

Miroslav Volf's theology of embrace in the context of CHC theology focusing on the question of eschatology leading to Christian engaged life

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Abstract

At the turn of the 19th and 20th century theology has reevaluated its basis so that eschatology regained its position of this basis. The view, which was kept only by the outsiders in the period of the Enlightenment, has become a generally accepted one. The intensity of this shift changed in a variety of ways but it cannot certainly be said that it was overcome or replaced by a new wave until now. The importance of the eschatological viewpoint in contemporary theology has affected to a great extent also the theology of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church (CHC). However, the importance of eschatology in the CHC theology does not stem from the mentioned shift only, but has its historical roots in the Czech Reformation from which the subject of eschatology is inseparable, as well as in its understanding eschatology as an impulse to practical action perceived as preparing the ways for the Lord's coming which can eventually turn to the revolutionary dimension. The continuity with the Czech Reformation was declared soon after the foundation of the new church using the slogan: „Completing the Czech religious reformation.“ It is undoubtedly clear from many historical sources that the CHC wanted to be from the very beginning an engaged church, both in the social work and in the influence on the political climate in the new republic. However, the eschatological justification of such an engagement was more difficult. According to Zdeněk Kučera the entire society and also the church lived a strong present eschatology of the newly created own state perceived in an idealized way as a liberation from 300 years of oppression. Due to it the reflection of the eschatological viewpoint did not consider the Kingdom of God to be eschatological but rather utopian in the spirit of the fading away liberal theology. It was only the second generation that due to the decline of the utopian mood gradually began to consider eschatology an important part of its theology. CHC's most prominent representative in the field of systematic theology Zdeněk Trtík accepted with certain reserves near the end of his life some principles of the theology of hope of Jürgen Moltmann. Thus, the question of eschatology was reopened by Trtík, but later on it was not sufficiently studied and discussed. In further thinking in this direction Miroslav Volf could be a good partner, both because he is a faithful student of Moltmann whose work he conceives in an updated context and at the same time he is a theologian the way of thinking of whom is very close to the biblical personalism of the CHC theology.

The importance and place of eschatology in Volf's thinking can be defined in three steps penetrating the whole system of his theology of embrace.

The first step is the eschatological claim that is imposed on us both by the promised Kingdom of God which is in contrast to the current world of sin and by the contrast between the real humanity of Jesus Christ and our sinful inferiority. These both lead us to Christian engagement. This engagement in its aim at a better world has its intention, zenith and direction in the effort to embrace, to acceptance of the other, to forgiveness and reconciliation. It has its specific goal in the endeavour for the „non-definitive reconciliation“ supported by the hope of the definitive reconciliation.

The second step of Volf's eschatological thinking solves the problem of our inability to achieve this definitive reconciliation of all people and mutual embrace of all enemies. The anxiety from our sinful inability is compensated by the eschatological hope of the final reconciliation at the end of time promised by God, which strengthens us in the effort to non-definitive reconciliation. This effort is performed in the form of a truthful life in love which means the practice of nonviolence. The requirement of truth and truthful life is certainly nothing new to the tradition of Hussite theology as may be seen in John Huss and his effort to live fully in the Truth regardless of the risk of death as well as in the requirement of the freedom of conscience subordinated only to the sovereign authority of the Spirit of Christ. However, the question of nonviolence is more complex. While for Volf the question is not whether a Christian should be a pacifist but how he/she is to be a pacifist, the tradition of the CHC did not go as far and does not identify herself with pacifism. The CHC clearly refused merging her „Hussiteness“ with the violent practice of medieval Hussitism and she consciously entered for liberal and tolerant contribution of the Hussite period. However, she did not make the crucial step towards a straightforward acceptance of the pacifism which is in the tradition of the Czech Reformation represented by Petr Chelčický, even though she openly refers herself to the heritage of the *Unitas Fratrum*. CHC's uninspired reporting to the practice of nonviolence may be due to certain inefficiency in practising the nonviolence in the real world. However, this problem is solved by Volf by a very strong emphasis on dialectic relation of claim and inability and of sin and grace.

The third step is connected with God's judgement and sword that will execute the last violent justice that we must forsake at this time. Thanks to the anticipation of the promised God's righteous judgement we are enabled to do so.

The CHC theology in the person of Trtík emphasized from these three steps primarily the first one which motivates us to fight for peace and justice in this world. Certainly, there is also present the awareness of unattainability of God's Kingdom in this world by human power. The problem is that Trtík did not have any specific vision what we are to expect in the context of God's

coming at the end of time. This corresponds well with his attitude to reject an excessive interference with God's mystery by theological speculations. On the contrary, Volf has a very specific vision – a vision of reconciliation or embrace – to use his metaphor. Volf's vision is not the Kingdom of God which will be perfect in a vague, not clearly defined way, but it is the Kingdom of God, which will be the kingdom of forgiveness, reconciliation and acceptance as well as of a very specific obliviousness. This precise image makes it quite clear that this kingdom is not of this world but that it is the Kingdom of God in which we hope and which is coming to us.

Two current tasks of the CHC theology as they ensue from this thesis are in my understanding the following: 1. To take an opinion on the practice of Christian pacifism in actual historical situation and 2. To clarify what are the eschata we are waiting for and in which we do hope.