

## **Commitment of the Churches in Poland to reconciliation process in Europe.**

### **Examples of common witness**

The World War 2 marked Europe with deep wounds, a sense of resentment, if not even social hatred. It seemed that the ditches of imperception that had grown between people, states and nations at that time would be difficult to fill in. And in addition, the defined, unfair zones of influence of the great empires – all that gave rise to new enslavements and a new division into the so-called free world and the one behind the „iron curtain”. Europe was devastated to an unprecedented extent. The war cataclysm was more devastating than any previous event. The civilization disaster left behind enormous human (35 to 40 million people lost their lives), infrastructural, economic, social, and church losses.

However, it has left the biggest wound in human minds which is still felt till nowadays in many communities. Almost everyone, who survived the war, lost friends and relatives in it. Whole villages, towns and even cities were wiped off the face of the earth, and their inhabitants with them. Vast stretches of Europe, once bustling with life, became a deserted wasteland. The war hecatomba had devastating consequences for the psyche of the entire continent. Through experienced devastating grief societies lost their sense of stability. Faith in the permanence of the world, established by tradition, was destroyed. In turn, the atmosphere of uprooting has created a favourable ground for mass resettlement and deportation, the consequences of which are still socially felt. The enormity of the suffering, harm and humiliation felt resulted in an equally great wave of revenge after the end of World War 2. This, probably, was the most dark page in the history of post-war Europe.

In the existing situation, Christians and Churches were the first that felt responsibility to achieve reconciliation entrusted to them by Christ (see Cor 2, 5:19). They took initiative for reconciliation of states and peoples in Europe. There are many significant church testimonies in this area, which have the effect of shaping a new quality of social life in Europe.

In Poland, many significant activities that bear fruit in the process of internal reconciliation between Christians, churches and various local communities come from

cooperation, being carried out within the Team for Contacts between the Polish Bishops' Conference and the Churches-members of the Polish Ecumenical Council. So far, several significant documents have been developed and published. Their main paradigm is reconciliation in its broadest sense. The first one, entitled: „The Sacrament of Baptism as a Sign of Unity. The declaration of the Churches in Poland on the threshold of the Third Millennium”<sup>1</sup> (January 23., 2000) concerned mutual recognition of importance of baptism by different Churches.

In 2009, the publication „*Following Christ. The Christian Churches in Poland speak about themselves*”<sup>2</sup>, was published – it was self-presentation of the Churches, associated in the Polish Ecumenical Council and the Roman Catholic Church. Later the document on mixed marriages was prepared<sup>3</sup> (2011). Several Joint appeals were published: „*Appeal of Polish Churches for the Protection of Creation*”<sup>4</sup> (2013), „*Appeal of Churches in Poland for Respect and Celebration of Sunday*”<sup>5</sup> (2015) and „*Message of Churches in Poland on refugees*”<sup>6</sup> (2016). These reconciliation initiatives are not limited exclusively to the local dimension, but inspire international actions as well.

It is, therefore, worth recalling some significant testimonies of the Churches in Poland showing their involvement in European reconciliation process. I mean here: Polish-German reconciliation with the so-called „*Eastern Memorandum*” („*Status of expellees and the attitude of the German people towards their eastern neighbours. The Evangelical Memorandum*”<sup>7</sup>, announced on October 1, 1965 by the Evangelical Church in Germany, and, above all, with „*Message of the Polish bishops to the German bishops*”<sup>8</sup> of November 18, 1965, which contains the famous formula „we forgive and ask for forgiveness”, which, until now, has been the basic paradigm for all reconciliation processes,

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<sup>1</sup> See text of the document <https://ekumenia.pl/czytelnia/dokumenty-ekumeniczne/sakrament-chrztu-znakiem-jednosci/> (12.07.2018) [dalej = Chrztst].

<sup>2</sup> *W drodze za Chrystusem. Kościoły chrześcijańskie w Polsce mówią o sobie*, red. H. Tranda, M. Patalon, Kraków 2009.

<sup>3</sup> See *Małżeństwo chrześcijańskie osób o różnej przynależności wyznaniowej. Deklaracja Kościołów w Polsce na początku Trzeciego Tysiąclecia* (10.05.2011), <https://ekumenia.pl/czytelnia/dokumenty-ekumeniczne/malzenstwo-chrzescijanskie-osob-o-roznej-przynaleznosci-wyznaniowej/> (12.06.2018).

<sup>4</sup> See content of document <https://ekumenia.pl/czytelnia/dokumenty-ekumeniczne/apel-kosciolow-w-polsce-o-ochrone-stworzenia-2/> (16.07.2018).

<sup>5</sup> See content of the document <https://ekumenia.pl/czytelnia/dokumenty-ekumeniczne/apel-kosciolow-w-polsce-o-poszanowanie-i-swietowanie-niedzieli/> (16.07.2018).

<sup>6</sup> See content of the document <https://ekumenia.pl/czytelnia/dokumenty-ekumeniczne/przeslanie-kosciolow-w-polsce-w-sprawie-uchodzcow/> (16.07.2018).

<sup>7</sup> See content of the document [https://www.ekd.de/ekd\\_de/ds\\_doc/ostdenkschrift\\_1965.pdf](https://www.ekd.de/ekd_de/ds_doc/ostdenkschrift_1965.pdf) (16.07.2018).

<sup>8</sup> *Orędzie biskupów polskich do ich niemieckich braci w Chrystusowym urzędzie pasterskim*, [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WE/kep/oredzie-niem\\_18111965.html](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WE/kep/oredzie-niem_18111965.html) (17.07.2018) [later = *Orędzie*]. For a critical edition in German, see *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, ed. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009, pp. 386-398. For a critical Polish edition see pp. 399-409.

Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation with the „*Letter of the Greek Catholic Bishops of Ukraine and the Roman Catholic Bishops of Poland on the occasion of the act of mutual forgiveness and reconciliation*”<sup>9</sup> (2005) and *Polish-Russian reconciliation with „Joint Message of the Catholic Church in Poland and the Russian Orthodox Church to the peoples of Poland and Russia”*<sup>10</sup> of 2012. Reception and importance of these documents for the reconciliation process have been and remains different. However, it must be admitted that they have borne and continue to bear a lot of good fruits in deepening good mutual relations between European neighbours.

### **1. Churches in the process of Polish–German reconciliation**

„*Eastern Memorandum*” evoked lively discussion in West Germany and largely initiated the process of Polish-German reconciliation<sup>11</sup>. It preceded the Message of the Polish Roman Catholic bishops to the German bishops, signed on November 18, 1965, in the final phase of the Second Vatican Council and short before direct preparation for the solemn celebration of the millennium anniversary of Poland’s baptism. Then, the Polish bishops, participating in the Second Vatican Council, have issued more than 50 letters to the Episcopal Brothers inviting them to the Millennium’s celebrations.

One of these letters has become known in a special way in history as an important, far-reaching and prophetic document of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. It is precisely „*Message of the Polish Bishops to the German Bishops*”, with its famous formula „we forgive and ask for forgiveness”<sup>12</sup>. Its main author was Archbishop Boleslav Kominek, later Cardinal and Metropolitan of Wrocław<sup>13</sup>. Cardinal Stephan Wyszynsky, Archbishop Karol Wojtyła (later, Pope John Paul II), and Bishop Kazhimezh Kovalski have worked with him on editing the *Message*. Bishop Jezhy Stroba has also influenced the content of the

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<sup>9</sup> See content of the document <https://episkopat.pl/pokoj-miedzy-narodami-jest-mozliwy/> (18.07.2018).

<sup>10</sup> See content of the document <https://episkopat.pl/wspolne-przeslanie-do-narodow-polski-i-rosji/> (18.07.2018).

<sup>11</sup> See J. Kłaczków, *Memorandum Rady Kościoła Ewangelickiego w Niemczech „Sytuacja wypędzonych a stosunek narodu niemieckiego do jego sąsiadów wschodnich” – reakcje w Europie i w Polsce w świetle polskiej dokumentacji*, „*Dzieje Najnowsze*” 38 (2006), nr 4, s. 165-178.

<sup>12</sup> See P. Madajczyk, *Na drodze do pojednania. Wokół orędzia biskupów polskich do biskupów niemieckich z 1965 roku*, Warszawa 1994; P. Madajczyk, *Okoliczności powstania „Orędzia biskupów polskich do biskupów niemieckich”*, in: *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, red. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009, s. 109-120; „*Przebaczamy i prosimy o przebaczenie*”. *Orędzie biskupów polskich i odpowiedź niemieckiego episkopatu z 1965 roku. Geneza, kontekst, spuścizna*, red. B. Kerski, T. Kycia, R. Żurek, Olsztyn 2006; W. Kucharski, *Najnowsze źródła archiwalne w badaniach kulis powstania Orędzia biskupów polskich do biskupów niemieckich*, in: *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, red. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009, s. 165-182.

<sup>13</sup> See J. Krucina, *Kardynał Bolesław Kominek – prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, in: *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, red. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009, s. 21-28.

letter. It is worth underlying that at that time the Polish bishops have appealed to all Germans, without distinguishing between those from the BRD or the DDR, and have spoken on behalf of the Church and all Poles<sup>14</sup>.

In Poland, the reaction of communist propaganda to the *Message* was really hysterical. It concerned especially the following piece: „In this most Christian but also very human spirit, we extend our hands to you, sitting here on the benches of the Council that is coming to its end, and we ask for forgiveness. And if you, the German bishops and the Council Fathers, will fraternally take your arms outstretched, then, only then we will be able to celebrate our Millennium in a completely Christian way with a peaceful conscience”<sup>15</sup>.

Then, the existing Polish authorities published in the press a letter of protest, in which they referred to the initiative of the Polish bishops with great outrage, astonishment, and disappointment. Particularly, the gesture of forgiveness, contained in the *Message*, was strongly and aggressively criticized. They were asking who authorized the bishops to act on behalf of the nation, which, according to the Polish communists, was not ready and would never be ready to repentance. It must be admitted that the message of the letter also has caused objections from some Catholic circles. Not all those who survived the horrors of war were already mature enough to make the gesture of forgiveness and to take steps leading to reconciliation between the Poles and the Germans<sup>16</sup>.

The German bishops replied to the letter of the Polish bishops on December 5., 1965.<sup>17</sup> The most important part of their reply included: „Many horrors have been suffered by the Polish people from Germany and the Germans. We know that we have to bear the consequences of the war, which are also difficult for our country (...). We are grateful for the fact that in the face of the millions of Polish victims of those times, we remember those Germans who have resisted the demon and in many cases have given their lives for it (...). So we also ask for forgetting, more, we ask for forgiveness. Forgetting is a human matter,

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<sup>14</sup> See J. Żaryn, *Episkopat Polski w drodze do Orędzia (1945-1965)*, in: *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, red. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009, s. 99-108. For documentation related to the creation of the *Message*, see *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, red. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009, s. 233-301.

<sup>15</sup> *Orędzie*.

<sup>16</sup> See . Ł. Kamiński, *Władze PRL i społeczeństwo polskie wobec Orędzia biskupów polskich*, in: *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, red. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009, s. 133-142. See also: *List Komitetu Centralnego PZPR do wszystkich organizacji partyjnych Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej (for internal use)*, in: *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, red. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009, s. 186-197. For further documentation see *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, red. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009, s. 303-381.

<sup>17</sup> For the text of the reply, see *Pozdrowienie biskupów niemieckich dla polskich braci w biskupim posłannictwie o odpowiedź na list z dnia 18 listopada 1965 r.*, in: *Wokół Orędzia. Kardynał Bolesław Kominek prekursor pojednania polsko-niemieckiego*, red. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2009, s. 183-185.

and asking for forgiveness is an appeal to the injured ones to look at the injustice with God's merciful eye and agree for a new beginning"<sup>18</sup>. „With fraternal respect, we accept hands extended"<sup>19</sup>.

In March 1968, the supporters of the German church peace movement „Pax Christi” considered the response of the German Episcopate of two years ago to be insufficient. The commission, they set up in 1970, produced a „*Memorandum of German Catholics on German-Polish problems*”<sup>20</sup>, called the „*Bensberg Circle Memorandum*” (Bensbergerkreis). The history of Polish-German relations was not analysed in the document. Hope and expectation for spiritual and political rapprochement between both nations was expressed in it. It was also emphasized there that historians „should make an effort to consistently present the common understanding of the course of history in independent studies”. The signatories of the *Memorandum* advocated full legal and pastoral normalization of the borders of the dioceses in the Oder-Neisse region, as well as compensation for the Polish victims of National Socialism. Such influential people as professors Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Rahner were among the initiators of the *Memorandum*.

Neither the *Message* nor the *Memorandum of the German Catholics* remained just archival documents. After the exchange of letters between the Churches in Germany and Poland, the courtesy correspondence between them has begun, which later has turned into regular cooperation, that continues till nowadays. During one of the visits to Poland (September 13, 1980), Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger gave a sermon during the Eucharist held in St. Mary's Basilica in Krakow. The topic was „Christian faith and Europe”. At that time, Cardinal Ratzinger said, among other things, „After a dark history, which in the relations between Germans and Poles is already behind us, this invitation to me is a particularly valuable sign of the unifying and reconciling power of faith, which gives strength to forgiveness and introduces fraternity where the spirit of disbelief sows hatred and hostility. I would like to thank you for this gift of forgiveness, peace and fraternity of faith”<sup>21</sup>.

The result of cooperation between the Churches of Poland and Germany was *A joint Statement of Polish and German bishops* on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, s. 184.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, s. 185.

<sup>20</sup> See the text: *Memorandum katolików niemieckich w sprawie zagadnień polsko-niemieckich opracowane przez Bensberger Kreis*, tł. J. Zaborowski, „Novum” (1970), nr 2, s. 15-41[hereinafter = *Memorandum katolików niemieckich*]. See also: F. Boll, *Krąg z Bensbergu i Memorandum Polskie. Od Soboru Watykańskiego II do poparcia socjalliberalnej polityki odprężenia*, in: *Pojednanie i polityka. Polsko-niemieckie inicjatywy pojednania w latach sześćdziesiątych XX wieku a polityka odprężenia*, red. F. Boll, W.J. Wysocki, K. Ziemer, Warszawa 2010, s. 72-110.

<sup>21</sup> G. Polak, *Kościół i pojednanie z sąsiadami*, <https://www.deon.pl/drukuj/ZJGj3qVkbKjGdWal.html> (12.07.2018).

memorable exchange of letters of 1965<sup>22</sup>, announced on 13.12.1995. The bishops mentioned in it the harm done to the Poles by the Germans. In the name of truth, they also drew attention to the sufferings of many Germans, expelled from their homeland. The core message of the declaration concerned the formation of a new, united Europe and the role that the Churches in Poland and Germany had to play in this direction. The Permanent Contact Group of both Episcopal Conferences<sup>23</sup> was then established.

In 2005, *the Joint Statement of the Polish and German Bishops' Conferences on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the exchange of letters between the two Episcopates in 1965*<sup>24</sup> was issued. In this document, the bishops of both countries were asking, among other things, for the common strengthening of the Christian identity of Europe. They decisively opposed the unilateral claiming attitude in mutual relations. They also have pointed out to the new challenges, having emerged in Europe, stressing that they should be for Christians of particular concern.

On August 25., 2009, simultaneously in Warsaw and Bonn, the Chairmen of the Polish and German Bishops' Conferences, Archbishop Joseph Michalik and Archbishop Robert Zollich issued a *Joint Statement*<sup>25</sup>, appealing to their nations to set an example to the modern world of a new culture of peace, truth, justice, and love. With reference to the theme of evictions, the bishops of both countries warned against „temptation to use propaganda for the wounds, already committed in the history, and arousing resentment, resulting from unilateral historical interpretations”. The document repeated the significant words from the *Message of Polish bishops to German bishops* of 1965: „We forgive and ask for forgiveness”. They are often cited by various groups as fundamental for the difficult process of Polish-German reconciliation.

In 2017, the bishops from the Contact Group between the Polish and German Bishops' Conferences made a very important appeal to both nations (08.09.2017),<sup>26</sup> in which they emphasized that „reconciliation is a word that has defined German-Polish relations for over a quarter of a century. It is a great value that has been achieved and which

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<sup>22</sup> See the text: *Joint Statement of Polish and German bishops on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the exchange of letters (1965-1995)*, L'Osservatore Romano 17 (1996), No. 2(180), pp. 56-59.

<sup>23</sup> See H.J. Muszyński, *Przebaczenie i pojednanie pomiędzy Polakami i Niemcami jako dar i zadanie. W 50 lat po wymianie listów biskupów polskich i niemieckich*, „Paedagogia Christiana” (2016), nr 1(37), s. 139-162.

<sup>24</sup> See the text: *Wspólne oświadczenie Konferencji Episkopatów Polski i Niemiec z okazji 40. rocznicy wymiany listów między oboma Episkopatami w roku 1965*, [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WE/kep/pl\\_niemcy\\_20050924.html](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WE/kep/pl_niemcy_20050924.html) (10.07.2018).

<sup>25</sup> See the text: *Oświadczenie przewodniczących Konferencji Episkopatów Polski i Niemiec z okazji 70. rocznicy rozpoczęcia II wojny światowej*, [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WE/kep/70rocznica\\_25082009.html](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WE/kep/70rocznica_25082009.html) (10.07.2018).

<sup>26</sup> See the text: *Apel Zespołu ds. Kontaktów z Konferencją Episkopatu Niemiec*, <https://episkopat.pl/apel-biskupow-z-zespołu-ds-kontaktow-z-konferencja-episkopatu-niemiec/> (15.07.2018).

we uphold thanks to the efforts of not only politicians, but numerous people of good will on both sides of the border. However, we are aware that it can be easily lost through ill-considered decisions and even through too hasty words. At the same time, we remember that (...) it is our duty „to engage in the work of social reconciliation by reminding truth about dignity of every human being, mitigating excessive political emotions, pointing out and expanding the fields of possible and necessary cooperation across divisions and protecting public life from unnecessary politicization”. The process of reconciliation that we have jointly undertaken and consistently implemented in recent years is a model for many other countries in the world. (...) Forgiveness is not an economic and condition-dependent decision, but an irreversible act of mercy that does not deny justice, but complements it”.

The bishops jointly appealed to the rulers of both states and nations: „The capital of goodness in the mutual relations between the peoples, nations and states, accumulated over the years, must not be wasted or squandered. The capital of reconciliation and ties must be protected, strengthened and multiplied for the good of our Motherlands, which have a mission to fulfil – mission to bear witness of the reconciled against the not reconciled ones in Europe and the world”. They also expressed their hope that „those, responsible for our countries and international relations, having in mind the already carried out reconciliation processes, will build on this capital and on its multi-faceted value”. „This is the spirit, in which the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian churches work, proclaiming the Gospel of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace”.

To sum up, it should be said that the Churches made significant contribution to the process of Polish-German reconciliation. What is more, they have exerted and are having a great influence on the social discourse in both countries, contributing to the rapprochement between neighbouring nations.

## **2. Churches in the process of Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation**

While the message of the Polish bishops to the German colleagues turned out to be a pioneering document, building better relations between both nations, the same could not be said about the *Letter of Greek Catholic Bishops of Ukraine and Roman Catholic Bishops of Poland* (2005),<sup>27</sup> the letter issued 40 years later, despite the fact that it was created in a much more favourable political situation. It seemed that it would become the foundation of the Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation. That letter did not initiate similar process, but became a

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<sup>27</sup> See the text: *List biskupów greckokatolickich Ukrainy i rzymskokatolickich Polski z okazji aktu wzajemnego przebaczenia i pojednania* (19.06.2005), <https://episkopat.pl/pokoj-miedzy-narodami-jest-mozliwy/> (21.07.2018).

kind of result of the road already gone, marked by the gestures of reconciliation from both sides.

While the millennium of Poland's baptism was the occasion for the exchange of letters between the Polish and German episcopates, the millennium of the baptism of Kievan Rus in 1988 was the pretext for the steps of reconciliation between the Poles and the Ukrainians. On this occasion, the Polish Roman Catholic bishops and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops from the Diaspora met in Rome on October 8. and 17., 1987.

Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivsky, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church at that time, delivered very important words: „We extend our fraternal hand to the Polish Brothers as a sign of reconciliation, forgiveness and love”<sup>28</sup>. „We are guilty before you, Brothers Ukrainians, because we couldn't put the baptismal teaching into practice. (...) We are guilty before each other. And where there are guilts, there is a need to say: Forgive us, as we also forgive”<sup>29</sup> – replied Cardinal Joseph Glemp, the Primate of Poland. This historic meeting had no chance to take root in the broad social consciousness in Poland, and, especially, in Ukraine, where the Greek Catholic Church was still banned. Nor did it take place in the light of cameras and flashes. It was preserved in the consciousness of Ukrainian and Polish elites.

It had the approval of John Paul II. He was able to predict and to promote the Polish-Ukrainian dialogue. He gave the greatest impulse for Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation during his pilgrimage to Ukraine in June 2001. In his homily, delivered in Lviv during the Eucharist there (June 26., 2001), he said: „May the forgiveness –granted and obtained – be poured like a charitable balm into every heart. May everyone, through purification of historical memory, be ready to place higher what unites rather than what divides, in order to build together a future, based on mutual respect, fraternity, fraternal cooperation and authentic solidarity”<sup>30</sup>. After those words, many Poles and Ukrainians embraced each other. There were emotional tears in the eyes of many participants of the celebration.

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<sup>28</sup> Przemówienie Miroslawa kardynała Lubaczewskiego wygłoszone 17 października 1987 r. w Kolegium Ukraińskim św. Józefa w Rzymie, „Pismo Okólne” 20 (1987), nr 44, s. 5-7. See also G. Polak, M. Przeciszewski, *Kościół w Polsce inspiratorem pojednania między narodami*, <https://ekai.pl/kosciol-w-polsce-inspiratorem-pojednania-miedzy-narodami/> (15.07.2018); A. Konderak, *Ku pojednaniu – przez wiarę*, [http://dlibra.kul.pl/Content/23830/13.%20ethos1988\\_nr%201\\_Konderak.pdf](http://dlibra.kul.pl/Content/23830/13.%20ethos1988_nr%201_Konderak.pdf) (18.07.2018); S. Zielińska, *Przed 30 laty opublikowano historyczne deklaracje o polsko-ukraińskim pojednaniu*, <https://opoka.news/aktualnosci/7430> (12.07.2018); M. Melnyk, *Ukraińcy i Polacy. pojednani Ewangelią*, „Edukacja Humanistyczna” (2017), nr 2 (37), s. 23-31.

<sup>29</sup> Przemówienie kardynała Józefa Glempa, Prymasa Polski, wygłoszone dnia 17 października 1987 roku w Kolegium p. w. św. Józefa w Rzymie podczas spotkania biskupów polskich z biskupami ukraińskimi, „Pismo Okólne” 20 (1987), nr 44, s. 8-9.

<sup>30</sup> Jan Paweł II, *Przyjmijcie duchowe przesłanie waszych błogosławionych (homily delivered in Lviv on 26.06.2001)*, [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan\\_pawel\\_ii/homilie/lwow\\_beatyfikacja\\_26062001.html](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/homilie/lwow_beatyfikacja_26062001.html) (20.07.2018).

The Pope's appeal was not left without an echo. After his pilgrimage to Ukraine, the Commission for Cooperation of the Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and of the Polish Episcopal Conference was established. As a result of its activity, a pastoral programme of „wounds' healing” was adopted, with a special emphasis on education of priests and work with young people.

On November 1., 2002, at the Lychakiv Cemetery in Lviv, the Poles and the Ukrainians prayed together for the Sich Riflemen and the Lviv Eagles, who died in 1918 in the battles for this city, fighting on both sides of the barricade. This gesture of religious and social character was followed by other initiatives. In June 2003, Greek Catholic bishops from Ukraine appealed for reconciliation in a pastoral letter. On May 30, 2004, the Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Cardinal Lubomyr Huzar, together with a group of Ukrainian youth, took part in the 8th Youth Meeting on Lednitsa. At the end of the Eucharist, Cardinal Huzar together with Cardinal Joseph Glemp, the Primate of Poland, delivered a prayer for reconciliation. „Today, in this place, on behalf of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, before my co-brother, and, especially, before you, dear young people, I want to declare that we ask for your forgiveness and we are ready to forgive all that we have experienced” – Cardinal Huzar prayed. After the prayer, both hierarchs let out two white pigeons.

On August 7. and 8., 2004, on the initiative of Cardinal Huzar, the „Pilgrimage of Love and Reconciliation” to the Shrine of the Holy Mother in Zarvanitsa, Ukraine took place. About 200 thousand young people from both countries took part in it. In turn, on August 26., 2004, on the feast of Our Lady of Chestohova, several hundred Ukrainians, led by Cardinal Huzar, came to Jasna Gura to pray with the Poles for reconciliation.

A year later, on June 19., 2005, at Pilsudsky Square in Warsaw, at the end of the Third National Eucharistic Congress, the most spectacular act of reconciliation in the history of Christianity in Poland and Ukraine took place. After having confessed, the Head of the Polish Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Joseph Michalik, and the Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Cardinal Lubomyr Huzar, delivered a prayer of reconciliation. They admitted in this prayer that the Poles and the Ukrainians had done many harm to each other, which „fills us with inexpressible pain”. They asked „brothers and sisters of both nations” to „forgive each other” together with them. They also asked God to forgive their sins and guilt and to help us „do what is right and proper for brothers and sisters”. The faithful, gathered in the capital's Pilsudsky Square, joined in prayer by acclamation: „Kyrie, Kyrie eleison”

(„Lord, Lord, have mercy on us”). The prayer was concluded with handing over sign of peace by the Greek and Roman Catholic bishops, which was enthusiastically received by the congregation, among whom both Poles and Ukrainians were present<sup>31</sup>.

Because of the act of forgiveness and reconciliation, the Greek Catholic bishops of Ukraine and the Roman Catholic bishops of Poland issued a joint letter. It referred to our difficult history, emphasizing importance of Christianity, which grew from the Latin tradition in Poland and the Byzantine tradition in Ukraine. The Polish and Ukrainian bishops referred to the message of 1965, writing in conclusion: „let us rise above the political views and historical past, above our church rites, even above our Ukrainian and Polish nationality. Let us remember above all that we are children of God. Let us appeal to our Father: Forgive us our guilt, as we forgive those, who is guilty against us. Let us say words to each other to make our prayer fruitful in all ways: We forgive and ask for forgiveness – after all, they already have their historical power in the work of reconciliation between the nations (cf. Letter of the Polish Bishops to the German Bishops, Rome 1965). May this act of forgiveness and reconciliation take place before the face of one God in the Trinity and the Mother of God in holy places for our faithful: on Jasna Gura and in Zarvanitsa, in Warsaw and Lviv. May our joint prayer be the prayer of pure hearts, the prayer of people of good will”<sup>32</sup>.

It should be stated that the document in question did not bring such a result as the message of the Polish bishops to the German ones and this despite the fact that the process of reconciliation was supported by the politicians, as evidenced by e.g. the joint prayer of April 27, 2007 of the Presidents Viktor Yushchenko and Leh Kachynsky on the 60th anniversary of the „Wisla” action. It seemed that the reason for this state of affairs might be the fact that the idea of reconciliation and agreement did not hit the fertile ground and did not reach the consciousness of the significant masses of Ukrainian society, as it happened in Poland, and, especially, in Germany, where neighbourly relations were a constant topic of public debate.

Churches in Poland and Ukraine have taken many other initiatives for reconciliation between both nations. Several significant examples are worth mentioning. On June 28.,

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<sup>31</sup> See *30 lat kościelnego dialogu polsko-ukraińskiego*, <https://ekai.pl/30-lat-kościelnego-dialogu-polsko-ukraińskiego/> (15.07.2018).

<sup>32</sup> *List biskupów grekokatolickich Ukrainy i rzymskokatolickich Polski z okazji aktu wzajemnego przebaczenia i pojednania*, nr 3.

2013, the *Polish-Ukrainian Declaration on Reconciliation* was published<sup>33</sup>. In June 2015, the representatives of the Catholic Church in Poland and Ukraine got together. As a result of the meeting, a joint communiqué (09.06.2015) appeared<sup>34</sup>, in which the bishops, among other things, appealed: „We want very much the work of reconciliation between the peoples – Polish and Ukrainian – to continue through concrete cooperation, mutual respect, understanding and support between the representatives of our peoples and churches in order to bear witness to unity in diversity and to respond to expansion of secularism and military aggression, coming from the East”<sup>35</sup>.

An important event in building good relations between Polish and Ukrainian nations was the appeal of the Presidium of the Polish Bishops’ Conference for Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation (June 24., 2016),<sup>36</sup> issued before the 73rd anniversary of the Volyn tragedy. It is a response to the „*Open Letter*”<sup>37</sup> of the group of Ukrainian religious, cultural and political activists, and heads of Ukrainian churches, addressed to the elites of the Polish state, to clergy, cultural activists and to the entire Polish society. In this appeal, recalling the Volyn Tragedy and the death of many innocent people, its signatories wrote: „The murder of innocent people has no excuse (...). We ask for forgiveness, and at the same time we forgive the crimes and harm that have been committed against us – this is the only spiritual formula that should be found in every Ukrainian and Polish heart that wants peace and

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<sup>33</sup> See the text: *Deklaracja Arcybiskupa Większego Światosława Szewczuka, Metropolity Kijowsko-Halickiego Ukraińskiego Kościoła Greckokatolickiego, Arcybiskupa Józefa Michalika, Metropolity Przemyskiego obrz. lac., Przewodniczącego Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, Arcybiskupa Mieczysława Mokrzyckiego, Metropolity Lwowskiego obrz. lac., Przewodniczącego Konferencji Episkopatu Rzymskokatolickiego Ukrainy, Arcybiskupa Jana Martyniaka, Metropolity Przemysko-Warszawskiego, Kościoła bizantyńsko-ukraińskiego* (Warszawa, 28.06.2013), <https://episkopat.pl/deklaracja/> (12.07.2018). For more information, see: W. Polak, *Pojednanie polsko-ukraińskie. Deklaracja w przededniu 70. rocznicy zbrodni na Wołyniu. Treść, kontekst, perspektywy na przyszłość – polska perspektywa*, in: *Pojednanie w Europie środkowo-wschodniej. Nowe wyzwania. / Versöhnung in Mitteleuropa. Neue Herausforderungen. / Примирение в Центральной и Восточной Европе. Новые вызовы*, red. D. Lukas, I. Lukas, M. Dmitruk, Warszawa 2015, s. 19-21; S. Batruch, *Pojednanie polsko-ukraińskie. Deklaracja w przededniu 70. rocznicy zbrodni na Wołyniu. Treść, kontekst, perspektywy na przyszłość – ukraińska perspektywa*, in: *Pojednanie w Europie środkowo-wschodniej. Nowe wyzwania. / Versöhnung in Mitteleuropa. Neue Herausforderungen. / Примирение в Центральной и Восточной Европе. Новые вызовы*, red. D. Lukas, I. Lukas, M. Dmitruk, Warszawa 2015, s. 22-26; G. Motyka, *Pojednanie polsko-ukraińskie. Polska perspektywa historyczna*, in: *Pojednanie w Europie środkowo-wschodniej. Nowe wyzwania. / Versöhnung in Mitteleuropa. Neue Herausforderungen. / Примирение в Центральной и Восточной Европе. Новые вызовы*, red. D. Lukas, I. Lukas, M. Dmitruk, Warszawa 2015, s. 27-31; I. Iliushyn, *Pojednanie polsko-ukraińskie. Ukraińska perspektywa historyczna*, in: *Pojednanie w Europie środkowo-wschodniej. Nowe wyzwania. / Versöhnung in Mitteleuropa. Neue Herausforderungen. / Примирение в Центральной и Восточной Европе. Новые вызовы*, red. D. Lukas, I. Lukas, M. Dmitruk, Warszawa 2015, s. 32-37.

<sup>34</sup> See the text: *Komunikat ze wspólnego spotkania przedstawicieli Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce i na Ukrainie* (Warsaw, 9.06.2015), <https://episkopat.pl/komunikat-ze-wspolnego-spotkania-przedstawicieli-kosciola-katolickiego-w-polsce-i-na-ukrainie/> (10.07.2018).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See the text: *Prezydium Episkopatu wzywa do pojednania polsko-ukraińskiego (Communiqué, Warsaw 24.06.2016)*, <https://episkopat.pl/prezydium-episkopatu-wzywa-do-pojednania-polsko-ukrainskiego/> (21.07.2018).

<sup>37</sup> See the text: *List otwarty Ukraińców do Polaków*, <http://blogpublika.com/2016/06/03/list-otwarty-ukraincow-do-polakow/> (23.07.2018).

understanding (...). As long as our nations exist, the wounds of history will be painful. But they will only then exist if, despite the past, we learn to see each other as equal brothers”<sup>38</sup>.

In response to this appeal, the Polish bishops recalled that „Christian forgiveness is unconditional value, covering even the greatest wickedness, such as killing innocent people and genocide or forced eviction”<sup>39</sup>. The Bishops wrote that „mutual forgiveness between Polish and Ukrainian nations is particular religious and moral requirement that we are facing in the currently experienced Extraordinary Anniversary of Mercy (...)”<sup>40</sup>. They referred to the prophetic words of St. John Paul II, spoken by him in Lviv in 2001: „May all be ready, through purification of historical memory, to place higher what unites rather than what divides, in order to build together future, based on mutual respect, fraternity, cooperation and authentic solidarity”<sup>41</sup>. They also expressed „joy from all efforts to forgive the guilt of individual people and nations”<sup>42</sup>. They also recalled other words of St. John Paul II, who, appealing to the Ukrainians and the Poles, wrote: „Since God has forgiven us in Christ, it is necessary for the faithful to be able to forgive each other’s wrongs and ask for forgiveness of own faults, and, thus, contribute to building a world that respects life, justice, harmony, and peace”<sup>43</sup>.

At the end of their appeal, the Polish bishops recalled that „in order to build unity of nations and to develop mutual relations in spirit of trust, and, thus, to create a civilization of love, it is necessary to overcome the heritage of the past, forgive historical wrongs and misunderstandings and cleanse our memory”<sup>44</sup>.

The response to the position, expressed by the Polish bishops, is „*Appeal of Patriarch Sviatoslav and the Bishops of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland to the faithful and all people of good will with request to pray for the victims of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict*”,<sup>45</sup> published on July 4., 2016. It mentions the steps that the churches have already taken on the path of Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation. It also draws attention to the important obligation, imposed on Christians by the Christ himself, that, before taking a sacrifice to God, one should first reconcile oneself to one’s brother who feels hurt (cf. Mt. 5:23-24). This means that, in spite of unfavourable external conditions, the path of Polish-Ukrainian

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> *Prezydium Episkopatu wzywa do pojednania polsko-ukraińskiego*, nr 2.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., no1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., no 2.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., no 3.

<sup>45</sup> See the text: *Apel patriarchy Światosława oraz biskupów kościoła greckokatolickiego w Polsce do wiernych i wszystkich ludzi dobrej woli z prośbą o modlitwę za ofiary konfliktu polsko-ukraińskiego*, <https://episkopat.pl/apel-biskupow-greckokatolickich-do-wiernych-i-wszystkich-ludzi-dobrej-woli/> (19.07.2018).

reconciliation must be taken, following the words of St. John Paul II, who taught that merciful „forgiveness, received and given, is a healing balm”, which can heal our historical memory and heal the wounds of the past.

### 3. Churches in the process of Polish-Russian reconciliation

Another, very difficult area, marked by many wounds, which in mutual relations have not yet been healed, concerns the Polish-Russian reconciliation. Also here, the Churches have their significant contribution. I will recall one of the important events in this area, when on August 17., 2012, at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, the Head of the Polish Episcopal Conference, Archbishop Joseph Michalik and the Head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch of Moscow and of all Russia, Cyril signed *the Joint Message to the Nations of Poland and Russia*<sup>46</sup>. This event will probably be recorded in history as an important step towards reconciliation between both Churches and nations. It must be admitted that this is about a very difficult process, characterised by a mutual sense of grievance and historical injustice. Life has shown that neither politicians, nor diplomacy, nor business has succeeded in rethinking mutual mentality about each other. There are too much mistrust and suspicion in mutual relations, and their paradigm seems to be constantly alive and re-fuelled demonic stereotypes. It is, therefore, good that responsibility for the difficult process of reconciliation between the Polish and the Russian people has been undertaken by the churches: the Roman Catholic Church, which represents the majority in Poland, and the Orthodox Church, whose situation is similar in Russia. We, the Poles, remembered that Polish- German reconciliation, after the atrocities of World War II, seemed to be impossible. This would probably have happened in this case if it has not been for the faith and wisdom of the Churches. To heal so many wounds, still open on both sides, it is essential to undertake the process of purification of memory and mutual forgiveness of guilts.

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<sup>46</sup> See the text: *Wspólne przesłanie do Narodów Polski i Rosji* (Warsaw, 17.08.2012), <https://episkopat.pl/wspolne-przeslanie-do-narodow-polski-i-rosji/> (21.07.2018). For more information, see Z. Glaeser, „*Wspólne przesłanie do Narodów Rosji i Polski*”. *Treść, kontekst, perspektywy na przyszłość*, w: *Pojednanie w Europie środkowo-wschodniej. Nowe wyzwania. / Versöhnung in Mitteleuropa. Neue Herausforderungen. / Примирение в Центральной и Восточной Европе. Новые вызовы*, ed. D. Lukas, I. Lukas, M. Dmitruk, Warsaw 2015, pp. 13-18; Z. Glaeser, „*Gemeinsame Botschaft an die Völker Russlands und Polens*“. *Inhalt, Kontext, Zukunftsperspektiven*, in: *Pojednanie w Europie środkowo-wschodniej. Nowe wyzwania. / Versöhnung in Mitteleuropa. Neue Herausforderungen. / Примирение в Центральной и Восточной Европе. Новые вызовы*, ed. D. Lukas, I. Lukas, M. Dmitruk, Warsaw 2015, p. 89-94; Z. Glaeser, „*Совместное послание к народам России и Польши*”. *Содержание, контекст, перспективы на будущее*, in: *Pojednanie w Europie środkowo-wschodniej. Nowe wyzwania. / Versöhnung in Mitteleuropa. Neue Herausforderungen. / Примирение в Центральной и Восточной Европе. Новые вызовы*, ed. D. Lukas, I. Lukas, M. Dmitruk, Warsaw 2015, p. 169-174.

The authors of the „*Joint Message to the Nations of Poland and Russia*” began it with a reference to the words of St. Paul, Apostle of Nations, from 2. Corinthians, 5:19: „In Christ God reconciled the world with Himself, not counting people their sins, but giving us the word of unity”<sup>47</sup>. This meant that here they were not guided by a short-term policy, but by a sense of responsibility for the present and future of the Churches and nations of Poland and Russia, and by pastoral care for the salvation of human beings. Hence, in the preamble of the document, they addressed the message of reconciliation to the faithful of their Churches, to both nations and to all people of good will. It was emphasized that by confessing the truth that „Jesus Christ is our peace and reconciliation” (cf. Eph 2:14; Rom 5:11) and being aware of the vocation, entrusted to us in the spirit of the Gospel of Christ, both Churches wished to contribute to the work of reconciliation between the peoples of Poland and Russia<sup>48</sup>.

The signatories of the document appealed to the faithful of their Churches „to ask for forgiveness of guilts and of any evil, done to each other”, because „this is the first and most important step to restore mutual trust, without which, there is no lasting human community or full reconciliation”<sup>49</sup>. The fundamental conviction that it was Christ, who obliged us in the *Lord’s Prayer* to forgive guilts, was also emphasized<sup>50</sup>. Those, whose injuries, barriers and walls, present in their hearts, were so deep that they did not yet allow forgiveness, were accepted with understanding.

Thus, the appeal was directed to historians and scientists for objective learning and presentation of facts from the past, including the painful ones. Therefore, the actions of commissions and teams, working in both countries to „heal the wounds”, and, as a consequence, to bring about reconciliation between the Churches and nations of Poland and Russia, were welcomed. The conviction was expressed that the activities of these bodies „will allow to know the unbreakable historical truth, help clarify doubts and contribute to overcoming negative stereotypes”, because „lasting reconciliation as a foundation for peaceful future can only be achieved on the basis of the complete truth (...) about the shared past”<sup>51</sup>. It, therefore, appealed „to all those, who want goodness, lasting peace and happy future: politicians, social activists, people of science, culture and the arts, believers and non-believers, representatives of the Churches: to make constant efforts to develop dialogue,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> See *ibid*, *Preambula*.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, no 1.

<sup>50</sup> See *Ibid*.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, no 2.

support what enables us to rebuild mutual trust and bring people closer to each other and to build peaceful future for our countries and peoples, free from violence and war”<sup>52</sup>.

The document clearly underlines that „to forgive is not to forget”<sup>53</sup>. The collective memory of the victims of violence from the past, martyred for their loyalty to God and their earthly homeland, is an essential part of the collective identity. Forgiveness means exceeding possibilities of revenge, hatred, prejudice, stereotypes and building community and fraternity between people. The way to do this is through fraternal dialogue, understood not as a method of persuasion, but as attitude of understanding the partner of dialogue as one understands oneself<sup>54</sup>.

Despite the difficult subject matter the document addresses, it is clearly optimistic. It is made possible because it is founded on the faith in resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has conquered death, has given us hope beyond the tomb and has shed new light on life and immortality. A joyful sign of hope is also the fact that, from the very beginning, the work of renewal and the content of the message have been accompanied by common prayer of many faithful from different Churches, which has often been ahead of many common actions<sup>55</sup>. Thus, the document ends with the entrusting of the work of reconciliation between the peoples and Churches of Poland and Russia to the Most Holy Mother of God<sup>56</sup>.

Here can be asked the question about the consequences and perspectives of the document. In answering it, a few significant facts should be indicated<sup>57</sup>. It is not a document that will remain in the minds of only a small group of professionals. The full text of the message, appealing to the peoples of Poland and Russia to reconcile and forgive each other all injustices and harms, has been read almost immediately after it has been signed in Catholic parishes in Poland. As there is no such practice in the Orthodox Church, the content of the document has been made public in many ways both in Poland and in Russia. It has been placed on many internet portals, including the official website of the Moscow Patriarchate<sup>58</sup>. In addition, the Patriarch Cyril, personally, has notified the Russian people

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, no 1.

<sup>54</sup> See ibid.

<sup>55</sup> See Z. Glaeser, „*Wspólne przesłanie do Narodów Rosji i Polski*”, *Article cit.*, s. 17; Z. Glaeser, '*Gemeinsame Botschaft an die Völker Russlands und Polens*', *Article cit.*, p. 93; Z. Glaeser, '*Совместное послание к народам России и Польши*', *Article cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>56</sup> *Wspólne przesłanie do Narodów Polski i Rosji*, dz. cit., no 3.

<sup>57</sup> See Z. Glaeser, „*Wspólne przesłanie do Narodów Rosji i Polski*”, art. cit., pp. 17-18; Z. Glaeser, „*Gemeinsame Botschaft an die Völker Russlands und Polens*“, art. cit., pp. 93-94; Z. Glaeser, „*Совместное послание к народам России и Польши*”, art. cit., pp. 173-174.

<sup>58</sup> See *Совместное послание народам России и Польши Предстоятеля Русской Православной Церкви Патриарха Московского и всея Руси Кирилла и Председателя Епископской Конференции Польши архиепископа Юзефа Михалика, митрополита Перемышльского*, <https://mospat.ru/ru/2012/08/17/news69023/> (27.07.2018).

about signing the document in his weekly religious program „Word of the Shepherd”, broadcasted by the Russian state television Channel 1. On August 25., 2012, this program aired a homily delivered by Patriarch Cyril on August 19., 2012 in Poland during the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord in the Sanctuary of St. Grabarka near Shemiatyche. In it, the Patriarch referred to the message signed at the royal castle, having emphasized that „mutual relations between both nations can only be changed with God’s help”. The Patriarch also pointed out that this did not mean that political, economic and other factors were not relevant in that process. He said: „But our main hope is in God, in the power of prayer. Signing this agreement is like setting the right angle for the sail that will blow the wind of God's grace and help us move from place to place in the right direction”. He added: „Today we pray for the Russian and Polish nations, for our national reconciliation”.

The patriarch’s visit to Poland was widely reported by the three largest Russian TV channels: Channel 1, Russia and NTV. Television is still the main source of information for the vast majority of the Russians. All three channels also informed about the visit of the Patriarch to Poland, although they did not comment on it. However, they emphasized the historical dimension of the patriarch’s journey to Poland.

The document was commented on by the state agency RIA-News. Its commentator, Vadim Dubnov, noted that reconciliation between Russia and Poland was a difficult and delicate issue. He stressed: „Poland for Russia has always been a European source of irritation, and Russia for Poland was an eternal eastern empire, not letting to the west”. Another RIA-News commentator, Dmitriy Babich, noted in the interview with PAP that there would be no immediate reconciliation between the nations of Russia and Poland. Babich declared: „We have a long and difficult history behind us. However, the message is a step in the right direction. Reconciliation will take place, but it will be a process that will take years, maybe even decades”.

The message was also communicated by the most important Russian newspapers, such as „Kommersant”, „Rossiyskaya Gazeta”, „Niezavisimaya Gazeta”, „Komsomolskaya Pravda”, and „Moskovskiye Novosti”. The latter one, being published in cooperation with the RIA-News, provided fragments of the document, emphasizing that it was addressed not only to the Orthodox and the Catholics, but to all citizens of both countries, regardless of their faith.

In the light of the written above, we can hope that the „*Joint Message to the Nations of Poland and Russia*” has initiated process of reconciliation between the peoples and the

Churches of Poland and Russia. I am deeply convinced that this process, although it will probably be very difficult, will bring blessed fruits.

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The above mentioned testimonies of the churches' commitment to reconciliation in Europe are important but not the only ones. One could give many other examples. The project „*Reconciliation in Europe. The mission of the Churches in Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Germany*” is a part of this process. Its implementation started during the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz in June 1997, which took place under remarkable motto: „Reconciliation as Gift of God and Source of New Life”. A chance for its success lies in its Christian roots and its ecumenical character.

Formation of European unity between states, nations, cultures and churches should start with demolition of the walls that have been built up in people's minds and hearts for many years. It is necessary to rebuild human bonds based on trust and mutual respect. Only a minimum of political correctness can be enforced by law. In order to improve the world, to build better European future, it is necessary to have deep personal commitment, conviction of the need and purpose of such a process and, last but not least, motives that will allow the work undertaken to be continued. A special mission falls on the Churches, Christians and religious communities in general, but also to institutions of education, science and culture.

At the same time one should remember that reconciliation, leading to greater integration in Europe, is not a final goal in itself, but means to the integral development of each person and of human society. This is the great challenge, standing before the Churches today. In doing so, the Churches are making for Europe the best they can if they strive, in the first instance, to achieve full visible unity among themselves, thus, carrying out the mission of Christ, which draws from the Gospel constantly new motives for spiritual renewal. Only through constant renewal, which is an essential expression of the process of reconciliation, the Churches will be a living ferment of the Gospel, a source of qualitative change and of new continuing dynamism for the world.

The Church of Jesus Christ, which is both universal and local, through its experience of unity, plurality and diversity, and through its rootedness in concrete countries and cultures, can be of great assistance in uniting and connecting peoples, regions and local communities. However it will be provided if it is ever more fully Church and that the

secular people of Europe want to benefit from this experience. Europe, therefore, has no other option: either it will become a reconciled community of the spirit, or it will remain a self-serving institution, promoting strength and material wealth at the price of the depreciation of that, what is spiritual and objective.