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## **Immaculata-Doctrine and the New Evangelization**

### ***Nauk o Brezmadežni in nova evangelizacija***

*Abstract:* This paper theologically articulates the Immaculata-doctrine of the Church and its dogmatic implications through Mariology and Ecclesiology. Moreover, the paper is following the soteriological relevance of the Christian dogmas, according to which they speak of revealed truth about affirmation of the human being. Accordingly, through theology we are able to get an insight to content significant for the Christian anthropology, which then also point back to theology as its authentic ground. It is primarily about the theological content of the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception, according to which Mary, mother of Jesus, is holy and immaculate (*sancta et immaculata*). Although the Immaculate-doctrine firstly concerns Mary, it was theologically accepted from a very early stage as a doctrine of the Church that had an emphasis in anthropological implications. This paper brings to question these anthropological implications as well, especially the contemporary relativization of sin and human sinfulness, where Immaculata-doctrine is seen, not in contrast to human nature, but as the one that deeply belongs to it. In that context, the old doctrine and its content can now be seen as precious and has a valuable meaning even in modern times, especially if accepted as the key of the new awoken evangelization.

*Key words:* Immaculata, Mary, Church, sin, holiness, humanity

*Povzetek:* Članek teološko naslavlja cerkveni nauk o Brezmadežni in njegove dogmatične implikacije v okviru mariologije in eklezilogije. Članek nadalje sledi prepričanju o odrešenjski relevantnosti krščanskih dogem, v skladu s katerim dogme govorijo o razodeti resnici glede potrditve vrednosti človeškega bitja. Na tak način lahko prek teologije dobimo vpogled v vsebine, ki so pomembne za krščansko antropologijo, ta pa v obratni smeri kaže na teologijo kot svojo pristno podlago. Tu gre predvsem za teološko vsebino dogme o Marijinem brezmadežnem spočetju, po kateri je Marija, Jezusova mati, sveta in brezmadežna (*sancta et immaculata*). Čeprav nauk o Brezmadežni v prvi vrsti zadeva Marijo, je bil že v najzgodnejših časih teološko sprejet kot nauk Cerkve s poudarjeno antropološkimi implikacijami. Članek naslavlja tudi tovrstne antropološke implikacije, zlasti sodobno relativizacijo greha in človeške grešnosti, pri čemer nauk o Brezmadežni ni razumljen kot nasprotje človeške narave, temveč kot

nekaj, kar k njej najgloblje sodi. V tem kontekstu se lahko stari nauk in njegova vsebina izkažeta kot dragocena in pomembna tudi za sodobnost, zlasti če sta sprejeta kot ključ novo obujene evangelizacije.

*Ključne besede:* Brezmadežna, Marija, Cerkev, greh, svetost, človeštvo

## 1. Introduction

Deliberating about the content of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Karl Rahner has especially emphasized the soteriological relevance of the Christian dogmas, saying how neither of them is just any truth told by the Church, but the truth told to us and for our salvation. (Rahner 1967, 155). In Christian dogmas it is always about saying of what is accepted by faith as revealed truth about God and his relation to man, before all the truth of revelation of God's love to the man and by that also affirmation of the man and mankind in general. Soteriological dimension of Christian theology is in that way shown as an authentic anthropology and Christian anthropology is, according to this concept, directed to find its foundation and fulfillment in theology, direct doctrine of God. Since God, according to the Christian Creed, became man and by incarnating his Son stepped in the sphere of humanity, it is no longer possible to talk about God without seeing his relation to humanity. Since God stepped into the human history, we are only able to talk about that history as the history of salvation. We can only think of it as the history of God's relation to man and thus understand it within general human community and community of man with God, and finally within the universality of God's mercy over man.

This basic classification of the Christian dogmas is a starting point for revolving actuality of Christian speech of immaculacy, which is articulated principally as the speech of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception. The content of this Marian dogma predicates the faith of the Church that the Virgin and Mother of God Mary was from the beginning of her life, by the salvific merits of her son Jesus Christ, given prevenient grace and was preserved free from the state called the original sin (which is understood as the lack of grace in every man caused by the first man's sin at the beginning of human history). Under the Immaculata-doctrine it is primarily thought that the Virgin Mary, unlike all other humans, from the beginning of her existence was captured by the divine graceful life, i.e. by the redeeming and consecrating God's love. Besides, the dogma of the Immaculate also pronounces the faith by which Mary had remained without sin during her entire life. So, she wasn't only preserved by the original sin but was also entirely and permanently preserved from any personal sin as well. She is holy and impeccable, *sancta et immaculata*.

Both of those aspects of the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception, although she is human, on the first glance separate her from other people because they point out the uniqueness and oneness of her person and the divine grace

given to her in relation to others. Indeed, according to the Christian belief, she was the only one of all people free from sin, while all others are born with an inheritance of sin which is called Adam's sin. She was the only who had not experienced any sin whatsoever, while all others are considered sinners by nature, often taking impurity as an excuse for our weaknesses (in a sense *errare humanum est*), also as a fundamental characteristic of humanity, as it was something distinctively human (in a sense of 1 Jn 1,8-10: »If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.«).

Unlike this opinion, according to which Mary is being observed as contraposition and opposition to the human race, Church, on the other hand, from the beginning accents the fact that Mary is the prototype of the Church and every man<sup>1</sup> and concrete presence of God's truth of every man and God's word directed for them. Rahner's thought of dogmas mentioned at the beginning of this paper can also be applied at this Marian dogma: no truth of Mary's life does not speak just to her and could not be applied only on her. Furthermore, the truth of Mary's life does not concern only her relation to God, nor is God's word pointed only to Mary. All Marian dogmas are understood as universal God's speech to man and about man. This can be seen with especial accuracy in the dogma of Immaculate Conception because in this dogma the Church accepts the content of exceptional soteriological importance for all the Church and every man. The strong connection between Mariology and theology is manifested exactly in this content and that link is reflected through correlation of Immaculata-Doctrine with Ecclesiology and Christian anthropology.

## 2. Immaculata-doctrine and ecclesiology

The biggest complaint about the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception and its theological content was the lack of its foundation in the Scripture, i.e. the New Testament. However, it cannot be said that the doctrine is lacking in the New Testament and the patristic texts entirely, but there that speech is not direct about Mary, but about the Church (Ratzinger 2008, 64). In Pauline and Deutero-Pauline opus, the purity and immaculacy are applied first on the Church and Christ's worshippers. They have been chosen before the genesis of the world to become »holy and immaculate« (*sancti et immaculati*) (Eph 1,4). The reconciliation had been given to them by Christ's death, so they could be governed to him »holy in his sight, without blemish« (*sanctos et immaculatos*). So it does not surprise when Paul writes to the believers in Corinth that he promised them to »one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him« (2 Co 11,2). According to Paul, the Church is not seen here only in eschatological perspective as pure and immaculate, but as already free of sins (Ro 6,18), washed and sanctified (1

<sup>1</sup> About meaning of the Marian principle in the Church, under which the shaping of the Church and every Christian is thought, see especially Balthasar 2008, 65. About the close connection of Mary with the Church and Mary with every Christian, see also Štrukelj 2014, 661–670.

Co 6,11), sanctified in Jesus Christ (1,2). Certainly, it is not about the purity which is gained from the Church itself and its human credits, but bestowed purity and consecration that comes out from Christ's surrender for the Church, with a wish to present it to himself »glorious, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish« (Eph 5,27). Hence, Paul will accentuate that this purity the Church needs to keep until Christ's second coming. As reflected in the content of the Epistle of Ephesians, the Church has very early been called *ecclesia immaculata* in theological thought, which has also been enhanced by early patristic comments on Pauline Epistles and Old Testament Song of Songs, according to which the Church was identified as the bride, pure and holy. Therefrom the content of the »holy« Church appeared very early in the Christian symbol of faith: I believe (in) the holy Church<sup>2</sup> (Greshake 2014, 236–237).

Afterwards the content of this doctrine was transposed from Church to Mary as a person because she was represented as the beginning and impersonated reality of the Church. The early Christians, especially those from the first century, have cherished deep and true consciousness of holiness and immaculacy of the Church and they have, no matter what were the experiences of the real Church community, permanently kept in front of their eyes Christological founded brightness of the Church and her election as a virgin and a mother. Among Christians the need has arisen to look upon Mary as a pure image and archetype of the Church due to their own experience of weakness, insufficiency and sin, because she was the member of the Church who had been able to experience Church as holy and immaculate. As more the parallel Eve – Mary was being infiltrated, even more the contrast of Mary's immaculacy towards Eve's sinfulness and sinfulness of all other people and, of course, the Church in whole was being accentuated. As bigger the experience of one's weakness and sinfulness, as more the pure holiness was transferred and projected on Mary. Doing so, the doctrine of the Holy and Immaculate applied on Mary showed as »an expression of faith certainty for true existence of the holy Church – as a person and in person« (Ratzinger 2008, 67). It seemed that without this personal embodiment of perfect holiness of the Church in Mary, the holiness itself and belief in the holy Church would only remain unreached and abstract ideal (Greshake 2014, 238).

In the background we can identify the elements of an attitude, according to which the holiness is seen as the perfection of actualization, and is related to complete absence of sin, which theology of the Church never represented and with what in official doctrine did not relate to. According to the Church doctrine and theology, the Church, although holy, is not immaculate. Thus, the Christian faith in »the holy Church« does not exclude an open view on its sins and the real facing with its sinful side in the sense of acknowledging personal sins and human

<sup>2</sup> Believers' acknowledging the Church is expressed in the third pneumatological part of the Creed, i.e. together with expressing belief in the Holy Spirit. In so doing in some versions of the Creed and in the formal sense the distinction between believing in the Holy Spirit as a divine person and believers' acknowledgment of the Church: *credo in Spiritum Sanctum*, but *credo sanctam Ecclesiam* (accusative without preposition »in«) wants to be underlined. This distinction is significant also in the context of our speech of the holiness of the Church.

sinfulness. Even more, within faith in God the man necessarily faces with a secret of sin, and doing so he is having a true insight into his own sin and sinful nature. Hence the confession of sin and sinfulness is only possible in purified faith in God. This kind of faith in God along with the human consciousness of sin has kept the Church in humility, separating it from any kind of puritanism and equalization with some ideal, perfect and pure community of the holy. The Church has never reckoned only the perfect, but her members were always been both holy and sinful (*ecclesia mixta*), who considered themselves, from the Christological point of view, holy although sinful.

So, in what way we may see the holiness of the Church when it is obvious that we cannot see it in its perfect immaculacy? It is clear that from the beginning it is about the category of holiness which is not some moral attribute of the Church or her certain members, although that also could be the case, but it is more an ontological designation that it is based upon the inseparable connection between the Church and the holy God and his Son Jesus Christ (Congar 1972, 463). The holiness in its origin is first of all and above all, the feature of God's being, in the meaning of his transcendence and sublimity, i.e. ontological detachment from the creatures in whole. God is Holy One of Israel (Is 12,6). Also, Jesus Christ, Son of God, of one Being with the Father, is the Holy One of God (Mr 1,24). The Church as the »holy nation« (1 P 2,9) by God's call and election belongs to the area that is primary God's, the area of holiness, and so becomes the participant of it. The Church is holy because she has been a participant in Christ's work of salvation through the sacrament of baptism which gives to its every member purity and consecration. The mercy of God is that which makes from imperfect and sinful the justified and consecrated ones. By this gift of holiness, the Church becomes the chosen one and special property, the area of God's ownership, the property of the holy. Surely, this separation does not mean, and it has never meant the exclusiveness of the Church from the world, but just the opposite – the mission of the Church in the world. The holiness of the Church is not there for itself, but because it has been sent to the world to be its yeast and to make the whole creature holy, i.e. God's ownership and God's residence. It is hence a holiness which has been given to the Church as a gift and a mission.

Holiness of the Church is the gift achieved through action of the Christ, who himself chose the holy nation that he permanently consecrates through words and sacraments and by the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of sanctity (2 Co 2,13) and who is renewing the Church in sanctity by sending her the new members all the time. »The Church is holy because it is the salvific instrument of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, it is indestructible in professing God's saving deeds, in her faith, in her teaching, and in the sacraments that Christ instituted in it.« (Štrukelj 2018, 724) Still, by this divine strength that is the permanent source of the sanctity of the Church, the Church always needs to keep awareness of its human dimension that is the source of weakness and sin. It is about human-mundane and human-divine element in the Church. Hence, with right we can speak at the same time

of the holy Church that is sinful and the Church of the sinners.<sup>3</sup> It stands as a permanently valid patristic statement that the Church is holy virgin and pure harlot (*casta meretrix*<sup>4</sup>). This expression in the Patristic time had not been used in the sense of later principle *simul iusta et peccatrix* (simultaneously righteous and sinful), but in the sense that the Church that was once a sinful harlot, by merits of Christ, became purified and consecrated for the pure bride. However, the expression can be used, and today it is the case, in the sense of permanent danger of turning the view from the Christ, the only bridegroom, and tendency to adultery with the world we are living in. The Second Vatican Council emphasized the ambiguity of human imperfection and sinfulness, on the one hand, and given holiness of the Church, on the other, when it has spoken of the Church as the »spotless spouse« (*sponsa immaculata*) (LG, 6), but also »in the weakness of the flesh she may not waver from perfect fidelity, but remain a bride worthy of her Lord, and moved by the Holy Spirit may never cease to renew herself« (*sancta simul et semper purificanda*) (LG, 8), whereat this duality is thought as a permanent tension of the existence of the Church.

Taking in consideration both dimensions of Christian life seriously, both saint and sinner, we are not surprised by the already mentioned Paul's statement in which he called Christians saints, in spite of their sins and imperfections, taking this name at the same time as a fundamental Christian disposition, and also as a goal and ideal for Christians to strive for. Holiness of the Church is not, hence, firm and permanent deposition of the Church itself, which would arise from its inner nature or efficiency of its work (not even if it concerns its holy work or holy individuals), but always and permanently a new gift that comes from *ab extra*, from God. By its fundamental determination the Church is an answer to God's self-revelation in history, the answer based on Jesus' work of redemption and enhanced by the Holy Spirit. Since by this answer the Church – spouse – participates in the love of Jesus for his Father and salvific love for all men, Jesus Christ is the one who loves it continuously and holds in gifted holiness. The Church is, hence, holy because Christ keeps pulling it to himself, watching it in his love, wash it and consecrate it for his pure bride and because in it is the permanently active winning strength of Holy Spirit's holiness (Kehl 2010, 21).

### 3. Actuality of the Immaculate-doctrine and the new evangelization

The connection to ecclesiology, the doctrine of sin and grace, Immaculata-doctrine aims on the concretization in Christian anthropology that observes a man in relation to God, within the presence of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

<sup>3</sup> Whether the Church of sinners can also be denoted as the sinful Church, see: Rahner 1965.

<sup>4</sup> More about »casta meretrix« in Balthasar, 1961. An expression »casta meretrix« Balthasar took over from Ambrose (*Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*, VI,23), who uses it within a quite difficult chapter in which he typologically interpreters an Old Testament text about the harlot Rahab (Jos 2).

### 3.1 Immaculata-doctrine in the context of the contemporary understanding of holiness and sin

Since Mary is an archetype of man in a fullness of grace, Mariology could and should be understood as a graceful-theological concretization of anthropology; it is developed within the doctrine of creation and history of salvation. In that way the content of the Immaculate dogma points the Church and every man to Jesus Christ and through him to the mystery of Triune God as a fundamental and central stronghold of human fulfillment. In attempt of actualization of dogmatic doctrine of the Immaculate, we are going to extract here especially the relationship of the contemporary man towards holiness and sin.

In Mary Immaculate we recognize the acceptance of communion with God as an expression of human freedom which is in faith fulfilled in love, as the fullness of humanity, i.e. human fulfillment.<sup>5</sup> Every man with holiness can realize that primordial human longing of »being as God«, described on the first pages of the Bible (Gn 3,5). Looking at the Immaculate as a highlight of God's graceful realization of man, we are able to recognize in her the realization of God's longing for man and his full potential. God imagined and created a man »in our image, in our likeness« (Gn 1,26-27), so, he wanted for a man to be »like God«, to be holy and without sin as the true image of his Creator, which was finally implemented in Mary. God's plan with men and human longing for true realization and happiness is accomplished in Mary's graceful immaculacy.

If we turn back to biblical text from Genesis about human longing to become as God, then we see how that text point to father of lies, who uses this primordial human longing and tries to twist it and direct it wrongly. The man's longing, which is according to God's plan written in human being as true God's offer and call to man, father of lies turns by demonstrating God as enslaving man, as the one from whom a man needs to turn away so he could fully realize himself and his real happiness. False directing man that it is even possible to be »like God« without God – this offer precipitates him in sin that actually closes the opportunity for true realization. Entering sin and becoming sin, the man faces his nudity and emptiness as the only thing that belongs to him by nature and the only thing by nature he can call his own. He lost the given being »like God«, and was given diabolic emptiness of »being like gods«, which is the sign of all idols, signs of nothingness, signs of not-to-be. The Bible denotes how the consequences of original sin uncover this fraud to men. This perfidious fraud is not seen only in the original sin, but also in every human sin.

Unlike this trap of seduction of man, the doctrine of Immaculate shows that standing on God's side, deciding for God and accepting God's given holiness (»be like God«), denotes in a true sense the fullness of human realization. Mary Immaculate, therefore, shows what every man was intended to be by God's plan, and

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<sup>5</sup> The Second Vatican Council instructs to that in its dogmatic constitution on Church when said that by holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society, *humanior vivendi modus promovetur* (LG, 40).

also what he is still able to become by God's grace: to be like God. Mary is the evidence of true God's plan with man, a plan he never gave up, not even because of human sin. Due to that plan of Creator's love, even after the fall and after human sin, we have a full access to the divine nature through Jesus Christ (2 P 1,4), so we could be able to fully realize our humanity in that sense of »be like God«. In Mary Immaculate we see that, unlike persistent attempts of »emancipation« of man from God, only agreeing with God and entering in dependence on God, denotes true affirmation of man. Being like God is possible if man enters in the area of God's holiness, and that means entering the dependence on God, entering under the aegis of God's closeness in Christ and in Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, in our time and culture the holiness is not represented in the light of biblical and Christian understanding. On one side, it is represented as something unnatural to man, something stiffed and archaic, so the name »saint« has a quite negative sound and therefore people are trying not to be perceived as such. According to the widespread opinion, saints are not fun people, they are not social and do not have a sense of humor, they are inadapted, unready for compromises, they contrast from a lot of things we consider necessary virtues of contemporary man. On the other hand, we see true holiness, even then when we intimately admire it, as something extremely difficult to achieve, for ordinary man it is almost impossible, as something for which extraordinary effort is needed and is reserved only for exceptionally strong personalities. (St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta said in her speech in 1988: »Holiness is not luxury of the few. It is a simple duty of you and for me.«)

It is understandable that this attitude towards holiness is connected today to present and growing relativization of sin and human sinfulness. Unlike biblical faith that clearly uncovers sin and faces its consequences, the practice of the contemporary world, according to which the existence of sin is denied or the speech of sin is twisted, is obvious. The sin is not called to its true name and does not show its true meaning in relation to both God and humanity. It is justified in the name of human freedom and described as desirable in the name of human happiness. Instead of clear uncovering of sin, we witness the speech about human errors and imperfections as something that is a part of human being that belongs to it, that is even inevitable and almost attractive. When sin is described in such a manner, it is logical that it does not ask for remorse, forgiveness or justification. Often just a superficial excuse is enough (Raguž 2016), while real remorse, the consciousness of insult and pain that is caused, especially retribution for sin, redemption and true justification are lacking entirely. Saying that it is human to make mistakes, moreover, we express human empathy and acceptance of sin as something that is inherent to a man, so in every possible way the man is being justified from inner and external responsibility for committed sin. As if holding eyes wide shut in front of the mystery of sin, contemporary man tries to avoid the queasy of its devastating consequences that he nevertheless feels within and in the ruined relationships to others. This insufficient consciousness about sin or superficial approach to it then leads to the lack or crisis of forgiveness as a wanted and



expected forgiveness from God, as well as that of others in the sense of a needed condition of life. The contemporary man does not see what all the history of salvation points to – that sin can disappear only by given forgiveness, by God's strength and action after one's confession and remorse.

In the atmosphere of holiness, we can truly uncover sin, and in such a way we may say the speech about holiness and sin are somewhat inseparable and complementary. It certainly does not mean that believers invented sin and as such resent it to others as collective neurosis and frustration, but it is the fact that only in realizing God's holiness and greatness of his love we can see our sinfulness and insufficiency that devalues that love. Facing God's holiness, man can see more clearly and purify his inner view to recognize his sin. It is about purified human conscious that is shaped by living with the holy God, and in doing so, man can easily notice sin and try to avoid it. Hence, the awareness of sin actually exists only within a believer's point of view on the reality of man and the world, showing how, for example, all saints' biographies point to the fact that the bigger holiness is connected to bigger sensitivity for sin. On the other hand, only in faith it is possible to experience the freedom from sin and redemption from its consequences because forgiveness of sin and justification of man is an exclusive act of God. Looking at God's love encourages man to confess his sin and ask for forgiveness. Christians, believing in Jesus Christ, believe in love of God-Father from which man was created to be holy, they believe in Jesus' love that redeemed men from sins for holiness in the faith of Holy Spirit, whose love permanently keeps men in consecration and integrity. They admit the existence of sin and acknowledge themselves as sinners, they believe in the power and strength of God's love that justifies and forgives sins (by baptism, Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation).

In modern times we are facing a growing relativization of sin and indifference to it. The holiness has lost its attraction, and the sin is being observed as an ontological determination of man and a reality for which we need to show understanding. The consequences of all this, even in Christian Europe, is an empty theism, indifference, apathy and clemency of the man today; the lack of existential meaning of faith, spiritual void, various forms of idolatry and secular religiousness and more intense and louder practical atheism. Therefore, a few last popes were strongly inviting the Church for a new turn and on a new evangelization of the Christian world that starts to rise harder under influence of the Second Vatican Council.

### **3.2 New evangelization and the Immaculata-doctrine**

The Second Vatican Council recognizes evangelization of the world as the main task of the Church, which means rediscovering original God's plan together with the world and collaboration of Christians on that God's work. The decree *Ad gentes* is directly dedicated to the evangelization work, although all the Council documents are permeated with this topic. A request for the new evangelization is especially visible in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: »For it is the function of the Church, led by the Holy Spirit Who renews and puri-

fies her ceaselessly, to make God the Father and His Incarnate Son present and in a sense visible.« (GS, 21) Ten years after the Council the Pope Paul VI has convened the Synod that resulted with Apostolic letter *Evangelii nuntiandi*, in which Mary is recognized as »the Star of the evangelization« (EN, 82). Evangelization is here emphasized as a grace and a mission for the Church from Jesus Christ himself. The Pope John Paul II continued his work of encouraging for evangelization. His speech in Poland 1979 about the exhausted Christianity that needs to accept the new swing, is taken as a beginning of the discourse on the new evangelization. This pope, as a participant of the Council, strongly felt the theme of evangelization, exposing it from the perspective of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in which the fundamental thought is the universal call to holiness (LG, chapter V)<sup>6</sup>. In his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Inuente* from 2001, he directs pastoral guidelines to the Church among which the universal call for holiness is especially pointed out. In that letter the pope is completely aware, and he strongly points it out, that the Church as God's property must find the way to holiness again, which means belonging to God himself. On that Council line, the graceful character of the holiness of the Church is emphasized, but also very seriously the responsibility of the Christians and their collaboration with grace in endeavoring holiness is underlined. The same striving about the new evangelization as returning to holiness of the Church was clearly articulated by the Pope Benedict XVI as well. In his audiences and speeches, he gladly showed saints and their lives as role models for the contemporary Church's life. The highlight of the new evangelization is noticeable in today's Pope Francis and his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, in which he sees the motivation for a new evangelization in the joy for belonging to the Lord and his Gospel. All these initiatives of the Church Magisterium have in common the content of the new evangelization that is recognized in the restoration of the Gospel in the Church and representing Christ and God's plan to the world. The new evangelization does not imply some new contents instead of the Gospel, but with the new strength and renewed glow to collaborate with God on the salvation of men and the world. Secondly, an important outcome of all these initiatives of the Magisterium is the call to the Church to be a participant and the first object of that new evangelization.

Where can we put the dogmatic content of the Immaculata–doctrine within this Church's strive around the new evangelization? We have seen that, according to the original Christian understanding of this doctrine, the Church itself is immaculate. As a chosen spouse it belongs to Christ, justified by him and as such is a part of God's salvific plan and area of Holy Spirit's activity. Its holiness consists in that, and that is also a natural state of every of its member. Therefore, being holy for the members of the Church should not have been an exception. Nevertheless,

<sup>6</sup> In the commentaries of the Council ecclesiology, the most emphasized aspect is the communitarian character of the Church, which is, of course, a very important aspect. However, sometimes we get an impression that emphasizing the communitarian dimension (which is sometimes explicated in social categories and observed in contrast to the hierarchical system until the Council), we overlook the central and, it seems, the fundamental element of the council's constitution on the Church: the call for holiness as the Church' fundamental designation.

the fact that the Church is a human community implies that it is not once and for all purified, but it is always in a need of purification, and, according to the words of the Council, it needs to step on a journey of penance and restoration permanently (LG, 8). Although being Christ's spouse, it is permanently defined by the duality of its nature, it is a heavenly and earthly reality. It is washed and justified by Christ's blood, but cannot escape from the human element from which it is made of. This duality of nature is reflected in each member of the Church, but also in every man created from the earth that is at the same time bearer of God's spirit. The permanent and irrefutable ontological holiness of the Church, on the one hand, and soiled with sin, on the other, theology evokes with an image from the Song of Songs, when it observes that it as an image of the Church. In that text for the fiancée it is said to be »black, but beautiful«, *nigra sum sed Formosa* (Song of Songs 1:5) (more about this theme see in: Balthasar 1961.) The blackness is here the symbol of sin and beauty is a symbol of purity and holiness. The Church is, hence, sinful, but still holy, unlike Mary, personal role model of the Church, that has been called *tota pulchra*, »altogether beautiful« (Song of Songs 4:7) – because of her perfect holiness and complete immaculacy, according to the same image from the Song of Songs. Mary is completely holy and immaculate, while the Church is holy, although sinful.

Mary Immaculate in this image of the pure fiancée does not represent a higher and unreachable ideal, but a way of a possible itinerary of the Church and every man. Accepting God and trusting him about his revealed intention, the Church, like Mary, shows trust, not only in divine love but also in divine power that was manifested in her. What God's omnipotent love manifested in Mary, it is possible with every man. Marian dimension is not the one that only shapes the saints, but the one that should, as an open possibility for the commitment to Christ, be visible in the Church of the sinners as well (Balthasar 2005, 130). In conviction that for God nothing is impossible, holiness and life without sin is not an exception and unreachable dream, but a real human option and a logical consequence of opting for God. The new evangelization is an eye opener to the Church and the world in front of the call that this is an open possibility and a true offer for everyone. Each man was given freedom to decide for holiness and living without sin, or that sin can be despised and detested, and that we can pray for forgiveness and make decisions worthy of life. Human nature could not be determinate to that extent to define the power of God's love for man or to annihilate the freedom of choice and option for God. Human nature is sinful, but where the sin is being revealed and acknowledged, the grace of forgiveness and justification is even more present to release man from the burden of sin. This grace is manifested as a gift of freedom and strength for living holiness, especially through sacraments of baptism and Eucharist.

For the new evangelization of the Church is, therefore, extremely important to perseveringly lead the contemporary man to his wakening in front of the fake image of the world about sin. On the other hand, it needs to include witnessing and confirmation of the God's love and grace that overwhelm every sin which are the

only realities that are able to act liberating on man. It means that the new Gospel proclamation to today's man needs to support the ancient human longing for »being like God«, even though that longing is actually manifested in various wrong ways. Since that longing is a code written by the hand of Lord in the human being, contemporary man needs to see its genuine beauty and strength, but at the same time also all the false offers of its realization that the world offers need to be unmasked. This is possible by pointing our regard on holy and immaculate Mary. By watching her, it can be noticed how human longing for »being like God« is actually God's gift for man and completely achievable in community with God. Exactly this fundamental truth about man created in God's image and God's intention to the complete realization of this likeness Mary Immaculate shows and invites us on, should be the content of the new evangelization that Church calls to.

Mary Immaculate showed how man could enter in the area of the divine by serving and listening to God, in the area of holiness, the space of complete realization of its humanity. So, she became someone who exceeds every human thought about its own realization. She became a mother of God at his entering humanity. In her life all the greatness of God's love to man has been shown. It was clear that the claim of the father of lies is not true that God would hide his divinity and jealously keep it from human (Gn 3,5). Moreover, in his Son, born by Mary, God has clearly and openly showed his divinity, surrendering it in admirable exchange of love and gave it to men. It is obvious that belonging to God and dependence on him is not annihilation or limitation of the human freedom and potentials of humanity, nor God's fear that man would take his place. Moreover, belonging to God is the only real condition and realization of true sublimity, true divine life in man. As no branch can bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the tree (John 15, 4-5), so man can reach divinity only if he remains in God. Only with God Almighty people can become »gods and children of the most High« (Ps 82,6).

According to his fundamental determination that he has from the Creator, man is an image of God. However, fragility, weakness, inconsistency belong to his determination. To that points the creation from earth, material apt to pestle, waste and losing shape. Even in the realization of human existence this determination needs to be taken seriously. The man is not ontologically evil but is easily seduced and, in front of offers of the Evil, naïve. Mary Immaculata as realized existence of human embracing God is a clear and convincing example that directs man by his created nature to God, and from whose creating love he comes from and in whose salvific love he can reach highlight of his humanity.

#### **4. Conclusion**

We can see that Immaculata–doctrine as a primarily dogmatic doctrine of the Immaculate Virgin Mary has always been understood also as a doctrine of the Church with its anthropological consistencies, and in contemporary time is again precious if accepted as a key of the new awaken evangelization in the Church. The

content of this doctrine directs contemporary man, even when faced with sin, being born within sinfulness and a burden of the culture of sin, belonging to human race wounded with sin and his own tendency to sin (in a sense of: »Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.« Ps 51,7). Man has and permanently keeps the gifted freedom (especially Christian by the strength of the sacraments of baptism, reconciliation and Eucharist) and decides over and over again for God, God's closeness and to choose life without sin (life of holiness) as a deeply humane option. As we say that err is human, which is the statement about the determination of the human inclination to sin, we can also, by watching Mary Immaculate, say that not to err is human. To the original human inclination understood as God's intention with man belongs life without sin, i.e. by God's grace the possibility of being a part of God's holiness. Biblical anthropology and the Church Immaculate-doctrine show how this option is the Creator's original intention, revealed as a content of God's will. God »wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth« (1 Ti 2,4).

A substantial content of the new evangelization that starts from renewing the faith of the Church is hidden in a renewed recognition of the connection between Immaculata-doctrine in contemporary ecclesiology and anthropology. This recognition becomes clear in the confidence in the original God's intention with man and God's grace during the realization of that intention. It is about faith and trust that, following Mary's example, for every man is salvific, possible and beautiful to be holy, and collaborating with God seriously we can stand up against the sin and fight it, resisting it without looking for excuses in our weaknesses. God's love for humanity opens the unthinkable space of freedom in which every man, according to the psalmist (Ps 51,7) could say: even though I was conceived by my mother in sin, the sin does not have to be my final destination, so I could freely decide for entering God's closeness and ask for his help not to give birth to my children in sin. Immaculata-doctrine exactly confirms, accepted as a prototype of all humanity, such a potential of the human dignity, according to which man is free to give up sin and accept holiness as entering God's presence, with a deep conviction that holiness is the most suitable option for the human nature. The content of the new evangelization first needs to be accepted by the Church, so it could, as the realization of the fullness of life, be able to offer it to the world.

## Abbervations

- AG** – Drugi Vatikanski koncil 2008 [Ad gentes: Dekret o misijskoj djelatnosti Crkve].
- EG** – Franjo 2013 [Evangelii gaudium].
- EN** – Pavao VI. 1976 [Evangelii nuntiandi].
- GS** – Drugi Vatikanski koncil 2008 [Gaudium et spes: Pastoralna konstitucija o Crkvi u suvremenom svijetu].
- LG** – Drugi Vatikanski koncil 2008 [Lumen gentium: Dogmatska konstitucija o Crkvi].
- NMI** – Ivan Pavao II. 2001 [Novo millennio ineunte].

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