linked to the fate of Christianity. The thesis, according to which Christian ideas have been implemented into life in a complicated and often turbulent way by particular countries and people, is indisputable. When we look at the development of Christianity from a historical perspective, we see different phases of development and variety of methods used by representatives of religious institutions in order to form religiosity among people. The institutional manifestation of the Christian ideas is inseparably linked to the fact of the Church creation, and then its split.

Modern scholars usually speak about the ecumenical movement in terms of two planes. The first concerns the attitude of individuals towards the area of difference, as well as confessional and religious otherness. This is typically a personal dimension, accomplished not only by learning and assessment of other faiths and churches, but also through emotions that significantly impinge upon the process of cognition and evaluation, as well as through specific individual actions towards religious otherness.

The second area concerns the institutionalization of the ecumenical movement, apparently exhibited in the work of the World Council of Churches. The very institution was established in Amsterdam in August 1948. From the very beginning of its existence it embraces representatives of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, and Old Catholic churches from dozens of countries around the world. As this worldwide organization grew, regional religious organizations began to emerge from it. One of them was the Conference of European Churches (Karski 2002, 35).

It is the Conference of European Churches (CEC), which was founded in 1959 and is currently bringing together 126 non-Latin churches with the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE) and includes 34 national Episcopal conferences; in 1975, it formed a joint committee that for the first time in the history of Christianity developed a document stating the basic rights, responsibilities, and challenges of ecumenism. The

document, called the Ecumenical Charter, could be formed as a result of long-term work of both bodies and the observations made during the First European Ecumenical Assembly, held in Basel in 1989, and thanks to the concretization of ideas at the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz in 1997. The ceremonial signing of the Charter took place on 22 April 2001 in Strasbourg. The document was assigned by the Cardinal Miroslav Vlk on behalf of the CCEE and the Metropolitan Jeremiah from Paris on behalf of CEC.

Ecumenical Charter in the introduction, among others, states: "The Conference of European Churches and the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe in the spirit of both European Ecumenical Assemblies in Basel (1989) and Graz (1997) definitely decide to keep and develop a community that has been created between us" (Charta Oecumenica 2002, 159).

The document consists of three parts, each with specific responsibilities defined. Charter promises strengthening the cooperation between CEC and CCEE, defending the rights of minorities and ensuring that all churches have a broad access to public life.

In its form, it clearly emphasizes the need for European integration, not only in terms of politics and economics. "Therefore, we wish to keep the *soul of Europe*, when guided by our common faith, we act on behalf of such basic values as justice, freedom, tolerance, participation, and solidarity, and when we together admit to the fact that these values should result in a common benefit among the people" (Charta Oecumenica 2002, 164). Hence, the obligation is to provide support for the process of European unification with all its cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. This commitment is consistent with the approval of the diversity of regional, national, cultural, and religious traditions, defined as the common wealth of Europe. As follows, the churches are obliged for supporting the democratic processes and for ensuring peace and justice to all people.

According to the opinion of Hryniewicz, one of the authors of the document,

Europe has a special responsibility for the fate of the world. It should remain open to all newcomers, refugees and asylum seekers. Thus, churches should consider nationalism a sin, when the love of one's own nation leads to unfair treatment of other nations or minorities. Christians and Churches are obliged through the Ecumenical Charter to commit themselves to the dialogue of appropriate relationships with other religions and beliefs, especially with the Jewish people, with whom we share a belief in the God of Abraham. Everyone has the right to seek truth and bear witness to it in accordance with his or her conscience. (Hryniewicz 2002, 72)

Through the ecumenical movement in this study, I understand the collective action of the society, whose objective is striving to share common values among Christians, values resulting from the sources of the Christian faith and formalized by religious institutions. Reflection about the essential premises of the ecumenical movement will allow the enrichment of the society with the values resulting from the unification ideas and will indicate the direction of cultural change resulting from the violating structure of human communities.

In modern literature, there are three aspects of ecumenism: the spiritual, doctrinal, and practical. Spiritual ecumenism is the inner transformation of a man, from the novelty of spirit, after all, the self-denial and unrestrained outpouring of love, unity desire is born and matures. New spirit in the sense of the individual, means to change attitudes towards other religions. In the social aspect, it is the relation between Christians, which is filled with love. The basis of it is everything that unites rather than divides. When searching for connecting elements of Christians of different confessions, we should adopt an attitude of openness and friendliness. We should understand thoroughly the reason for religious divisions and dogmatic-theological differences. The result of this analysis will lead us to the universal Christian values present in various Christian traditions.

In this type of ecumenism, humanistic aspects of this movement seem to be apparent, which means return to the source of conceptual ecumenism. According to Floran,

humanism does not require any additional terms, it is an essential, common element of all the people and understood by all. It can also be a way to rescue and rebirth of humanity. Humanism is a value beyond the material existence of a man, it includes the so-called higher, spiritual values cultivated by both Christians and followers of other religions among believers and unbelievers. (Floran 1995, 45)

However, the requirement of ecumenism perceived in such way, is to get rid of alienation, hostility, aggression or conviction of possession “only correct views” in social life.

The basic form of spiritual ecumenism is prayer for the unity of Christianity. The first symptoms of this type of activity could be isolated during the pontificate of Leo XIII who in 1894 established the Catholic Church annual day of prayer for Christian unity, immediately before the event of Pentecost. However, this initiative did not meet the wider response from non-Catholic community.

Several years later, this initiative was strongly supported in Lyon by a Catholic priest Paul Couturier who in 1935 began to invite his church Christians of different denominations to pray together for unity. The habit of January prayer for Christian unity was extended to France and thence to neighboring countries, and then to other churches: Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant. Since 1996, the themes of the annual Week of Prayer, Scripture readings and worship schedule are set by a joint group established by the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. In Poland, since 1998 there has been a common adaptation of the material by the Ecumenical Council of Bishops for the Roman Catholic Church Ecumenism and the Polish Ecumenical Council (Kijas 2004, 221-3).

Hryniewicz has written that

overcoming the split happens every time the state of mutual alienation is overcome. While remaining a stranger, or even hostile against one another, we only enlarge the scope of distribution, extending it into our own interior. When overcoming alienation and division we accelerate the day of reconciliation. (Hryniewicz 1982, 1499)

Spiritual ecumenism concerns individual, it teaches how to overcome internal phobia. There's no place for triumphalism or self-egoism. However, it is the self-denial and the adoption of shared guilt for the divided Christianity. Implementation of this task is extremely difficult for the individual. That is why theologians, representing various churches in a scientific way, have been trying for several years to bring people closer to this subject. Their area of operation is doctrinal ecumenism.

Doctrinal ecumenism discusses theological and ecumenical issues, cooperates in doctrinal field and conducts interfaith dialogue. Since the beginning of Christianity, a lot of attention has been paid to doctrinal unity, recognizing it as an essential condition for the unity of the Church. To preserve this unity already in the patristic period, after many debates and disputes, it was possible to determine the Creed as a true force in the whole Church. Starting from the sixteenth century, when the family of Christian churches underwent rapid fragmentation, there were established new churches that interpreted differently the doctrinal principles set out in the first Councils. Along with a different interpretation of the principal truths of faith, the rite was changed and with time passing particular tradition was created. Over the centuries, there were several attempts to make arrangements on doctrinal differences. It was not until the twentieth century that most Christian churches took up reciprocal dialogue. Lutheran and Reformed Churches joined dialogue first. Their greatest achievement was to conclude in 1973 Leuenberg Concord by which the two churches recognized the community of “altar and

pulpit.” An important aspect of the inside-protestant ecumenism expansion in the terms of Leuenberg Concord is the adoption of seven European Methodist Churches on 2 February 1997 (Karski 2001, 56). In the late sixties representatives of the Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church sat to the talks table. The inclusion of these churches to the dialogue resulted in quantitative and qualitative changes in the ecumenical movement. Bilateral dialogues are currently being carried out on a global, national or regional plane. “These involve representatives of the following Christian traditions: Anglicans, Baptists, United Evangelists, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Orthodox, Oriental Christians, Reformed, Old Catholics, Pentecostals and followers of Christ” (Karski 1986, 273). Taking such significant number of dialogue in the world (currently about 30) confirms that in many countries exists friendly climate for discussions, which often involve the largest ecclesiastical authorities. Multilateral discussions and documents, which arise as a result of work of the theological commissions, do not close this issue; it still remains a very difficult and lengthy process of reception and approval of arrangements. It is complicated due to the fact that in almost every church there are different ways to exercise and understand the supreme power (alliances, federations, councils, etc.), hence the need for time so that the church authorities can take such a decision. Doctrinal ecumenism also deals with the missionary issues and cares for ecumenical orientation of priests and pastors education. The aim of every Christian church is to bring thoughts of evangelizing to the whole world and the splitted church loses the integrating function as a consequence and ceases to be credible. The consequence of the confessional divisions was, among other things, the establishment of new independent churches, separatist and syncretic which is contrary to the idea of mission and ecumenism, which requires the existence of one and indivisible Church.

In addition to the realm of consciousness and attitudes of individuals as well as doctrinal arrangements, social, and international relations became an important plane for Christian’s cooperation. The third direction of ecumenical ecumenism, called practical ecumenism is trying to resolve this problem. The origins of this movement back to the second half of the nineteenth century and the initiators were mostly members of clergy, derived mainly from the Protestant Churches. The most famous character of this ecumenical trend in its initial phase known as “Practical Christianity” was Archbishop Upsari, Nathan Soederblom. Among the pioneers of the Church who tried to awake public interest on social issues the two Swiss ministers shall be mentioned, Hermann Kutter and Leonhard Ragaz, and the theologian from the USA-Walter Rauschenbusch. Having used the international organizations of workers, they performed for understanding between people. “The International Association of Reconciliation and the World Association for Promotion of People’s Friendship by the Churches emerged from these initiatives” (Karski 1986, 43). These organizations were created just before World War I, and for obvious reasons they could not extend their activities, especially in the countries involved in armed conflict. However, despite the difficult international situation, the group of church leaders of the neutral countries managed to announce in 1914 the peace appeal, stating among others that “the Church task in the present situation is to appeal for peace and Christian community” (Karski 1986, 43). Roll call was initiated by the before mentioned Archbishop and Soederblom, whose headquarter in Uppsala was the center of ecumenical peace efforts and the assistance to prisoners and victims of war was organized there.

After the war, it was an intense attempt to convene the first Conference of Churches to the Home Practical Christianity. It did not take place until August 1925 in Stockholm and gathered over 600 delegates from 37 countries which were divided into four groups: American, British, European and the Orthodox Church (Karski 1986, 45). Participants in this conference worked in five committees that dealt with such problems as: a/The Church and the economic and industrial issue, b/Church and moral problems, c/Church and international

relations, d/Church and Christian education, e/Church and the methods of creation and federation. As a result of the findings of the Stockholm Conference in 1926, there was the Institute established for Social Research in Geneva, which gave birth to the still existing Ecumenical Institute in Bossey.

The Institute prepared a program of the second Conference held in July 1937 in Oxford. The difficult political situation in Europe and economic crisis doomed that the conference debates differed from the program. The conference was attended by 425 representatives of Protestant Churches, Orthodox, and Old Catholic. There were no representatives of the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany. With the Oxford Conference there is a related slogan: "Let the Church remain the Church," which echoed throughout the Christian world. It was to express the idea that the Church had been influenced by historical, social and political forces and that so far there is no possibility to identify its real character. The slogan formulated in Oxford was supposed to be kind of stimulus, inducing the church to reflect upon its own particular essence. Oxford Conference was an attempt to recover the integrity of the Church (Karski 2007, 49).

3. The Ecumenical Movement in the Context of Social Movements

Beginning of the 21st century is characterized in many societies by great pace and a comprehensive range of social change. These changes affect not only the microsocial level, but also penetrate into the macrosocial dimension. Wnuk-Lipiński has said that

the world has entered a phase of global transformation, the consequences of which we are not able to predict. There is almost nothing which will be like in the past, and the future will not be a simple continuation of the present day. The deepest qualitative changes are probably still ahead of us, and this what the world has experienced since 1989, may be just a prelude to the more qualitative breakthroughs awaiting us in the first decades of the twenty-first century, that will fundamentally change our present horizon of imagination and that will reveal new perspectives and new threats the next generation will have to deal with. (Wnuk-Lipiński 2004, 7-8)

A common understanding of social movement usually refers to some steering effect, which had influence on the qualitative and quantitative change in particular society. Usually the term refers to the movements of workers, peasants, and religious liberation. Modern scholars dealing with issues of social movements define it variously. Generally, two approaches can be distinguished. The first consists of analyzing the movement as a group with specific characteristics, while the second movement is recognized in the broader context of the social system, taking it as a process of the change in thinking, attitudes and institutional arrangements. This distinction has an analytical and ordering character. Most authors take into account both aspects of the studied phenomenon (Szczepański 1970, 252-3; Hryniewicz 1982, 113-36).

Social movements, according to Sztompka, are probably a historically universal phenomenon. People in all societies must have had a reason to join up and fight for common objectives, and against those who stood in the way of their implementation. Historians describe the riots, insurrections, explosions of discontent, which took place in ancient times, powerful religious movements in the Middle Ages, the meaningful peasant revolts in 1381 and 1525, the Reformation and the cultural, ethnic and national movements emerging from the time of Renaissance. Powerful social movements contributed to the birth of modernity in the great bourgeois revolution, mainly English, French and American (Sztompka 2005, 259). "Generally by the term social movement we mean loosely organized community acting together in a non-institutionalized manner to produce change in their society" (Sztompka 2005, 256). These aspects of social movements, despite having been presented in a very selective and general way, will allow preliminary analysis of the ecumenical movement understood as collective action.

Although the ideas of unification were formed with different intensity and effect almost from the beginning of Christianity, it is only in the twentieth century when the conferences on the subject of ecumenism started to be organized. These events are considered to be the beginning of the ecumenical movement. At these conferences the current meaning of the ecumenism was shaped and Nathan Soderblom, Archbishop of Uppsala, described it as “the expression of spiritual attitudes, providing a deep knowledge of the fundamental unity of Christian Churches” (Karski 1986, 12). This definition emphasizes the fundamental unity of the Church and its common tasks. The Catholic Church states in the Ecumenical Decree that the ecumenical movements are activities and enterprises aimed to promote Christian unity, depending on various needs of the Church and the time (DE.4). Unity in this definition is understood as an attempt to overcome the existing confessional barriers. Overcoming these barriers depends on each person, and more on his attitude in relation to Christians of other denominations.

Such an attitude should be characterized by a profound respect, sincere openness towards Christians from other churches, lack of prejudices and fears, and partner trust consisting in exchange of ideas for mutual integration. Considerations about the essence of the term ecumenical movement and the difficulties of definition have led to such a situation that today we use more often the term ecumenical movement than the term ecumeny. Such a state, according to Kijas results from the fact that,

ecumenical efforts taken by the Christians are nothing static, on the contrary, they constitute a dynamic reality of the word. Their ultimate goal is not “scrambling” the wounds of the past and standing still, but the brave, though often very difficult going ahead. Scholars involved into that process do not stop solely on the mere intellectual reflection on what happened in the past, but indulge in finding and identifying new ways towards the future, in which Christians might find the lost unity. (Kijas 2004, 62-63)

Taking into account main goals of social movements and considering the general conditions of the ecumenical movement, we will present here the essential elements of the ecumenical movement in a social context.

3.1. The Ecumenical Movement as a Community in Action

The community is usually a group of people connected by a kind of social bond; in other terms we can determine the community as a number of persons between whom there are any relations (Karski 2002, 256). Therefore, the essence of this element will not focus on the idea, which the movement includes itself as the research shall concentrate on the values that result from the implementation of this idea in society. However, the crucial aspect becomes the fact of adoption of these ideas by members of the community, which is the essence and purpose of every human action (Weber 2005, 55-64).

Therefore, in our case, we will name the community a certain number of persons addressing common actions to restore Christian unity. In such circumstances, the ideas of ecumenism are internalized by members of the community who create then an ecumenical attitude among the rest of society.

The main task in creating ecumenical attitudes is minimizing the interfaith distance. We mean here two dimensions: cognitive and emotional. The concept of social distance is difficult to define in the context of empirical research. The origins of this concept should be seen in the spatial recognition of the issues of familiarity and strangeness in the concepts of G. Simmel, W. Sumner and E. Bogardus. Distance in the context of the ecumenical movement is recognized as the perception of difference and as the scope and nature of contacts with people operating in different confessions. Such approach to distance determines the intensity of

relationship with our person or group, where proximity is expressed by the use of the words: “yours,” “mine,” “ours.” We often talk about, e.g., our nation, our country and our church or our religion. The word “our” includes hidden content suggesting the existence of a social community which we identify ourselves with and which we are connected to.

Nikitorowicz has written that “social bond is created and maintained by what links people and by what divides people in the collective coexistence. Interactions and relationships are formed at a certain level and they make people connect to each other, need each other, feel they are complementary and feel the differences and the community” (Nikitorowicz 1995, 13).

The essence of this part of the ecumenical movement is the desirability of specific human community, which created a bond between them by closing the interfaith gap and adopted the aim of fostering ecumenical ideas.

3.2. The Ecumenical Movement as an Imperative for Change in Christianity

Writing about the changes which have occurred since the emergence of the unifications ideas to the present day, one should go back to the late nineteenth century and realize the deeply divided Christianity. The division of Christianity in 1054 into the so-called East and West cemented the sixteenth century division of the Western Church. Christian churches in the late nineteenth century functioned independently. Their official documents and teaching were focused on the isolationism and negative judgment of other confessions, and the creation of Christian identity based on discriminatory factors but not general. In practice this approach led to many conflicts and mutual antagonisms, which in some way undermined the essence of Christianity as a religion that believed in love, respect and forgiveness. In such circumstances, it was very difficult to carry out missions to preach the good news effectively and at the same time take in a mutual exclusion or hatred. This attitude became a very unreliable and internally contradictory. Therefore, the first ecumenical impulses should be seen in the mission field. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, as reported by Karski, “it was easy to observe the Christians activity to promote peace, international understanding and solving social problems; it was the activity that exceeded the denominational and national limits” (Karski 2007, 43).

The mere fact that the emergence of the ecumenical ideas within Christianity was the beginning of changes that intensified in the Christian churches in the second half of the twentieth century. These changes related primarily to the interdenominational relationship, which directly influenced the attitudes of society towards people with different confession.

3.3. The Ecumenical Movement and the Formalization and Concentration of the Activities

On these matters, the ecumenical movement is heterogeneous and it is very difficult to refer to the specified aspects clearly. This heterogeneity is apparent even from the fact that when we look closer at the accomplishments of ecumenism followers over the centuries, we see that they were finalized on a high level of formalities, for instance Ecumenical Charter, doctrinal agreements or development of research institutes. Such institutions are obviously lacking in other social movements. However, this picture is rather simplified since our own research clearly shows that more than 90% of conscious ecumenists (for such we consider participants in the ecumenical meetings) argue that ecumenism is not encountered in the churches or through contact with a formalized ecumenical group but mostly accidentally from his colleagues or friends. This fact indicates the problem with the reception of the doctrinal arrangements and their impact on the creation of ecumenical

attitudes. In our opinion there is a large discrepancy between the effects of doctrinal dialogues and the actual attitudes of the believers' community. These processes do not run in parallel, and even distant interdenominational agreements are very hard to be internalized by believers. This situation confronts us with another aspect of the ecumenical movement, referring to the concentration of ecumenical activities or rather lack thereof. In Poland, there are centers or places where the so-called "saturation" of ecumenism followers is high, among others Warsaw and Kielce. On the other hand, there are areas where there is a complete lack of those.

3.4. The Ecumenical Movement and Unconventional Forms of Action

In this case, the actions of social movements are characterized by a high level of spontaneity and unconventionality. The ecumenical movement at the current pointed to the existence of great spontaneity and unconventionality as well. The first contacts of the clergy of different faiths raised on the part of church hierarchs high concern and unequivocal opposition. Hitherto, the whole essence of the creation of denominational identity based on the negation of science and tradition of other Churches, and the only full-exponent and carrier of truth was the own Church. There was a need of brave and looking into the future theologians and philosophers in order to alter these views systematically. For this purpose, there were used unconventional methods and activities that substantially exceeded the existing arrangements or practices in the various Churches.

We will use here the example from Poland, which turned into a habit of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Polish specificity of these days is a guest preacher's exchange: during the masses in Catholic churches sermons are preached by the clergy from other Christian Churches and the Catholic priests preach sermons in the fraternal temples. From the standpoint of the Holy See or theologians coming from other denominations, this fact is seen to be inconsistent, however, long-term "community of the pulpit" has been existing so deeply in the consciousness of the clergy and the faithful that the church hierarchs have been forced to accept this fact.

All previous arrangements and the changes that occurred in the interdenominational relations can be related to the ecumenical movement. These changes can be viewed from two points.

First, the ecumenical movement might be the cause of changes, therefore, we claim that the rapprochement of Churches occurred through its development. This fact can be attributed to creation of the institutions which realize the ecumenical postulates including World Council of Churches and the appropriate Councils functioning within the Catholic Church which intensified ecumenical involvements and extended the group of unity supporters among the clergy and laity.

Second, the ecumenical movement may be the result of changes that occurred in the Churches during the formation of the movement. These changes relate to opening up the Churches to other Christian communities as a result of the impulses coming out, among other things, of changes in social structure, the countries involvement in global wars, the evolving of the secular religiosities nature from ritual to evangelical and the emergence of reformatory movements in many Churches.

The wisest and most complete solution of the ecumenical movement causality is to co-locate both cause and effect. An important element is the fact that the ecumenical movement seeks to change the public awareness in the aspect of the confessional relations improvement or strengthening the unification efforts, which is transferred in a direct way to the change of social attitudes in general. Therefore, the ideas of ecumenism transported by its followers to other members of society give a new quality to social relationships

and create new cultural patterns. We may assume that their course and conditions will be strongly correlated with the changes launched by a specific type of social movement, which is the ecumenical movement.

4. The Ecumenical Movement as Inspiration to Activity for European Unity

When talking about Europe, we cannot forget its identity mainly based on the Greek and Roman culture. Europe is not only a defined territory, but also culture. Four great heritages influenced its emergence, namely Judaism brought strict moral precepts and prohibitions and the idea of social justice, the Greeks—the universal value of truth, understandable to all people, the Romans—the idea of common law, relevant to all humanity, the Christians—ideas of human brotherhood and the belief in one God who loves and saves. These four great heritages were mutually intertwined and they enriched themselves through the contributions of other nations, such as the Celts, Teutons, Slavs. As a result of this process, it created a European culture, which is a certain unity, however not homogeneous but pluralistic. This culture can be described as unity in diversity.

That unity in diversity is emphasized and proclaimed by the ecumenical movement, which took as its goal the unification of Christianity in its all main currents. The principal area of operation of the unification ideas is to create an axionormative system by individual communities or Churches.

The ecumenical movement initiated by the Protestant Churches in the late nineteenth century and intensified by the inclusion of the Orthodox Churches and in the longer term also the Roman Catholic Church, has currently different intensity and various effects. One of the most important issues still being raised in the circle of ecumenists is how to make a wide range of people aware of the lack of Christian unity. This is the challenge posed to every Christian, at any time and any place. It is a universal and current demand and it is based on the need for continuous learning about ourselves and others, the need to approach and not move away from each other.

In recent years, mankind has experienced many tragedies of micro- and macro-social scale, yet there have been crystallized several movements, which in the face of postmodern drama of human endeavor to create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere in people's relationships. One of them has become undoubtedly the ecumenical movement, which basically promotes attitudes of openness, respect for dissidence, and in disputable cases encourages to take up a dialogue.

When analyzing the changing notions of meaning and different forms of expression the word *ecumeny* or *ecumenical movement*, we need to modernize the ancient interpretation of the term. It will allow a broad view of the substance of ecumenism, that is what is used today. Today's equivalent of "the world inhabited by the people" may be separate inclusion of "living environment" understood as a sphere or a space of human life. For this space, we can include natural, social, and cultural environment.

The first one is sometimes perceived as the occurrence of the people's relations with the environment and the impact of nature on human life and biological development of *homo sapiens*, enabling or hindering the satisfaction of physiological needs. We need to consider also the environment components that do not belong to the world of nature, the metabolic processes and physiological balance as well as adapting to the environment (Wolański 2012, 13-15). The ecology deals with these problems and as a self-study science it defines in detail the problems and the scope of its inquiry.

However, with the interaction of individuals and society in the sense of collective life deal sociology and other social sciences, which on the basis of the empirical research, preceded by the deep theoretical reflection, attempt to describe the individual's attitude towards society, how social bonds are formed inside the concrete

human communities, how the process of learning the social roles is conducted or how society shapes the man and how separate conditions proceed in social reality. So outlined social issues perceive the social environment as the determination of what is common or functions for the relationships between individuals and the community.

Another sphere of human activity and functioning is a cultural space. The object of scientific inquiry in cultural anthropology is “searching for the features of a typical human, that is, those that bind to the cultural essence of man” (Wnuk-Lipiński 2004, 40-41). With the broad cultural context in mind, we can say that it is the characteristic of a given society, it is all that we learn in social life and that we will pass to future generations. Hence, the cultural environment is called the configuration of material and spiritual heritage elements typical of the collectivity, which include the products of human activity, as well as activities related thereto.

Considering three purely theoretically separate functioning environments, it appears to us a three-dimensional image, which is difficult to determine any boundaries of each sphere, or indicate the beginning and the end of that space. This ancient term based on the specific issue of the social sciences, internalized in the consciousness of contemporary man can be an excellent plane to reconsider the diverse social reality, including the church. This reality affects not only the purely social space, but may well go beyond the empirical dimension of humanity. It may concern not something only profane but also sacred.

Modern man, who deliberately creates an environment of residence occasionally also suffers from painful problems of the past. He carries in himself difficult past feuds and interpersonal conflicts including those that concern religion. This is an expression of selfish desire to subjugate others, willingness to impose their beliefs and expand to other entities. The human nature is to strive for the only one “right” socio-religious picture of the reality, often interpreted very personally, as an expression of individualistic ambition and determination to interpret the socio-cultural reality. Hence, reaching for different administrative and political methods in the past people tried to impose their interpretation of the truths and beliefs, their socio-historical vision of the past.

These problems are no longer subject to conflict in view of the ecumenism, whose sense is the coexistence of people from different religious traditions and the acceptance of their past. This is a basic social function, which is satisfied by ecumenical movement. The idea of this feature is to build between people friendly relations that are the foundation for the functioning of all human communities. Such a perspective on ecumenism, which has the strength and will merge, attract, and not discard or break, allows extracting from its core universal values, which are becoming necessary in the functioning of modern democratic societies.

Therefore, ecumenism, as the intellectual and religious current has large deposits of positive impulses in order to counter the different forms of fundamentalism, hatred, or selfishness, to shape the modern man and the future in a spirit of respect for otherness and to teach how to benefit from the wealth of the world diversity.

The characteristics listed above should not be underestimated in the context of European unity. Re-unity is possible only inside a quite homogenous civilization. The civilization identity does not exclude the presence of a whole range of seemingly foreign elements, which in the course of history have been adapted or even assimilated by the ever-wider social groups. It must be agreed as to the truth that due to the interweaving of cultures appears the process of reclaiming rigid native forms. But not always it is possible to exclude the phenomenon of still dangerous eclecticism. This applies particularly to the religious sphere where there is the temptation to simplified reconciliation between apparently similar ideas.

5. Social Functions of Ecumenism

Having the general assumptions of the ecumenical movement and the significant historical problems in mind, we would like to extract the social functions, which ecumenism serves in the modern world.

The first of these is the cognitive function, which determines the degree of interest to other Christian confessions and religions. The interest or desire to explore concerns the nature and specifics of the operation of other churches or denominations. The scope of this feature covers the historical aspects of the formation of specific churches and religions. Not without significance is the fact of getting to know the confession and constant reflection on its changes. It is extremely difficult for us to participate in exchanges of thoughts, whether inter-church or inter-religious dialogues if we do not know sufficiently the specifics of our adversary in matters of doctrine, worship and religious structure.

In direct contacts, called interpersonal, the cognitive aspect is also needed in order to shape appropriate attitudes towards other human beings. In this regard, ecumenism as a process of bringing people with different philosophies of life, serves undeniable assistance in mutual maintaining and edification of interactions with another person. Cognitive efforts preferred by the ecumenical movement in all conditions and circumstances may result in the formation of lasting interpersonal relationships, necessary for the proper and peaceful functioning of human societies.

The second function of ecumenism we can call integration. It is particularly important today, where the interpersonal integration is the core of relationships. This is due to the position of the post-modernism man, who is constantly being placed in new social situations. These situations are subject to fast-paced, constant changes for the cause of emerging new technologies, or development of methods, techniques, and information flow. The changing socio-cultural reality forces the modern man to create and learn new social roles, to create new social networks.

An important feature of the present day is processes changing the socio-cultural environment, which previously was subject to slower changes. The contemporary understanding of human functioning was simpler and more predictable, due to the similar socio-cultural entity context. Stability and durability were qualities which were permanently preparing the man to function in society. However, today's motility, mobility and the constantly changing social reality make the integration processes more difficult.

In this situation, ecumenism is preparing the present to continuous changes and new social situations. It does not inhibit or obstruct relationships but with the multiplicity and diversity allows focusing on core values, on what unites people and not divides them. It proposes the integration, rather than unification, it opts for saving the own otherness but with respect for other people's separateness and autonomy. The proposed value with full accountability can contribute to the integration of modern societies and to adopting an open attitude to otherness.

Another function performed by the ecumenism in the lives of individuals has the pedagogical and educational dimension. The education is said to be a process. Therefore, education to ecumenism is not limited to a specific time or space dimension, it is not just a specific moment in the life of an individual, but it runs throughout the whole life. This applies not only to children and adolescents, but also applies to adults. Through contacts with people from different religious traditions occurs a process of mutual approach, acceptance and empathy. Contacts with people from different religious backgrounds help to create attitudes of respect for otherness and attitudes of understanding followed by acceptance of other positions, ideas and opinions. A man

equipped with such personality traits becomes more open, compassionate, understanding others and less selfish. He looks for beauty and truth in others and he does not shut down in his idealized, fundamentalist world.

6. Closing Remarks

The above presented arguments and remarks on the role of the ecumenical movement in the modern world were actually accepted and used in the everyday life of contemporary societies only to a certain degree. In our opinion, there are several reasons for this state of affairs.

One of them is to reduce the role of institutional religion. We have in mind the secularizing processes that are particularly hard to run in the societies of Western Europe, and consequently resignation of large social groups from belonging to any church. As a result of pluralistic reality, a modern man individually seeks religious and extra-religious reference systems and he systematically distances himself from the models of institutional religiosity proposed by the Churches.

In this context, the ecumenical movement proposed or legitimized by these institutions, by analogy, is not that significant, and is identified only as treatment that restores the prestige of Churches. Incidentally, as a result of intense social transformation and globalization processes Churches more willingly care about the image of their confession than about the inter-religious or interdenominational affairs. It affects the positions of the faithful, and the whole idea of ecumeny as a community of people weakens. The problem of unity or religious community is also not discussed at meetings of political leaders who create political unity, for instance within the European Union.

In this regard, religious leaders agreed to leave the religious matters to individual member states, which in turn distanced even more the perspective of turning the ecumenical into a real social reality. Such decisions were in many cases dictated by maintaining the political interest of the authorities, which resulted in various roles the Churches play in every state. The issue of unity in the world is also raised by the so-called authorities, scholars or artists. Postmodernism in its high rate of change and visual creation of reality is a fundamental dilemma and the biggest difficulty in more intensive reception of the movement in contemporary societies.

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