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Salvation History in *Fides et Ratio*: Theological (Ecumenical) and Historiographical Implications

Abstract: The spiritual interpretation of the local and world history as salvation history represents a general feature of the entire Christian theological tradition, Eastern and Western alike. The concept of salvation history can also be found in the encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* (1998) written twenty years ago by John Paul II. In *Fides et Ratio* the concept of salvation history and the importance of the category of time is emphasized as one of the crucial features of the Christian faith's self-understanding, especially regarding the Divine Revelation and its relation to reason. The aim of this article – in line with the encyclical's thoughts – is to show that the interpretation of history as salvation history represents a faith-based contextualization of »empirical« (»objective«) history, thus not neglecting, but rather complementing, the methods of secular (postmodern) historiography. The author of this article advocates the following thesis: salvation history not only opens the possibilities of cooperation between faith (theology) and reason (historiography), but also, and even more, due to its Christian universality, enables the connection with the (Catholic) Church's own intellectual heritage and fosters the ecumenical dialogue. In this regard, a special attention is given to the Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) and the Russian East Orthodox theologian and historian Georges Florovsky (1893–1979).

Key words: faith, reason, *Fides et Ratio*, salvation history, ecumenism, historiography

Povzetek: **Zgodovina odrešenja v *Fides et Ratio*: Teološke (ekumenske) in zgodovinske implikacije**

Duhovna interpretacija krajevno zamejene in svetovne zgodovine kot zgodovine odrešenja predstavlja splošno značilnost celotnega krščanskega teološkega izročila, tako vzhodnega kakor tudi zahodnega. Koncept zgodovine odrešenja je mogoče zaslediti tudi v encikliki *Fides et Ratio* (*Vera in razum*) (1998), ki jo je pred dvajsetimi leti napisal Janez Pavel II. *Fides et Ratio* koncept zgodovine odrešenja in pomembnost kategorije časa poudarja kot eno izmed ključnih značilnosti samorazumevanja krščanske vere, zlasti glede božjega razodetja in njegovega odnosa do razuma. Cilj tega članka – zasledujoč miselni tok enciklike

– je pokazati, da interpretacija zgodovine kot zgodovine odrešenja predstavlja kontekstualizacijo »empirične« (»objektivne«) zgodovine na temelju vere, ki tako ne zanemarja, temveč dopolnjuje metode sekularnega (postmodernega) zgodovinopisja. Avtor članka zagovarja naslednje stališče: zgodovina odrešenja ne odpira zgolj možnosti sodelovanja med vero (teologijo) in razumom (zgodovinopisjem), temveč tudi in še bolj – zaradi svoje krščanske univerzalnosti – omogoča povezanost s (katoliški) Cerkvi lastno intelektualno dediščino ter spodbuja ekumenski dialog. V tem pogledu sta posebne pozornosti deležna švicarski katoliški teolog Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) ter ruski pravoslavni teolog in zgodovinar Georgij Florovski (1893–1979).

Ključne besede: vera, razum, *Fides et Ratio*, zgodovina odrešenja, ekumenizem, zgodovinopisje

1. Introduction

The spiritual interpretation of the local and world history as salvation history – i.e. in the light of Divine Providence and »encounter« between God and man – represents a general, almost universal feature of the entire Christian theological tradition, Eastern and Western alike, extending from the Late Antiquity up to the twentieth century (Malmenvall 2017a, 69). The concept of salvation history can also be found in the encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* (1998) written by the pope (now saint) John Paul II.¹ In *Fides et Ratio* the concept of salvation history and the importance of the category of time is emphasized as one of the crucial features of the Christian faith's self-understanding, especially regarding the Divine Revelation and its relation to reason. This connection is most evidently emphasized in the first chapter (titled The Disclosure of Divine Wisdom, paragraphs 7–15) of the document (Hemming and Parsons 2002, 14–29). The aim of this article – in line with the encyclical's thoughts – is to show that the interpretation of history as salvation history represents a faith-based contextualization of »empirical« (»objective«) history, thus, not neglecting (but rather complementing) neither the contingency of specific historical circumstances nor the methods of secular (postmodern) historiography. Although John Paul II – primarily concerned with philosophy and himself a former professor of this discipline – does not directly mention the relationship between faith and reason in the field of historiography as a science in its postmodern forms, this issue can be addressed regarding the more general context of the encyclical letter. Therefore, the author of this article advocates the following thesis: salvation history not only opens the possibilities of cooperation between faith in the field of theology and reason in the field of historiography, but also, and even more, due to its Christian universality, enables the connection with the (Catholic) Church's own intellectual heritage and fosters

¹ The text of this encyclical letter is cited from its Latin-English critical edition with a revised English translation edited by Laurence P. Hemming and Susan F. Parsons (2002).

the ecumenical dialogue. In this regard, a special attention is given to the Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988)² and the Russian East Orthodox theologian and historian Georges Vasilevich Florovsky (1893–1979).³ Consequently, the ambition of this article is not to offer a final or all-encompassing coverage of the subject(s) discussed, but to foster dialogue between theology and historiography in the context of the phenomenon called salvation history.

2. Salvation history as a general feature of the Christian theological tradition

The concept of history as salvation history traces its origins back to the Biblical exegesis and theology of history in the Late Antiquity Patristic period which interpreted the local and global historical processes referring to the »Divine Providence« and »economy/oikonomia«, namely in the light of the care of a loving God for the mankind (Špidlík 1986, 6–9; 157; Grant and Tracy 2000, 71–79; Averincev 2005, 125–130; Malmenvall 2017a, 68). In this context, among the earliest East Christian authors the Biblical exegete and theologian Origen from the third century (2013, 280–281; 285–287; 315–317), as well as the Biblical exegete and historian Eusebius of Caesarea from the first half of the fourth century are worth mentioning (Maier 2007, 9–13; 16; 333; Cameron and Hall 1999, 2; 47; Averincev 2005, 132–133). Among the classical Western authors, Augustin of Hippo from the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century cannot be omitted (Moreschini 2004, 456–457; O'Daly 2004, V; 27; 29–30; 35–37; 39).

Various Christian authors from the Late Antiquity up to the twentieth century, characterized by their spiritual interpretation of history as salvation history, share some crucial similarities. All of them recognize God as the Lord to whom the entire history belongs. Furthermore, God is recognized as someone »entering« into history of the world because of his loving care for the mankind in order to save it from the captivity of sin and provide it with the »fullness of life«. According to their notion, the history as a whole is a stage of »encounter« between God and man. In addition to that, the world history consists of three crucial events or turning points which are the measure of all others. These events are: the creation of the world, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and the second coming of the Lord at the time of the last judgement. Therefore, history represents a coherent whole with its starting point (creation), summit (incarnation) and awaited conclusion (last judgement). Consequently, the notion of history as salvation history becomes a mechanism of the spiritual interpretation of the secular events, personalities and processes for which the empirical evidence exists. Thus, the events, personalities and processes are presented in the light of the symbolically rich Biblical hi-

² In the field of theology of history his most important work is *Theology of History: A Sketch (Theologie der Geschichte: Ein Grundriss)* (1959).

³ In the field of theology of history his most important work is *The Predicament of the Christian Historian* (1959).

story – its message does not end with the literal temporal ending of the Biblical images, events and stories, but continues in the set of historically comparable actions denoting repetition of relations between God and man. Within these relations, historically specific elements are placed in the context of repeatable, almost perpetual similarities. (Malmenvall 2015, 200–202; 2017a, 69–70; Bresciani 2016, 30–31; 39; 41–43; Averincev 2005, 121–127)

3. *Fides et Ratio* and salvation history

The main starting point of John Paul's encyclical letter is that faith and reason represent autonomous realities which are not mutually opposed but complementary – both enabling man to search and find the truth with its fullness in Jesus Christ. For John Paul II faith and reason seem to be like »two wings« by which the human spirit is raised toward the contemplation of truth. »It is God himself who implanted in the minds of men and women an inclination for knowing him, so that knowing and loving him, they may likewise attain the whole truth about their very selves. « (Hemming and Parsons 2002, 3)

John Paul's preference for philosophy can be already traced in the introduction (paragraph 3) of *Fides et Ratio*. He claims that there are many resources which man can deploy to foster the progress of knowledge of truth so that life is made »more human«. Standing out among these is philosophy, which when properly constituted, is a direct help in posing the question about the meaning of life and sketching an answer to it. (7) Not (salvation) history, but rather philosophy is, according to John Paul II, the key resource to seek and know the truth. In a similar way, the author of the encyclical letter emphasizes his notion that fundamental truths or a »common body of knowledge« surpasses specific historical periods and cultural contexts – the truth and philosophy are basically »above« history.⁴

»Despite changing times /... /, we may still admit a sort of nucleus of philosophical ideas, which are regularly present in the history of human reflection. Consider, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, of finality and causality. /... / Consider as well certain moral norms /... / which are common to everyone. /... / There exists a body of knowledge /... / as a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity. /... / We may discover something like an *implicit philosophy*, the principles of which anyone might feel that they possessed, albeit in a general and unconscious way.« (9)

⁴ The author's preference for philosophy and its alleged universality is additionally accentuated in the fourth chapter of the encyclical letter on the interaction between theology and philosophy where he advocates the following position: »Dogmatic theology for its part ought to possess the ability of arriving at an understanding of the mystery of salvation, wheter through the structure of narrative, or preferably through the form of reasoning. It ought to achieve this above all by the use of those intellectual conceptions which are formed with critical judgement, in a way communicable to all. Indeed without the help of philosophy theological issues cannot be clarified, as, for example, God's creative activity in the world, the relationship between God and man, and the identity of Christ as true God and true man.« (107)

However, the Christian (Catholic) faith, especially regarding the Divine Revelation and its relation to reason, cannot be properly understood without its rootedness in the »encounter« between God and man which takes place in history, within a specific epoch and a specific geographically and culturally defined space. This »encounter« – despite ontological difference between eternal and invisible God, on the one hand, and the transience and fallibility of man on the other – issues in the disclosure of a mystery, »hidden in the ages« and subsequently revealed, by which man, through Christ, the »Word made flesh«, might have access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and become sharer in the Divine nature. This action is »gratuitous«, initiated by God and »coming to us for our own salvation«. (15; 17) In the context of salvation history, attention is directed primarily to the incarnation of God in Christ who, »out of abundance of his love«, speaks to man and lives among him, so that he may invite him into fellowship with himself. Therefore, the deepest truth about God and man's salvation is made clear in Christ, who is the »fullness of revelation«. (19) Furthermore, John Paul II argues, it is necessary to insist that in the Christian faith time has a »fundamental importance«. For it is within time that the whole work of creation and salvation comes to light and it is clear that »we now already anticipate what time will bring to perfection«, implying the second coming of the Lord and, thus, the end or fulfillment of history. On this basis, salvation history – as lived in the historical as well as present time by the Church between resurrection of the Lord and his second coming – brings forth two crucial elements: closeness of eternal and invisible God to man through Christ, and anticipation of the »things to come«, i.e. incompleteness of history. History, therefore, becomes the »arena« where man is able to confirm the deeds of God for the sake of God's love towards him. God »touches us in the things which we best know and can easily verify«, because they constitute the circumstances of man's everyday life. (21) For the »people of God« (members of the Church) this kind of history becomes a path »pursued to the end«, so that through the continuous action of the Holy Spirit revealed truth should »completely open up its contents«. The Church, as the age passes by, is always on the move towards the »fullness of divine truth, until the words of God are fulfilled«. (21)

In the context of salvation history, the faith in God is of supreme importance. Faith is an act of assent on the God's testimony about himself and as such an act of personal trust. Faith, which is granted to man and cannot be demanded by him, set within the context of interpersonal communication, compels human reason to open itself to it and to grasp its deeper meaning. »For this very reason the act whereby we commit ourselves to God has always been considered by the Church to be a moment of fundamental choice which involves the whole person.« (23) By believing, man accomplishes the »most meaningful act of his life«, for here the certainty of truth is attained in that one who decides to live by it (25). The truth of the Christian revelation through Christ allows man to understand the mystery of his own life. This truth is not the highest reach of the reflection of reason, but the expression of a »free gift« – it requires that it be accepted as a »declaration of love«. This truth is at the same time the anticipation of the final vision of God, de-

stined for those who believe (in) him with a »sincere spirit«. (29) However, from John Paul II's perspective, the complexity of the world, i.e. history and the »differing fortunes of peoples«, are realities that demand (scientific) attention and judgement, without at the same time removing faith from this process. Namely, faith does not interpose itself in order to destroy the autonomy of reason but wants to made plain that the events of history cannot be profoundly grasped unless faith is professed in the God who is at work in them. »Faith /... / opens up the mind to detect the active presence of providence in the passing of events. « (33) There is no reason, therefore, for rivalry between faith and reason. Though each belongs to its own sphere, God and man belong together in a common bond. The origin of all things is in God and in him »the fullness of mystery is gathered together«; upon man lies the duty of searching out the truth with the aid of reason. (33)

»The selfsame God who created and guarantees the faculty of understanding and reasoning about the natural order of things /... /, is one with him who revealed as the Father of /... / Christ. This unity of truth, natural and revealed, finds its living and personal identity in Christ. « (57)

4. Theological (ecumenical) implications of *Fides et Ratio* regarding salvation history

The primary objective of John Paul II's encyclical letter is not to investigate and further develop the concept of salvation history itself or the relation between God, man and Divine Revelation within the category of time. Nevertheless, the notions of *Fides et Ratio* concerning the »encounter« between God and man in history can be placed in the context of modern theological discourse about the importance of time for the Christian faith. In this context, a connection and comparison between two renowned scholars from the twentieth century – the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar and the East Orthodox theologian and historian Georges Florovsky – can be considered reasonable. This connection and comparison has two advantages: firstly, it complements the notions of John Paul II with the thought of scholars who are – contrary to the author of *Fides et Ratio* – directly and systematically working in the field of theology of history; secondly, it enables to widen the (modern) Catholic understanding of history and Divine Providence with an ecumenical dimension, in this case with a contribution of an East Orthodox author. Although the understanding of salvation history is generally very similar in all the three compared authors, it differs on the point where the assessment of the importance of salvation history as a narrative for the entire Christian theology takes place. In this regard, John Paul II gives the ultimate importance to the philosophical reasoning and »universal« truths, while the other two recognize in the historical narrative and testimony of the community of believers the most genuine form of discourse about God, about the »story« of »encounter« between God and man. Therefore, the following conclusion can be

made: John Paul II, although not discarding the historically contingent circumstances, focuses mainly on the »universality« of the Christian faith and Divine Revelation, while Balthasar and Florovsky focus mainly on their »historicity« and their dependence on the experience and testimony of the community of believers, i.e. the Church.

4.1 *Fides et Ratio* and Hans Urs von Balthasar

Hans Urs von Balthasar claims that the adequate understanding of the historical process as a whole requires a specific normative historical subject encompassing the entire history of mankind. Due to the fact that this kind of a subject cannot be found among men – as every individual is limited by its intellectual and moral strength and the duration of his lifetime –, the only subject that is able to give meaning to the entire history is God. God who ultimately gives meaning to history is God who showed his closeness to mankind by becoming man himself and who opened to the mankind the path of the purification from evil. This is Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. (Balthasar 1959, 11; 13; Malmenvall 2017a, 74–75) Thus, as in the case of John Paul's *Fides et Ratio*, Christ represents the ultimate center of history which gives the key to the understanding of the creation, God Himself and his relation to mankind (Balthasar 1959, 14–15; 18–19; 41; Malmenvall 2017a, 75). The most visible compatibility between Balthasar and *Fides et Ratio* consists in the assessment of the essence of salvation history, namely the closeness of God to man within time, i.e. within history. The manifestation and work of God in time, especially through Jesus Christ (»God made flesh«), is by both authors regarded as a supreme proof about the love and concern of the Creator towards his creation.

According to Balthasar, Christ's example is best showed in his voluntary obedience to God the Father (Balthasar 1959, 26–27; Malmenvall 2017a, 75). »The meaning of the incarnation, of Jesus' manhood, is first borne in upon us as a not-doing /... /, a not-carrying-out of his own will.« (Balthasar 1994, 29) Christ's spiritual integration and elevation of history is primarily revealed through the fact that the Son does not overtake the will of the Father and, consequently, he waits for the right time, the »hour of the Father«. In this way, he does not act in a way that is typical of the fallen human nature – he does not »usurp« time and God's providence. On this basis, the essence of every disobedience towards God and, consequently, sin is overtaking or usurping time. The restoring of the »Divine order« by the power of death and resurrection of the Son is precisely the restoration of patience and temperance which through Christ becomes a fundamental ethical attitude of every Christian. (Balthasar 1959, 27–30; Malmenvall 2017a, 75–76)

According to Balthasar, Christ is the center and summit of history also because after his death and resurrection he did not »withdraw« to the remoteness of heaven but is still present in his »Mystical Body«, the Church. He is present in the Church especially through the sacraments which are visible material images of the work of the invisible God. Christ's presence in the sacraments means the presence of eternity in the limitedness of time and material world – precisely through the sacraments the eternity becomes ever-present and contemporary. (Balthasar 1959,

70–75; Malmenvall 2017a, 76–77) »Here, again, he is the risen Lord, living in the eternity of the Father, his earthly time transfigured into his eternal duration, the eternal Christ accompanying ›his own‹ through time.« (Balthasar 1994, 94) Furthermore, Balthasar argues that if the Biblical and all other events are not understood as rooted in their summit and center, which is Christ, they become unconnected and lost in time – without Christ they cannot be placed in the context of the history of the »encounter« between God and man. If, for example, the Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac is not understood as a preannouncement of the Calvary, it becomes separated from the other events of history and, consequently, loses its meaning. Balthasar argues that deeds and events after the resurrection of Christ or in the life of the Church should be understood in a similar way as well. Every deed, born out of a sincere faith, does not have only its direct consequences in relation to the temporally and geographically limited present, but also in relation to the future, eventually changing the course of history on a global level. Thus, human deeds are subjected to the incarnate Son of God who at the »end of time« will be the judge of the »living and dead«. In his final judgement he will especially regard those who have worked for the transformation of the world towards the good. Namely, the saints are his »invisible forces« for the transformation of the world who can influence the outcome of the last judgement. (Balthasar 1959, 58–61; Malmenvall 2017a, 76) In this context, another compatibility between Balthasar and *Fides et Ratio* can be traced: history of salvation, decisively marked by Divine providence, continuous in the life of the Church and is oriented towards its complete fulfillment at the Christ's second coming.

4.2 *Fides et Ratio* and Georges Florovsky

Florovsky is convinced that Christianity is a »religion of historians«. According to him, Christianity lives by considering the testimonies about the specific past events recognized in the light of the faith as true for all the creation and defined as »magnificent God's works«. The very foundation of Christianity is constituted by the interpretations of the central meaning of the specific historical events – the incarnation, suffering, and resurrection of the Son of God. On the one hand, Christ as a center of history represents the fulfillment of the Old Testament, while, on the other, he is the carrier of the eternal life. In the light of Christ's second coming, the entire history of mankind is understood as an »evolution« pointing towards the »end«, as a process of revealing the generally valid meaning through specific events and personalities. Therefore, the Christian faith is an »everyday invitation« to the spiritual study of history. (Florovsky 1974, 31–32; 58–60; Malmenvall 2017a, 72–73)

»The starting point of the Christian faith is the acknowledgment of certain actual events, in which God has acted /... / for man's salvation. /... / This entire pattern of interpretation is definitely linear, running from the beginning to the end, from Creation to Consummation. /... / Yet, paradoxically, ›beginnings‹, ›center‹, and ›end‹ coincide, not at ›events‹, but in the person of the Redeemer. Christ is both *alpha* and *omega*.« (Florovsky 1974, 58)

Florovsky recognizes the continuity between the Old Testament's »chosen people« and the Church⁵ until the present day. Consequently, he argues that the Bible can be understood only through the faith in Jesus Christ and through one's integration into his »Mystical Body«. (Florovsky 1974, 62–63; 1972a, 21–23; Williams 1993, 322–323; Malmenvall 2017a, 73) According to Florovsky, despite the difference in the historical origin of specific Biblical texts, the Bible as a whole is the »creation of the community of believers« – the Old Testament's Hebrew and the New Testament's Christian community alike. The Bible was created »within the community for the community« based on its experience of God. This, in turn, means that it is not possible to separate the Sacred Scripture from the community. Furthermore, in the long period between the resurrection of Christ and his second coming, the Church, as a community and institution at the same time, preserves and transmits the genuine message about the »Kingdom of God«. (Florovsky 1972a, 17–18; 25; Malmenvall 2017a, 73) History became sacred when the »Word was made flesh« and, consequently, when the later became a part of temporality. From that time on, Christ is present in his »Mystical Body«, the Church, in which salvation history continues until the second coming of the Lord. Although the history of the Church is full of unimportant events and even immoral acts, the Church faithfully preserves and promotes the »permanent structures« in its ritual, doctrine and internal organization which refer to its essence or »eternal form«. (Florovsky 1974, 54; 58; 62–63; 1972a, 19; Williams 1993, 320; 322; Malmenvall 2017a, 73–74) On this basis, the most visible compatibility between Georges Florovsky and John Pauls's *Fides et Ratio* consists in the conviction that salvation history does not end with the temporal ending of the written biblical stories or the temporal ending of the Christ's earthly mission after his resurrection, but continues in the entire subsequent life of the Church until the second coming of the Lord. Therefore, God, through the Holy Spirit, »works« in the life of the Church, Christ's »Mystical Body«, as well.

According to Florovsky, the condition for the adequate understanding of the Bible is the personal internalization of the spirit of the New Testament. This is the spirit of repentance and the »change of mind« (Greek: *μετάνοια*), a deep conversion of one's intellectual and emotional state, starting with the self-denial. The acceptance of the self-denial means the recognition of the »message of salvation« transmitted by the uninterrupted tradition of the Church and summarized in the formula of the symbol of faith. This enables the individual person not to isolate oneself in the limited convictions of its own time. In this sense, Florovsky does not regard the tradition of the Church as a relic from the past, but as a »power of the Holy Spirit« since to understand the Bible means to understand Christ. If and because Christ is not a text, but a person, present in his »Mystical Body«, the tradition of the Church is the key to the Bible and the personal relation with God. (Florovsky 1972b, 10–14; 16; 1972a, 21; Malmenvall 2017a, 74) Here, another aspect of compatibility between Florovsky and *Fides et Ratio* is present: to adequa-

⁵ When Florovsky uses the term »Church« he is referring to the East Orthodox Church which, according to him, represents the only and real Christ's Church.

tely understand the Bible and with it the unfolding of God's providence in history a personal assent and trust in God's testimony about himself, transmitted through the tradition of the Church, is required.

5. Historiographical implications of *Fides et Ratio*

Historiography as a modern secular science, as a research practice, knowledge and representation of an »object« called history – either in its traditional positivistic or postmodern, mainly culturally oriented forms – is always framed in a specific time and space, conditioned by intellectual formation, values and interests of the author (historian) and/or society in which he lives. Therefore, any type of history cannot be written in a fully »objective« or »disinterested« way. Furthermore, historiography, already from the Hellenic antiquity to the present day, does not deal with super-temporal universalities, but with specific events, persons and processes of a given space and time. Historiography is, thus, primarily interested in particularities and change and, consequently, transience of any form of government, society or ideational and religious system. (Lorenz 2015, 13–14; 18; 20; Elton 1967, 8; 20–24)

Contrary to the notions and practice of modern and postmodern secular historiography, the Christian spiritual interpretation of history as salvation history places various events, persons and processes in a broader religious context, in the context of »encounter« between God and man – and points out some more or less universal truths disclosed and confirmed in specific circumstances. In this sense, John Paul II understands history, and with-it historiography, precisely as a means to search the (Christian) truth with the help of faith and reason alike. According to *Fides et Ratio*, the complexity of history is a reality that demands (scientific) attention and judgement, without at the same time removing faith from this process. Namely, faith does not interpose itself in order to destroy the autonomy of reason but wants to made plain that the events of history cannot be profoundly grasped unless faith is professed in the God who is at work in them. »Faith /... / opens up the mind to detect the active presence of providence in the passing of events.« (Hemming and Parsons 2002, 33) Following the perspective of John Paul II, it can be said that historiography as a science makes only a part of a broader endeavor, i.e. the search for (universal) truth by recognizing God's relation to man in time.

However, postmodern (culturally oriented) historiography, the leading methodological and epistemological current in Western historiography approximately since the 1980s, is characterized by its emphasis on language or discourse as a system of culturally defined symbols constructing the image of the world and historical reality.⁶ Consequently, it is defined by an »anti-essentialist« critique of any

⁶ Here, a typical assumption of the postmodern historiography, emphasized, for example, by Kellner (1989) and Malmenvall (2017b, 685), can be noted: every synthesis and conceptualization of the past – even the one which is at first sight characterized by a deep erudition and lack of political bias – is always

»grand narrative« – including the Christian vision of man's place in the world and God's providence in history.⁷ The main task of postmodern historiography is to analyze and present the past values and worldviews, primarily by analyzing their past representations and representations of the past itself. Thus, the postmodern historiography's ambition is not to be a historiography of the (political) facts, but rather a historiography of values, symbols and language/discourse. (Lorenz 2015, 21; Luthar et al. 2016, 385; 394–396; 422; 427–428; 437– 438)⁸ On this basis, it can be concluded that, at least on a general level, the concept of salvation history is something obsolete and has nothing in common with the postmodern secular understanding and writing of history. Yet, there seems to be a possible common ground enabling dialogue between the faith-based salvation history and postmodern (culturally oriented) historiography. This common ground could be deduced from the postmodern historiography's stress on the narratives, (collective) representations of the past and historical remembrance – all these realities are always shaped or at least influenced by the mythological, religious or political presuppositions and values of a given space and time. (Lorenz 2015, 22; 24–29; Confino 2015, 37–39; Luthar et al. 2016, 369; 422; 424–425) In this sense, salvation history as a specific mechanism of interpretation of history, founded on the truths, experience and memory of the community of the Church, works as one of the most visible (»grand«) narrative with its internal logic in the entire cultural history of the mankind.

Thus, the concept of salvation history can be understood in two terms: not only as a mechanism objectifying the past and giving it a comprehensible spiritual meaning, but also as an object of postmodern (cultural) historiography itself, studying historical narratives and other representations of the past. The key question regarding salvation history and any other kind of (narrative) representation of the past in relation to the postmodern (cultural) historiography is: Who and to whom are representing the past and why are they doing so? Therefore, salvation history becomes a source of investigation for theology and secular sciences, especially humanities, in their own right fostering their mutual enrichment. This is exactly what John Paul II has in mind – according to *Fides et Ratio*, the complexity of history is a reality that demands (scientific) attention and judgement, without at the same time removing faith from this process. In this case, theology studies the spiritual meaning, specific and universal alike, of the given segments of the past in the light

a view on the past from the perspective of the historian's present. Namely, every historian seeks to control (»overpower«) the forever lost past through the construction of knowledge transmitted by the narrative form. Consequently, there is no possibility for a (fully) objective or unbiased writing of history. Yet, there exists a possibility for dialogue with other (even divergent) syntheses or conceptualizations of the past.

⁷ A comprehensive view on theology as a (religious) language or »grammar« can be already found in the pre-structuralistic thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) (Žalec 2016, 462–468).

⁸ In this context, some crucial postmodern teoreticians of history, mainly philosophers and historians, and their reference works deserve special mention: Hayden White (1928–2018) (1973), Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) (1973), Reinhart Koselleck (1923–2006) (1985), Roger Chartier (1945–) (1989), Hans Kellner (1945–) (1989), Peter Burke (1937–) (1997), Frank Ankersmit (1945–) (2001), and Quentin Skinner (1940–) (2002).

of Divine Revelation, Church tradition and religious practice, while secular (cultural) historiography studies individual authors, historical circumstances, functions and consequences of such narratives or mechanisms of interpretation. On this basis, a limited compatibility and mutual enrichment between the two very different and, in some cases, irreconcilable modes of knowledge – salvation history and postmodern (cultural) historiography – seems possible. This is exactly what John Paul II has in mind; it represents a specific application of the main principle of *Fides et Ratio* – dialogue between faith and reason respecting the richness of Church's tradition and features of the contemporary postmodern culture at the same time.

6. Conclusion

The spiritual interpretation of the local and world history as salvation history – i.e. in the light of Divine Providence and »encounter« between God and man – represents a general, almost universal feature of the entire Christian theological tradition, Eastern and Western alike, extending from the Late Antiquity up to the twentieth century. Following the interpretation mechanism of salvation history, the events, personalities and processes are presented in the light of the symbolically rich Biblical history – its message does not end with the literal temporal ending of the Biblical images, events and stories, but continues in the set of historically comparable actions denoting repetition of relations between God and man. The concept of salvation history can also be found in the encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* written by the pope John Paul II. Although not representing a central subject of discussion, in *Fides et Ratio* the concept of salvation history and the importance of the category of time is emphasized as one of the crucial features of the Christian faith's self-understanding, especially regarding the Divine Revelation and its relation to reason. From the John Paul II's perspective, history is a reality that demands (scientific) attention and judgement, without at the same time removing faith from this process. Namely, faith wants to make plain that the events of history cannot be profoundly grasped unless faith is professed in the God who is at work in them. However, not (salvation) history, but rather philosophy is, according to John Paul II, the key resource to seek and know the truth and testify about it to the (contemporary) culture. In a similar way, the author of the encyclical letter emphasizes his notion that fundamental truths or a »common body of knowledge« surpasses specific historical periods and cultural contexts.

The notions of *Fides et Ratio* concerning the »encounter« between God and man in history can be placed in the context of modern theological discourse about the importance of time for the Christian faith. In this context, a comparison between two renowned scholars from the twentieth century – the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar and the East Orthodox theologian and historian Georges Florovsky – can be considered reasonable. The most visible compatibility between Balthasar and *Fides et Ratio* consists in the assessment of the essence of salvation history, namely the closeness of God to man within history. The ma-

nifestation and work of God in time, especially through Jesus Christ («God made flesh»), is by both authors regarded as a supreme proof about the love and concern of the Creator towards his creation. On the other hand, the most visible compatibility between Georges Florovsky and *Fides et Ratio* consists in the conviction that salvation history does not end with the temporal ending of the written biblical stories or the temporal ending of the Christ's earthly mission after his resurrection but continues in the entire subsequent life of the Church until the second coming of the Lord. Therefore, God, through the Holy Spirit, «works» in the life of the Church, Christ's «Mystical Body», as well. Although the understanding of salvation history is generally very similar in all the three compared authors, it differs on the point where the assessment of the importance of salvation history as a narrative for the entire Christian theology takes place. In this regard, John Paul II gives the ultimate importance to the philosophical reasoning and «universal» truths, while the other two recognize in the historical narrative and testimony of the community of believers (Church) the most genuine form of discourse about God, about the «story» of «encounter» between God and man.

Following the perspective of John Paul II, it can be said that historiography as a science makes only a part of a broader endeavor, i.e. the search for (universal) truth by recognizing God's revelation to man in time. However, postmodern (culturally oriented) historiography is characterized by its emphasis on language or discourse as a system of culturally defined symbols constructing the image of the world and historical reality. Consequently, it is defined by a critique of any «grand narrative» – including the Christian vision of man's place in the world and God's providence in history. Yet, there seems to be a possible common ground enabling dialogue between the faith-based salvation history and postmodern (culturally oriented) historiography. In this sense, salvation history works as one of the most visible («grand») narrative with its internal logic in the entire cultural history of the mankind. Thus, the concept of salvation history can be understood in two terms: not only as a mechanism objectifying the past and giving it a comprehensible spiritual meaning, but also as an object of postmodern (cultural) historiography itself, studying historical narratives and other representations of the past. Therefore, salvation history becomes a source of investigation for theology and secular sciences, especially humanities, in their own right fostering their mutual enrichment. In this case, theology studies the spiritual meaning of the given segments of the past in the light of Divine Revelation, Church tradition and religious practice, while secular (cultural) historiography studies individual authors, historical circumstances, functions and consequences of such narratives or mechanisms of interpretation. On this basis, a limited compatibility and mutual enrichment between the two very different and, in some cases, irreconcilable modes of knowledge – salvation history and postmodern (cultural) historiography – seems possible. This is exactly what John Paul II has in mind; it represents a specific application of the main principle of *Fides et Ratio* – dialogue between faith and reason respecting the richness of Church's tradition and features of the contemporary postmodern culture at the same time.

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