THE CHURCH
AS A PROCLAIMER OF THE CROSS


Introduction

The Cross of Jesus, being the main symbol of Christianity, has not lost its controversial meaning over the centuries. Although the reasons for Cross-related difficulties at the time of the Apostles are different from the ones encountered nowadays, the fact remains that the Cross does not leave anyone indifferent. If it evokes such varied, including negative, reactions from those who encounter Christianity, it is worth wondering which meanings contained in the Cross made it be the key subject of the apostolic proclamation as well as the teaching of the Church. The Cross, although it expresses the historical reality of Jesus’s death executed according to Roman practices, still remains much more than a mere reminiscence of old methods of causing death to convicts. It is clearly seen in the way St. Paul understands his mission of preaching the Gospel:

‘After all, Christ sent me not to baptise, but to preach the Gospel; and not by means of wisdom of language, wise words which would make the cross of Christ pointless. The message of the cross is folly for those who are on the way to ruin, but for those of us who are on the road to salvation it is the power of God […]’. While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, we are preaching a crucified Christ: to the Jews

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an obstacle they cannot get over, to the gentiles foolishness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. God’s folly is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength’ (1 Cor 1:17–18.22–25).

The present article begins with considering the theological significance of historical realism of the Cross. Further, it reflects on the place of the Cross in the apostolic proclamation. Finally, two main intuitions regarding the Cross, which are present in this proclamation, are discussed: the fact that the Cross fulfils those Old Testament prophecies that refer to the Messiah and that God reveals himself most fully in Jesus’s Cross.

1. Realism of the Cross in the consciousness of the Church

Evangelical accounts regarding Jesus’s crucifixion contain difficult to express verbally cruelty of this ancient punishment which, although originated in Persia, was practised by the Romans and used against slaves or political rebels. Christians themselves were often afraid of the realism of the Cross. This fear was justified as in the Old Testament it was believed that such death was cursed (Deut 21:23). St. Paul clearly connects this curse with Jesus’s fate (Gal 3:13). The cruelty of death by crucifixion was considered almost a proof for religious Jews that a person punished in the said manner had been abandoned and cursed by God. Fear of the Cross can be seen among Christians even nowadays. The death of Jesus contains all that makes death terrifying to people of all ages: torture, physical exhaustion, flagrant injustice, hatred of enemies, mockery, experience of being abandoned by God and helplessness. The reality of what happened on the Cross, this harsh truth, for many people stands in opposition to their sense of aesthetics, while for others it is too easy and stripped of its historical context an accusation of all those Jews and Romans who contributed to Jesus’s death. There is, however, another, possibly most serious argument. The true, uncensored vision of the Cross could make the viewers
concentrate solely on human suffering, pain and dying, which would con-
sequently lead to perceiving Christianity as glorifying all that is ultimately
inhuman. We can also add that the message contained in the New Testa-
ment warns us against focusing solely on the Cross. If St. Paul professes
his Christian faith by writing: ‘We know that Christ has been raised from
the dead and will never die again. Death has no power over him any more’
(Rom 6:9), that necessarily means that he acknowledges the reality of Je-
sus’s death but at the same time he shifts the point of gravity onto His vic-
tory that prevails.

However, an attempt to conceal that which is revealed in the brutality
of the Cross, regardless of the possible motivation behind it, undoubtedly
conceals all that is extraordinary, paradoxical, in contrast to the logic of
this world yet belonging to the essence of Christian faith that we find in
the Cross. As Christianity is internally maturing and simultaneously dis-
tancing itself from triumphalist trends, which have been and still are ob-
servable within it, it discovers the meaning of the real Cross⁴, even though
the image of true events occurred on Calvary is still being resisted. Images
of the Cross dated back to the 5th century AD, which are one of the oldest
that survived until modern times, do not show any traces of Jesus’s suffer-
ing; He is depicted either while praying or as being victorious, thus antici-
pating His resurrection. Similarly, in the early Middle Ages the dignity of
Crucified Jesus is shown by occasionally depicting Him wearing a royal
crown to indicate the fact that Crucified Christ is the Judge of the world
and the Lord of all creation. The change in Western European approach
to the Crucified relates to the late medieval and Renaissance art that aims
at greater realism. It was by no means an artistic trend unrelated to the
changes within Western Christianity itself. The development of mysticism,
which included an increasing significance of suffering, religious interpre-
tation of misfortunes that affected the Europeans such as the Black Death,
and finally, the return to reflection over the redemptive significance of the
Cross – all these are also expressed in the transformation of religious art. It
does not come as a surprise then that the most realistic images of the Cross
coincided with the Reformation. In the Reformation movement, particu-
larly for Martin Luther, the death of Jesus become the central theological
motif which expressed, on the one hand, the depth of separation between

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⁴ D.J. Hall, God and Human Suffering. An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross, Minneapolis
God and human beings resulted from their sins as well as humans’ helplessness, and on the other hand, incomprehensibly generous God’s activity towards people who are not capable of deserving or repaying God’s forgiveness.5

The reason why looking at the True Cross devoid of ornaments, smooth edges and omissions seems worthwhile is the search for the truth about the human person and the truth about God. The Cross depicts violence, injustice, suffering and sin, which does not allow us to interpret the death of Christ irenically. The death of Jesus on the Cross does not form merely a transition between life and death but it is a paroxysm of injustice and sin in all their forms.6 In the brutal reality of the Cross one cannot find the sick delight in human suffering but the appreciation of all that which constitutes human condition. There is also the conviction (crucial for the belief that in Jesus Christ God became Human) according to which God accepted this human condition in full, the sin excluded (Heb 4:15), to liberate and rebuild humanity.

Moreover, it is a classical Catholic standpoint. St. Thomas Aquinas says: ‘It is just as necessary for the Christian to believe in the passion and death of the Son of God as it is to believe in His Incarnation.’7 Rejection of the events that happened on Calvary or undermining the significance of the Cross would also have to result in questioning the reality of incarnation itself; the incarnation that occurred under particular historical, social and cultural circumstances. A serious approach to the Cross, however, leads to a serious approach to the life of an individual, that is scarred with weakness, suffering and injustice. It also leads to a serious reflection over God’s salvation activity which is far from utopian and, maybe due to that fact, occasionally difficult to grasp and comprehend by people who are lost in the unjust world, who experience evil and suffering but who are also aware of their own contribution to the sum of evil in this world. Karl Rahner points out that the authenticity of Christian faith depends on the particular history of Jesus, which also contains the Cross. Moreover, since the very beginning the Church has considered itself the preacher of historical faith, that

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is, based on a particular historical event. This relation was also considered crucial for the credibility of Christian testimony. This is the origin of Christian conviction that although Christ is God and Saviour, in His divine nature not subject to any human constraints, when we talk about God’s redemptive activity towards humanity, we cannot underestimate the worldly existence of Jesus, which is indispensable to understand the said activity.

In this context the difficulty of Christian approach to the Cross, understood as a historical fact and not a graphic sign, becomes clear. The emphasis on the realism of description of Jesus’s death is undoubtedly related to an important Christian conviction that the whole message of the Church is based on God’s entrance into human history, which was particular, historical and redemptive. All attempts leading to making this event unreal would also lead to making unreal everything that is said in Christianity about merciful and salvation-bringing God. It does not, however, invalidate the doubt regarding the Cross symbolising brutality and expressing the understanding for justice (or rather injustice) by the people of a certain time, culture and place. In this realism the Cross of Jesus Christ was primarily a brutal historical fact. The crucifixion itself of an Innocent person cannot be considered commendable and as such cannot be celebrated. The belief that it was God–Man that was crucified on Calvary does not change the fact that this tragic event constitutes a negation of human dignity and mockery of justice or honesty. Worshipping the Cross is possible for Christians only when one accepts all that happened on the Cross: absolute fulfilment of incarnation, the descent of God–Man into very depths of human misery, the acceptance by the Innocent of the whole burden of human fault and at the same time, His victory. This victory cannot be postponed in time onto the Easter morning; it is already present on Calvary because in that very place the meaning and depth of God becoming Human was revealed. It is here that His unconditional love can be seen along with invincible omnipotence, which allows for the fulfilment of God’s plan even in times of agony and abandonment of the Cross.

Removing or ignoring those elements that are connected with the Cross

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in the Christian faith must lead to objections against it even among those who claim to belong to Catholic Church or to some extent appreciate Jesus’s teaching. In such a situation the Cross becomes a provocation, which is difficult to accept and which reminds us of human sinfulness and fault. Alternatively, it becomes a historical reminiscence that cannot relate to modern times and consequently, can be supplanted by ‘more civilised’ ways of talking about God. In the first case, the more difficult the Christian conviction regarding human sinfulness and fault becomes to accept (this includes not only the fault of particular people responsible for sentencing Jesus and carrying out the sentence, but most of all, the actual fault of all the people without exception), the more difficult it becomes to preach the Cross. The Cross raises hostility because it is an accusation which cannot be limited to a small number of people responsible for false allegations against Jesus, unjust trial and a cruel sentence. On the other hand, the second approach comes down to invalidating the Cross as a unique experience that bears great significance for all the people. This invalidation is done by acknowledging Jesus only as a victim of injustice, plots and religious conflict, as a misunderstood prophet or teacher. This limited interpretation, however, goes against Christian belief in incarnation that reached its climax in the Cross. Questioning the Cross motivates people to search for a new Christian language and symbolism; nonetheless, such an attempt, devoid of the Cross, cannot prove successful. Similar actions within the Church strip the Christian faith of authenticity.

For the Church the Cross, that is real and brutal, does not have a pessimist meaning. It is a sign of victory and fame. It is also a sign of the truth about human beings as well as God’s incomprehensible and inexpressible grace. Finally, it is, in all its difficult truthfulness, a confirmation of irrevocable covenant that God made with humanity in the person of Christ. This is why the Cross became the symbol of Christianity as well as the sign and obligation for every Christian.

2. The Cross in the apostolic proclamation

Attempts to extrapolate one key thought, considered of the greatest significance, from the apostolic proclamation contained in the New Testa-
ment would result in reducing its richness. It does not mean, however, that we are unable to distinguish in the said proclamation subjects that are of particular significance among many others. Such is the case with the position of the Cross in this early Christian testimony. This is not, however, the only issue that is overwhelming or invalidating others. Neither is it the only perspective for the Church to examine God’s activity towards humanity. Nonetheless, we can demonstrate that the Cross was singled out in this first proclamation and even, when one considers the full context and significance of the Cross, it was given a central position.

The Apostles, since the Pentecost, while preaching that Christ resurrected must have referred to a proclamation made by Isaiah regarding the God’s Suffering Servant and must have noticed the fulfilment of this prophecy in Jesus. Moreover, from the fact that in the canonical Gospels Jesus’s suffering and death occupy the central position one can deduce that the Cross along with the Resurrection constituted the central subject for the Apostolic Church.

Such a distinguished status of the Cross can be seen in the work of St. Paul. For him the Cross is a crucial element of the Gospel, the essence of Christian faith, that is, an event which serves God to reveal Himself fully and by which God’s activity towards humanity as well as the necessary human response to it can be most fully comprehended. It is in the Cross that God’s paradoxical logic is revealed; the logic that makes preaching and worshipping the Cross the only way to comprehend Him. It becomes clear in this context that St. Paul rejects worldly wisdom, which does not comprehend the Cross, to be able to extract the true wisdom from the Cross. If a Christian is not merely a theoretician who aimlessly contemplates the truth, but has been summoned to transform their own life and the whole world by means of this truth, then the wisdom of the Cross also becomes their power (1 Cor 1:18). This statement, which regards Christian life and which puts it in opposition to worldly wisdom, is deepened by St. Paul in his own testimony that refers directly to his personal way of living and professing his faith: ‘I was resolved that the only knowledge I would have while I was with you was knowledge of Jesus, and of him as the cru-

The Cross is not only a significant element of preaching the Gospel but also as an event that shaped Paul’s life as well as that of a new Church community, which transgressed divisions set by the people. This is how the Apostle’s declarations can be understood, that for him the only source of pride can be the Cross (Gal 6:14) and that in the Cross God’s promises were fulfilled, and the curse of Law reached its end (Rom 4:25). In Crucified Jesus the demolition of the wall of hostility dividing people was accomplished as well as people’s reconciliation with God (Eph 2:14–16). This is the reason why St. Paul fully devotes himself to preaching the Cross; his preaching being also a call to convert and to completely change the life of those who are preached to. The logic of the Cross indicates that in Jesus’s death all those who believe in Him died for the sins and received a new life, which will be centred on the Crucified (2 Cor 5:14–15). This life is also scarred with persecution which allows Christians to feel similarity with Christ. The constant reference of the Christian life to the Cross is for the believers the cause of pride and the source of strength (Gal 5:11, 6:12–14).

The key position of the Cross in the apostolic proclamation can also be seen in the profession of faith made by St. Peter, although the context should be considered different. The first public confession of St. Peter, immediately after the Pentecost (Acts 2:14–36), refers to the reality of Jesus’s crucifixion, whose witnesses were present also among the listeners to the Apostle, to proclaim in the same manner the real resurrection. Moreover, this confession does not avoid the issue of the fault of particular people which led to Jesus’s death (‘This man […] you took and had crucified and killed by men outside the Law’, 2:23; ‘this Jesus whom you crucified’, 2:36), but at the same time it preaches God’s faithfulness which did not allow death to prevail over Jesus Christ. In St. Peter’s confession the Cross does not serve, at least it is not its key role, to accuse the Jews but it is an appeal to convert and accept baptism so that the promises given to Israel by God were fulfilled (Acts 2:37–41). Such a context of St. Peter’s accounts about the Cross is significant for the understanding of its place in the proclamation. It is not only about reminding the fault, which was obvious; neither is it about arousing remorse. The Cross would be in that case mere reminiscence of a recent event, which was shameful and disgusting but definitely a closed issue. It would serve to commemorate the harm and injustice that cannot be reversed or repaired. St. Peter’s confession, even though it does not negate the actual responsibility for Jesus’s death, aims at a different di-
rection. The Cross corresponds to the announcements of the Old Testament given to Israel regarding the Messiah. As such, it is firstly a sign of human wickedness but in the end, thanks to God’s unchangeable promise, it becomes a tool of God’s victory. For the people who were responsible for what happened to Jesus, the Cross is most of all an appeal accompanied by the promise of forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).

With similar fervency St. Peter talks about Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection; yet again not avoiding an issue of fault in the presence of Sanhedrin after the cure performed in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:8–12). Yet again the crucifixion refers to the announcements of the Old Testament regarding the rejection of stone by the builders, the stone that became the cornerstone (Ps 118:22). That gives the Apostles the strength to proclaim that Christ, crucified and resurrected, is the only Saviour. Similarly to the first confession, St. Peter does not omit any known circumstances of Jesus’s death and reminds us of the responsibility of people for the way He was treated. Nonetheless, the main emphasis is placed on a different issue: rejection and elevation of Jesus became the basis of Christian preaching regarding the only, universal and ultimate Saviour that was given by God to all the people. The Cross, therefore, becomes a significant element of the original profession of faith.

3. The Cross as a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies

The fate of Jesus must have become a subject of deepened reflection in the apostolic proclamation. Those who believed Jesus and in time began to give testimony regarding their personal meeting with the Resurrected, and were given the mission of preaching the Gospel, despite being delighted with their Master’s victory, raised the question regarding the purposefulness of the Cross or the possibility for Jesus to have avoided it. Even the resurrection could not have invalidated the shame of suffering and death on the cross. Such an end of Jesus’s life could be perceived by those who did not experience the meeting with the Resurrected as an argument against the credibility of the message spread by the rising Church. Could the Son of God experience such a shame? Was it not possible for the One, who was supposed to be the Messiah, to avoid the Cross?

Understanding the reasons for Jesus having experienced the Cross became possible thanks to rereading the Old Testament announcement regarding the Messiah. We can deduce the importance of explanation of the
Cross for the original Church from the position occupied by the issues of Jesus’s death and resurrection in the earliest preaching, the issues read from the Old Testament perspective (e.g. Acts 13:15–43). The significance of the Old Testament announcements for the Christian preaching of the Cross can be most vividly seen in St. Paul’s synthesis of the Gospel contained in the First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:1–8). The Cross, interpreted as fulfilment of the prophecies, is not an accidental event which brings earthly mission of Jesus to a tragic end, but it is an important element of the New Covenant established through the very sacrifice that He made.

Jesus’s death, as the content of the original profession of faith, does not function in the interpretative vacuum. It is important to determine, therefore, which of the Old Testament announcements of death the Cross represents. The most obvious statement would be to refer it to the curse of death, which is common to humankind as a result of the sin of the first people and which forms a peak of the curse that a human life is as this curse is evident in the toil, pain and injustice. From the perspective of this curse, present at the very beginning of human history, death as ‘return to soil’ demonstrates the wretchedness of human beings that are merely dust (Gen 3:16–19). Physical and psychical suffering of humans, as well as all the social injustice, and finally death connected with suffering, decomposition and loneliness, are all experienced by humankind in this curse resulted from the rejection of God. If, however, the Cross were an expression, even if distinguished, of this original announcement, it would only be a seal of human failure because people, having broken the bond with God, are not capable of achieving happiness. It would not be possible for the Cross to become an important element of the earliest profession of faith. Although indeed by His incarnation the Son of God became subject to constraints of human nature, which also meant accepting the possibility of experiencing suffering and death, the Cross is interpreted in the testimony of the original Church as fulfilment of another Old Testament announcement. The death of Jesus is given a particular role here. It is by no means a confirmation of the curse the humankind is burdened with but it forms its annulment as it happened ‘for our sins’. Moreover, it is compared to the resurrection which is also considered fulfilment of the Bible.

By considering the Cross the highest form of servitude of God towards humanity, Christians’ attention is directed at the announcement found in
the Isaiah’s prophecy regarding God’s Suffering Servant (Isa 52:13–53:12).\textsuperscript{14} Isaiah’s vision of the Righteous Sufferer, who was sent by God and took upon himself the sins of humankind, corresponds to the most principal element of Jesus’s mission and message.\textsuperscript{15} It particularly refers to the understanding of death of God’s Servant as a sacrifice for the sins, when a human being is sacrificed, and by which God’s will is fulfilled.\textsuperscript{16} Evangelical accounts regarding the life and teaching of Jesus, which were written down by the early Church, seems to suggest that Jesus Himself could connect His mission with this very part of Isaiah’s prophecy (Matt 20:28).\textsuperscript{17} This reference can be seen in the testimony of the original Church as well as at the beginning of Christian theological reflection, and can be confirmed by St. Irenaeus who noticed in Isaiah’s message an announcement of what happened to Jesus: rejection, torture and murder.\textsuperscript{18}

From the modern perspective an offence resulted from the connection between the faith in Jesus, God-Man, Messiah sent by God and God’s Suffering Servant of Isaiah’s prophecy may not be clearly seen. The problem is even greater as the Cross in the New Testament accounts is described not as opposing God’s plan but as fully compatible with it. How is it possible to comprehend that the plan for humankind’s salvation could assume that God’s Messenger, by faithfully fulfilling the role assigned to Him by the One who sent Him, was also supposed to suffer as being despised and rejected? This difficulty is strengthened by the fact that when the Christians connect Isaiah’s prophecy to Jesus, it confirms that the original Church did not interpret Jesus’s death as an accidental obstacle to God’s plan in the form of human sin. We cannot assume that injustice and hatred that were revealed in the treatment of Jesus brutally entered God’s plan although, as the resurrection confirms, were not able to destroy it. On the contrary, just as the victory of resurrection was present in that plan, so was the tragedy of

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\textsuperscript{14} One should also mention Zech 12:10; 13:7 and Ps 22:2–22 which the Christian tradition interpreted as the announcement of the sufferings of the Messiah.


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, 601.

the Cross. Reading the announcement of Jesus’s suffering in Isaiah’s prophecy closes, therefore, a very easy way to interpret the according to which human anger, which tried to oppose God’s plan, succumbed to God’s omnipotence. Such an interpretation, removing most of the difficulties related to the Cross, is from the very beginning in opposition to the Christian profession of faith, according to which the Messiah had to ‘suffer these things and then enter his glory’ (Luke 14:26). The Church has rejected the easiest way to explain how the death on a cross came to be. It took upon itself an extremely cumbersome task – to reveal the meaning of the Cross, to transgress particular historical and political circumstances which led to Jesus’s sentencing in order to understand what God would like to say about Himself and about humankind.

4. The Cross revealing God

The Christian profession that the Cross was present in God’s plans leads to the conclusion that despite the responsibility of particular people for unjust sentencing of Jesus, God most of all self-reveals Himself in the Cross. It is neither Pilate, nor the enemies of Jesus in the community of the teachers of the Law and Pharisees, not even the centurion that proclaimed ‘God’s sonship’ of Jesus (Matt 15:39), but it is God that initiated this revelation. The Cross is God’s word once spoken and constantly being spoken to humanity.

Jesus Christ, incarnated Son of God, is the Logos – the perfect and ultimate Word of Father (John 1:10–11, Heb 1:1–2). From there it follows that the entirety of His earthly way – words, deeds and signs – comprises all that God wanted to convey to humans, although the full manner of self-expression can only be found in the full Person of Christ that reveals the Father who is otherwise impossible to be known (John 1:18, 14:9). The ‘event’ of Jesus, therefore, tells human beings about God. One can, however, without obscuring this crucial for Christology understanding Christ as an Incarnated Word, notice self-revelation of God in those events in which the essence of Christ’s mission in the world is revealed. In those events human’s erroneous and shallow impressions regarding God’s activity are corrected in order to allow humans to interpret the issue of who God really is and how His plan for human’s salvation is performed. At the same time it

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19 Catechism..., 65.
allows human beings to uncover the truth about themselves and their own vocation. The Cross can definitely be considered such an event if, apart from historical actions of particular people responsible for sentencing and death of Jesus, one notices the abovementioned fulfilment of God’s announcement.

In evangelical accounts, which also reflected the belief of the original Church, the Cross preaches the uniqueness of the mission of Jesus – Son of God, and it also preaches the complete separateness from God, who reveals Himself in the Crucified One, when people would expect the gestures of might and glory. This paradox is sustained by St. Paul. While justifying the conviction that his mission is to preach the Gospel, he claims that the Cross is God’s wisdom that reveals God Himself to people (1 Cor 1:17–21). This wisdom is not obvious, easy to uncover and comprehend or uncontroversial. It objects to ‘the wisdom of the wise’ (1 Cor 1:19), and consequently transgresses all the false images of God, idols, which were made by people to substitute real God. It also transgresses connected with these idols religiousness, which substitutes the real worship of God. The aim of Jesus’s mission was to reveal to people the way to worship God and to remove all the false non-authentic elements from human glorification (John 4:21–26). The strongest, most shocking removal of all deformations of God’s image, which reduce Him according to human expectations, is precisely the Cross.

In the Cross God is revealed as radically different from anything that can be thought about Him. It can be seen as an objection towards an attempt to deform God’s activity in people’s interpretation, which was so strongly pointed out at Isaiah’s: ‘my thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not my ways, declares Yahweh. For the heavens are as high above earth as my ways are above your ways, my thoughts above your thoughts’ (Isa 55:8–9). It is not a negation of the bond between human beings and God, which originates in the act of creation, but it is a refreshing reminder against all human thinking – including theological – that God cannot be classified according to human categories and that His activity cannot be explained with the help of human ambitions and aspirations.

This is the reason why in the history of Christian thought the deep conviction that God is revealed by the Cross was clarified and protected against deformations with the help of an idea that in this revelation God remains hidden and unknown. It can be seen in the works of Martin Luther, for whom in the Cross God that is revealed (Deus revelatus) is simultaneously God that is hidden (Deus absconditus). This hide is invariably related to the Cross itself, which in human ways of thinking about God is utterly inexplicable. In the Cross, God that is hidden means God that was crucified (Deus crucifixus). It is here that God is revealed most fully, yet still remains incomprehensible for humans. In Luther’s approach it is about God’s presence and revelation sub contrario, that is, in such a form which seems to be contrary to human expectations and ideas. Such a manner of revelation of God in the Cross enables people to also understand all God’s activity towards the world and humanity; an activity that is otherwise incomprehensible and difficult to accept. From Luther’s perspective of theologica crucis, God’s activity in the world is a paradox, contrary to which we should still believe.

A Catholic interpretation of the Cross, including an interpretation of God’s presence and revelation in crucified Jesus, would hesitate from putting such a strong emphasis on the paradoxical character of God’s activity. The truth remains, however, that God’s revelation in the Cross is hidden in a depiction which in itself is cruel and terrifying, and therefore, recognising Him in the Cross is not devoid of problems but it requires faith. Admission that the Cross reveals God does not contradict the fact that at the same time it is a challenge for the Church and every person who tries to find faith in the Cross. It is also a challenge for those who try to clean the faith of deformations leading to worshipping some images of God and not God Himself, and which are in fact idolatry that can affect people and communities convinced about the honesty of their own Christian dedication. Therefore, it seem proper to say that all forms of Christianity, which in the name of political correctness or for other reasons would marginal-

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24 W. von Loewenich, Luthers Theologia crucis, München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1939, 149.
27 A.E. McGrath, Luther’s Theology of the Cross, 149, 161.
ise the Cross or belittle its significance, are in danger of falling victim to idolatry. Those who worship an image of God based on one’s own will or dominant cultural, political and civilizational phenomena in fact worship a deity, an idol, not the Crucified, who is the true image of God (Col 1:15).

The necessity of faith enabling us to accept the revelation of God on the Cross also leads to yet another side of this revelation, to which we can refer a well-known thought of Rudolf Bultmann saying that every assertion about God is simultaneously an assertion about humans and vice versa.\textsuperscript{28} As far as Christological assertions are concerned, this thought has its consequences: Christology, which also speaks about humanity, is always directed at the salvation of human beings, which makes it soteriology.\textsuperscript{29} The Cross is not taken out of context of the whole mission of salvation of Christ, which expresses God’s love towards humanity, but it forms its climax. By revealing God, the Cross also reveals the truth about the human person for whom the relation with God is fundamental. Faced with the danger that the truth about God’s irrevocable love towards humanity will be covered by human loquaciousness, including theological and church loquaciousness, which hinders an access to what is most important in the Christian faith, the Cross shows the very essence. If Christians, following St. John the Apostle, claim that God is love, it is not empty sentimentality because God’s love for humanity was shown in a very particular way: in the message of Jesus Christ whose climax was the Cross, a propitiative sacrifice for human’s sins (1 John 4:8–10). Although God as love is revealed in the Cross, this is a difficult and demanding revelation. Simultaneously, a radical character of this revelation confirms irrevocability of God’s love and its infiniteness.

Thus, one can agree with Alistair McGrath who writes about the place of the Cross in Martin Luther’s reflection and points out that for the Reformer all the theology stops at the foot of the Cross. The Cross makes a Christian make their own decisions – to accept God as the one He really is, to clean their image about God by explaining God’s attributes that are known to faith, such as glory, wisdom, justice or might, with reference to the Cross.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{29} Ibidem, 191.
\textsuperscript{30} A.E. McGrath, \textit{Luther’s Theology of the Cross}, 1.
Conclusion

The Church, whose faith was rooted in the Cross, strongly repeats the conviction that only in Jesus can the human person be explained. The Second Vatican Council in its constitution *Gaudium et spes* expressed this conviction by teaching that ‘Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.’ Particularly, when faced with evil that humanity experiences but which is also caused by humans, as well as when faced with inevitable transience of earthly life and fragility of the plans, the Church demonstrates that the union with Paschal Mystery of Christ and conformity to His death can strengthen human beings by giving them the real hope. The Cross is not an attempt to futilely destroy or devalue all that is good in the human person. The Cross does not contain Christian contempt towards the world, which should be understood as rejection of the value of all human attempts to make this world and interpersonal relations better, more fitting human dignity. On the contrary, preaching the Cross motivates the Church to reject false and unreliable attitude of human confidence as well as to show the lasting and unfailing foundation that is Christ.

Summary

The article presents the Cross of Jesus, being the main symbol of Christianity, as the essential theme of the Christian proclamation. It begins with considering the theological significance of historical realism of the Cross. Further, it reflects on the place of the Cross in the apostolic proclamation. Finally, two main intuitions regarding the Cross, which are present in this proclamation, are discussed: the fact that the Cross fulfils those Old Testament prophecies that refer to the Messiah and that God reveals himself most fully in Jesus’s Cross.

**Key words**: Cross, Church, proclamation, preaching, theologia crucis.

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32 *Ibidem.*
Kościół jako Głosiciel Krzyża

Streszczenie


Słowa kluczowe: Krzyż, Kościół, głoszenie, przepowiadanie, teologia crucis.