



# The Credibility of the Church Based on Benevolence in the Light of the Works of Marian Rusecki

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**Abstract:** The problem addressed in the article is the question of the credibility of the Church based on benevolence in the light of the work of Marian Rusecki. The present issue was addressed and resolved in three stages. In the first stage – invoking the Ecclesia-forming activity of Jesus – the benevolence-based aspects related to the genesis of the Church were pointed out. In the second stage, the benevolent identity of the Ecclesia was presented, for which well-being is an essential part of its life and mission. At the final stage, the matter of recognizing the benevolence-based credibility of the Church was addressed, taking into account Rusecki’s personalistic and sign-based concept of the Church and the signs of its credibility. Elements that are helpful in recognizing the benevolence-based credibility of the Church were also identified. The Church’s benevolence – which is rooted in the life and work of Jesus – is clear in its connection to the entirety of human life. Goodness is the overriding value that man needs in life, especially in illness, suffering or misfortune. The Ecclesia is a clear and credible sign of God’s goodness when, aware of the salvific goods which it has received from Christ, it bestows them on human beings, remaining particularly sensitive to human injustice and evil, and takes the side of the disadvantaged and the suffering, providing them with concrete help, both spiritual and material.

**Keywords:** Jesus Christ, Church, goodness, Church credibility, signs of Church credibility, benevolence-based argument

Who is the Church? This question is posed nowadays mainly in the context of the crisis the Ecclesia is experiencing and is particularly concerned with the meaning of its existence, its credibility and its salvific significance for mankind. In media, the Church is often judged without considering the overall picture. Not only is its supernatural dimension disregarded, but isolated situations from the life of the Ecclesia become the basis for making false generalizations to confirm preconceived assumptions about its untrustworthiness.

In this context, an important mission for fundamental theology is the apologia of the Church, an essential part of which is to demonstrate its credibility. Although there are many conceptions of credibility in contemporary fundamental theology (e.g., semeiotic, martyrological, personalistic, axiological, transcendental), they all move away from an intellectualistic and voluntaristic understanding of the concept and emphasize the personal character.<sup>1</sup> Credibility can be defined as a quality or set

<sup>1</sup> Rusecki, *Wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa*, 87–97; Rusecki, “Struktura naukowa,” 40–44; Rusecki, “Wiarygodność,” 1328–1334. Pottmeyer, “Teologia fundamentalna,” 285–293; Seweryniak, *Antropologia*, 182–187.

of characteristics of a person, event or reality – which cannot be known directly and obviously because they constitute a certain mystery – that allow a person, event or reality to be considered credible.<sup>2</sup> Since credibility cannot be understood statically, but rather dynamically, the credibility of the Church must be constantly deepened, shown in new ways. The development of theological thought, as well as the changing socio-cultural-religious context of the world, should also be taken into account.<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that the question of the credibility of the Church is addressed in contemporary fundamental ecclesiology from a number of perspectives.<sup>4</sup>

The Lublin School of Fundamental Theology<sup>5</sup> has developed a number of signs of the credibility of the Ecclesia to help verify its validity. These signs highlight the divine-human nature of the Church and reveal essential aspects of its life and salvific work.<sup>6</sup> Their comprehensive study helps in understanding who the Church is. With the above rationale in mind, we want to look at the benevolent side of the Church in order to demonstrate its credibility. This study is inspired by the academic publications of Marian Rusecki. There are two reasons behind this choice of source base. The first is related to the fact that Rusecki has proposed a number of signs of the Church's credibility,<sup>7</sup> but has not explicitly discussed the benevolent sign, although in publications he points to the benevolent elements of Christianity and even presents an argument from the good for its credibility.<sup>8</sup> The second reason is to commemorate the person and work of the eminent professor of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin on the 10th anniversary of his death.<sup>9</sup>

The good, in the general sense, is everything that appears worthy of a person's desire, valuable and useful, and beneficial and helpful in achieving the person's intended goal.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the general understanding of the concept, we will also refer to its existential and moral meaning. In the existential aspect, the good identifies the perfection, the value of being. In the moral aspect, on the other hand, it means

2 Rusecki, "Wiarygodność," 1328; Kaucha, *Wiarygodność Kościoła*, 10.

3 Rusecki, *Wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa*, 98.

4 Rusecki, "Wiarygodność Kościoła w Polsce," 377–390; Rusecki, "Czy Kościół w Polsce jest wiarygodny?," 143–156; Seweryniak, "Sposoby uzasadniania," 27–48; Kaucha, "Wiarygodność Kościoła," 335–359; Kaucha, "Współczesne metody uzasadniania," 77–96; Kaucha, "Wiarygodność Kościoła i jej uzasadnianie," 133–145; Kaucha, *Wiarygodność Kościoła*; Kaucha, "Joseph Ratzinger's Very Critical," 141–160; Rabczyński, "Wiarygodność Kościoła," 319–334; Michalik, "Wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa," 121–134; Mastej, "Paschalna wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa," 135–151; Borto, "Josepha Ratzingera ujęcie wiarygodności Kościoła," 203–216.

5 Kaucha, "Lubelska szkoła," 11–24.

6 Rusecki – Kaucha – Pietrzak, "Znaki wiarygodności Kościoła," 1381.

7 Marian Rusecki (*Traktat o Kościele*, 287–294; "Czy Kościół w Polsce jest wiarygodny?," 148–155) presents the following signs of the Church's credibility: Peter, the apostolic college, unity, holiness, universality, apostolicity, agathological, praxeological, martyrological, and culture-forming.

8 Rusecki, "Bonatywny argument," 152–155; Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 197–208; Rusecki, "Bonatywny wymiar cudu," 65–88.

9 Kaucha, "Doctor Credibilitatis," 5–12.

10 Herbut, "Dobro," 116.

acting in accordance with principles that perfect the human person (this is an objective and not merely subjective understanding of it).<sup>11</sup> In theology, it is accepted that the absolute and supernatural Good is God. In Him, the good is equated with truth and love. It is also from God that all good originates.<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of this article is to show the credibility of the Church based on benevolence in the light of the work of Marian Rusecki. The solution to the problem thus posed will be presented in three sections. In the first, the benevolent aspects of the genesis of the Church will be presented, in the second, the benevolent identity of the Ecclesia will be shown, and in the third, the question of recognizing the benevolence-based credibility of the Church will be discussed.

## 1. Benevolent Aspects of the Church's Genesis

Among the fundamental ecclesiological issues is the question of the genesis of the Church. The theological reflections on this topic are rich and multifaceted.<sup>13</sup> Contemporary fundamental ecclesiology presents the question of the founding of the Church integrally, taking the position that Jesus Christ is the Founder of the Ecclesia, since he willed to found it and indeed did so. The *Magisterium Ecclesiae* teaches that the Church, which has its origin in the eternal design of the Trinity, was fore-ordained and prepared in the history of the people of Israel, founded by Jesus Christ and sent to the world on the day of Pentecost<sup>14</sup>.

The Ecclesia is the fruit of the whole life of Jesus. Presenting the origins of the Church in close connection with the life of Jesus inspires an emphasis on its benevolent character. Rusecki states: "Jesus' benevolent activity is evidenced by his entire life, and thus by his teaching (the preaching of the word of God is also a vehicle for supernatural goods), his passion, his death and his resurrection (these events restore to humanity the God-given dignity, freeing it from sin and eternal death, restoring faith and hope for ultimate fulfilment in God), since they bring with them goods unimaginably new to man."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Kowalczyk, "Dobro," 1374–1375; Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 200.

<sup>12</sup> Rusecki, "Bonatywny argument," 152.

<sup>13</sup> Bartnik, *Kościół Jezusa Chrystusa*, 58–99; Nagy, *Chrystus w Kościele*, 17–90; Nagy, *Ty jesteś Piotr*, 27–68; Rusecki, *Wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa*, 238–242; Rusecki, "Boska geneza Kościoła," 72–78; Rusecki, *Traktat o Kościele*, 93–108; Seweryniak, *Święty Kościół powszedni*, 23–42; Napiórkowski, "Geneza, natura," 71–105; Napiórkowski, "Powstawanie Kościoła," 57–73.

<sup>14</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, no. 2; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 758–759; Rusecki, *Traktat o Kościele*, 131–144; Rusecki, "Rola Ducha Świętego w Kościele," 5–19.

<sup>15</sup> Rusecki, "Bonatywny argument," 154.

Jesus Christ most fully reveals the benevolence of God himself. St. Peter, in his Paschal catechism – delivered after Jesus' resurrection – makes an unequivocal summary of his life and activity: "He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him" (Acts 10:38).<sup>16</sup>

As Rusecki notes, the Incarnate Son of God is "the author and giver of good."<sup>17</sup> From the very beginning of his public ministry, he proclaims the Good News of the coming of the messianic times announced by God: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near" (Mark 1:15).<sup>18</sup> The advent of the kingdom of God has a benevolent dimension, as it involves God's salvific actions for the good of mankind. The professor from Lublin – referring to Origen – highlights the truth that the kingdom of God not only began with the coming of Jesus, but that he himself is God's kingdom, which is why he calls him *Autobasileia*.<sup>19</sup> Christ is therefore the personal embodiment of the Good God.

Jesus, proclaiming the Good News, gathers around him a community of listeners, disciples, apostles. The fruit of his teaching is the community of faith, which is the pre-paschal seed of the Ecclesia.<sup>20</sup> The words by which the Son reveals the Father who is in heaven and cares for all people play an important role in its origin: "since he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt 5:45). The words of the Teacher of Nazareth constitute a call to faith, proclaim the love of God and serve to create an ecclesial community. Christ's message is a word full of power and grace and is therefore an effective call to faith for man, the fruit of which is a life of love.<sup>21</sup>

Jesus' attitude towards people is conducive to the growth of the Ecclesia. His pro-existential involvement is evident throughout his life and is expressed in the fact that he associates himself with the poor, the hungry, the persecuted, the sick, the suffering and the abandoned.<sup>22</sup> This is highlighted by Jesus in his speech about the last judgment, particularly in the following words: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you

16 All biblical texts after New English Translation (NET).

17 Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 203.

18 Rusecki, *Traktat o Kościele*, 33.

19 Rusecki, *Cud w chrześcijaństwie*, 435.

20 Rusecki, *Traktat o Kościele*, 101.

21 Mastej, "Eklezjotwórczy wymiar miłości," 109.

22 Rusecki (*Traktat o Objawieniu*, 433) explains: "The crowds followed Jesus not only because of the originality of his teaching, but also because of his attitude towards people, namely a pro-existential attitude. One can even speak of the ecclesial pro-existence of Jesus. It must be understood in a broad sense – Jesus comes to the aid of people in their various existential needs, feeds the hungry, heals the sick, forgives sins, and restores to community people who have been excluded from it. He is merciful and gracious towards the weak and sinners, forgiving them and bringing them into the kingdom of God, he is a friend of the poor, the sick, the suffering and the wronged, but he is also harsh towards the hypocrites, the Pharisees, the unjust and the wrong-doers of fellow human beings, the proponents of pure religious formalism. Jesus' attitude towards people and the world is also community-forming, or ecclesia-forming."

invited me in, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matt 25:35–36). The Teacher from Nazareth shows compassion for people in need, as the Gospels show: “As Jesus came ashore he saw the large crowd and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he taught them many things” (Mark 6:34); “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt 9:36); “As he got out he saw the large crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Matt 14:14); Jesus says to the disciples: “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have already been here with me three days, and they have nothing to eat” (Mark 8:2).

Jesus’ attitude to man is marked by concern, kindness, graciousness, mercy. He brings comfort, peace, forgiveness and love. This is particularly evident in relation to those on the margins of socio-religious life, as well as women and children.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, He is uncompromising towards hypocrites, Pharisees, wrong-doers, proponents of pure formalism – He admonishes them with love. He places kindness toward sinful man and those in need of help above Old Testament sacrifices (see Matt 9:13; 12:7). A better understanding of the boundless love of the Incarnate Son of God for man is conveyed by the image of the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep (see John 10:7–18). This attitude of the Master of Nazareth is an expression of His care for each person and inspires people to trust and believe in Him, and thus gives rise to and defines the nature of the new community.

The miracles of Jesus serve to build the ecclesial community. They reveal the attitude of the Son of God towards people expecting specific help from Him.<sup>24</sup> Jesus’ miracles are “vehicles” of good and cause both natural and supernatural good. Rusecki unequivocally states: “Jesus in good deeds works for the natural and supernatural good of man, which can be seen most clearly in His thaumaturgical activity.”<sup>25</sup>

The miracles of Jesus are rooted in the daily existence of man, who considers life and health as the highest good in earthly life, and therefore cares for them, and in case of danger wants to save them at all costs. Jesus’ miracles bring concrete good to man. Rusecki explains:

Miraculous healings are the facts of the transition from a state of illness to health, it is the restoration of it in an instant by the power of the word of Jesus [...]. Miracles – rescues mean pulling a person out of life-threatening dangers, such as quieting a storm on a lake. Miracles – gifts are the coming of unexpected help to a person, bestowing certain gifts, resolving a difficult situation, such as the multiplication of bread. Exorcism is the liberation

<sup>23</sup> Rusecki, *Wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa*, 240; Rusecki, “Argumentacja prakseologiczna,” 123; Mastej, *Od objawienia do wiary*, 187; Seweryniak, *Świadectwo i sens*, 236–241.

<sup>24</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o Kościele*, 34.

<sup>25</sup> Rusecki, “Bonatywny argument,” 153.

of a person from the domination of demons. Resurrections are the restoration of life to those who have lost it.<sup>26</sup>

The natural goods resulting from the miracle become discernible by comparing the final situation with the initial state. However, it must be added that natural goods, while important, are not the essence of a miracle. The miracles performed by Jesus are not just about highlighting his humanitarian attitude, but about seeing their supernatural value, i.e. God's saving action. Rusecki emphasizes that "Jesus' good deeds resemble the works of God, especially the work of creation, which God himself saw as good."<sup>27</sup> The mission of the Incarnate Son of God is to repair and renew the order of creation, which was violated by sin. In miracles, Jesus manifests God's power and restores the good that man has lost through sin, which is why His thaumaturgical activity is seen by the witnesses as doing good: "People were completely astounded and said, 'He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak'" (Mark 7:37).

Through miraculous events, God invites man to enter into a personal dialogue with Him. Rusecki stresses that a miracle is not just about surprise or amazement, but about a personal encounter between God and man, accompanied by divine grace.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the miracle becomes an interpersonal event – there is an encounter between God and man and the act of bestowing a gift by God.<sup>29</sup> A miracle is a special manifestation of God's presence in history, which must be distinguished from His natural and creative presence.<sup>30</sup> Through a miracle, God manifests His personal existence and presence, reveals His willingness to enter into dialogue with man. Through miraculous acts, God realizes His economy of revelation and salvation, and at the same time becomes believable to man.<sup>31</sup>

Jesus' care for people has two fundamental dimensions that mutually affect and complement each other. On the one hand, it involves providing earthly assistance to people in need, and on the other hand, it concerns spiritual goods. In miracles, then, one should see Jesus' concern for the totality of man; both in the temporal and supernatural dimensions. This is made evident, for example, in the healing of the paralytic, where Jesus forgives his sins and restores his ability to move on his own.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the miraculous multiplication of bread cannot be simply narrowed to the Master of Nazareth's satisfying the physical hunger of the people who listened to Him. The meaning of this event must be seen in conjunction with the speech in

<sup>26</sup> Rusecki, "Bonatywny wymiar cudu," 74.

<sup>27</sup> Rusecki, "Bonatywny wymiar cudu," 75.

<sup>28</sup> Anderwald, "Znakowe ujęcie cudu," 105–108.

<sup>29</sup> Rusecki, "Bonatywny wymiar cudu," 71–88.

<sup>30</sup> Rusecki, *Funkcje cudu*, 50–57.

<sup>31</sup> Mastej, "Patrystyczne podstawy," 266–267.

<sup>32</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o Objawieniu*, 273–274.

which He reveals the following: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51). The miraculous event foreshadows further, even more wonderful divine action.

Jesus’ benevolent acts reveal who He is and authenticate His divine dignity and messianic mission. By doing good, Jesus is close to people, guarantees to help those in need and fills their hearts with well-founded hope. Thus, Jesus’ words and actions are signs of the realization of God’s plan of salvation; they fully realize the coming of the messianic times and reveal the abundance of goods coming from God.<sup>33</sup>

Paschal events were also important for ecclesio-genesis. At the Last Supper, Jesus institutes the Eucharist and establishes the New Covenant, which becomes the basis for the foundation of the new people of God. By virtue of this covenant, man has become a participant in a special good: human sins are taken away, and mankind is reunited with God (Rom 11:26–27). The sacrifice that was sacramentally offered by the Son of God at the Last Supper is one with the sacrifice offered on the cross and represents the pinnacle of love, for “No one has greater love than this – that one lays down his life for his friends” (John 15:13; cf. 1 John 3:16). Jesus, obedient to the Father, accepted the humiliation of the cross and death, giving them the salvific meaning of giving himself up out of love “for many.”<sup>34</sup>

The Resurrection and Pentecost are also benevolent Ecclesia-forming events. For the resurrection of Jesus Christ shows the supernatural character of God’s love, which is more powerful than death. And consequently, the goods coming from Jesus, Rusecki stresses, are eschatological in nature.<sup>35</sup> This is made evident by the resurrection, which is an extraordinary act of God’s omnipotence and goodness by which Jesus passed from death to a new, supernatural life in God’s glory.<sup>36</sup> Christ’s resurrection is the basis for a well-founded belief in the universal resurrection and participation in eternal life, which is the greatest good that man receives from God.<sup>37</sup> The fulfillment of the Paschal events is the day of Pentecost, when the ecclesial community receives the gift of the promised Comforter, the Spirit of truth and love. Henceforth, the Paraclete is constantly present in the life of the Church; He assists the ecclesial community on the way to achieving the totality of salvific goods.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Rusecki, “Bonatywny wymiar cudu,” 79–81; Rusecki, *Funkcje cudu*, 151–202; Rusecki, *Cud w chrześcijaństwie*, 408–426.

<sup>34</sup> Rusecki, “Krzyż w wydarzeniach paschalnych,” 520–523; Rusecki, “Eklezjotwórczy charakter Eucharystii,” 361–365; Dola, *Teologia misteriów życia Jezusa*, 239–242.

<sup>35</sup> Rusecki, “Bonatywny wymiar cudu,” 84–87.

<sup>36</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o cudzie*, 371–380; Rusecki, “Czy zmartwychwstanie jest cudem?,” 231–232; Rusecki – Mastej, “Zmartwychwstanie,” 1367.

<sup>37</sup> Rusecki, *Pan zmartwychwstał*, 210.

<sup>38</sup> Rusecki, “Rola Ducha Świętego w Kościele,” 5–19.



## 2. The Benevolence-based Identity of the Ecclesia

The Church was not only called into existence by Christ, but was also endowed by Him with gifts. The fundamental good of the Church is Christ himself. Thus, the Church of Christ is good because God is in it. The Ecclesia is also confident of the existence in it of supernatural goods.<sup>39</sup> These gifts come from God and are at the same time a mission for the Ecclesia. It is about the presence of good in the Church in the ontological sense, which involves the presence in it of God and the salvific goods received from Him. The Church is also continually being born and actualized in history, thus growing in the dimension of benevolence through the actualization of good and the good done by believers.<sup>40</sup> Thus, we can speak of benevolence as a note of the Church, that is, an essential attribute of the Church that forms part of its identity.

The Church is the Tradent of the goods it received from Christ. The life of the Church is a mission of preaching and doing good. It is part of the essence of the Church's life to "distribute" the goods it has received from the Lord. The Church, in which Christ is permanently present, proclaims the Gospel, heals, gives hope, lifts from sin and strengthens the weak. The Church's mission is carried out on the supernatural and temporal levels. These two dimensions in the daily life of the Ecclesia intertwine and complement each other.<sup>41</sup> Rusecki characterizes the dimension of the Church's supernatural activity as follows: "The Church, in its activity assigned to it by the Founder, imparts supernatural goods, proclaims the Gospel, that is, awakens faith and deepens it, administers the Holy Sacraments, unites with God, imparts grace for the deification of man, and shows the meaning of life. In the spiritual and supernatural order, these are essential goods for the religious and salvific life of man."<sup>42</sup>

The benevolent mission of the Church includes preaching. In its teaching, the Church – referring to Revelation – points out that the highest and most perfect good is God Himself, who is the Absolute Good and the source of all good.<sup>43</sup> The good is not only a personal attribute of God, it is part of His essence. God is Good in the ontic sense. God's goodness is expressed in the work of creation, in His providential watch over the world and in His presence in the history of the Chosen People.

Rusecki stresses that the Christian understanding of the good does not grow out of philosophical understanding, which has been formed over the centuries and is a product of human reason, instead, the Christian understanding of the good is linked to God's revelation. What is good – is revealed to us by God, who is Himself

<sup>39</sup> Rusecki, "Bonatywny argument," 152.

<sup>40</sup> Rusecki, "Współczesna eklezjogeneza," 226–234; Rusecki, "Urzeczywistnianie się Kościoła dziś," 5–14.

<sup>41</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o Kościele*, 305–306.

<sup>42</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 205; Rusecki, "Bonatywny argument," 154.

<sup>43</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 201; Nadbrzeżny, "Kościół jako sakrament," 45.



the supreme Good. God's revelation shows us what good is and what is right and wrong.<sup>44</sup> Although the Christian understanding of the good specifies its origin from God, it should not be contrasted with the philosophical understanding (especially when it comes to classical philosophy), since Revelation does not stand in opposition to man's rational search, but is its fulfillment. Thus, the human search for goodness found fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

In the Church's preaching, the truth that God is the source of all good resounds clearly. God, in creating the world and man, "saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (Gen 1:31). Thus, the work of creation, which is good, becomes an epiphany of God.<sup>45</sup> In the created world, man can recognize how good the One who created everything is. God's goodness is especially revealed in man, who is the crown of creation. The goodness of the Creator is made apparent in calling man into existence by a distinct act; he was created in the image and likeness of God.<sup>46</sup> The personal existence of man, the ability to enter into dialogue with God, as well as conscience and the ability to use speech, are testimony to the goodness of God. The above reasons lead Rusecki to describe man as a theophane of God.<sup>47</sup>

In the biblical understanding, the good is a value that man desires. Man wants to possess and keep what is good for him – he does not want to lose it, e.g., life, health. However, he is aware that the Giver of true good and the guarantor of its permanence can only be God. True and lasting good comes from God, and He is the supreme good. This is shown in the history of salvation, where God is constantly acting for the good of man. This action applies to securing temporal goods such as health, freedom, prosperity, as well as supernatural goods such as the presence and proximity of God. God not only shows man what is good for him, but also helps him achieve and enjoy this good. Israel continuously experiences the goodness of God. "The Israelites, having experienced, among other things, evil during the Egyptian captivity, discovered good in their Deliverer, Yahweh. God saves them from death (Exod 3:7ff.), leads them into the Promised Land, a land 'flowing with milk and honey,' 'over which the eye of Yahweh watches constantly,' in which the Israelites find their happiness."<sup>48</sup> Rusecki highlights the fact that "The truth about God's goodness is one of the most important in Old Testament revelation. Experiencing the goodness of God through His care, concern, saving, liberating was an important rationale in accepting the revelation manifested in the word and deeds of God's goodness."<sup>49</sup> Undoubtedly, Jesus

<sup>44</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 369.

<sup>45</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 201–202; Rusecki, *Istota i geneza religii*, 204–231; Rusecki, *Traktat o religii*, 243–267.

<sup>46</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o Objawieniu*, 278; Rusecki, *Traktat o Kościele*, 82–86.

<sup>47</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o religii*, 254–260.

<sup>48</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 202.

<sup>49</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 202; Arndt, "Stworzony 'dobry' świat," 45–57.

Christ and the benevolent dimension of His life (as mentioned in the first section) always remain at the center of the Church's preaching.

An important part of the Church's mission is sanctification, which is carried out especially through the celebration of the liturgy and sacraments. Both liturgy and sacramental life are thoroughly benevolent in nature, as they bring God's presence to life and actualize goods that come from Him. Rusecki points out the benevolent nature of liturgy, sacramental life and prayer. It emphasizes the presence of God in them and the fact that through them He allows man to participate in saving goods.<sup>50</sup>

The professor from Lublin also shows areas of the Church's earthly activity that are permeated by supernatural reality: "In the earthly life, the Church builds and promotes Christian culture, bringing into it the values typical of the religion, promotes charitable works, often takes care of the lonely, the sick (hospices), the disabled. These works, stemming from motives of faith and love, are among the good actions of the Church and give it credibility as the Church of Jesus Christ."<sup>51</sup>

The defining characteristic of the ecclesial community is love of God and neighbor: "by this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).<sup>52</sup> Christian love should be manifested in personal, family, marital, neighborhood, professional, parish, and national life. Goodness full of sensitivity, kindness, sacrifice, devotion, should be directed to all people, including enemies. Having its source in God, selfless love is a characteristic that distinguishes the ecclesial community from other human communities. In the totality of daily life, concrete acts of goodness can be seen in juxtaposition with lack of love, hatred, indifference or sin.

Good plays an important role in building the Church vertically and horizontally. In the vertical dimension – God's love for man continually sanctifies and renews the ecclesial community; man's love for God contributes to the growth and benevolent fulfillment of the Ecclesia. In the horizontal dimension – mutual kindness between people, as well as the attitude of Christians towards the world, contributes to the growth of a civilization of love – to imbue the affairs of this world with God's love. Thus, it is not just a matter of humanitarian, altruistic goodness, but an existential, lifelong attitude of goodness and service, stemming from faith in Jesus Christ.

Rusecki shares St. John Paul II's conviction that "the man is the way for the Church."<sup>53</sup> The professor highlights the fact that for almost two thousand years the Church has served and continues to serve man; it is with him in the daily life, it does not abandon him, but accompanies him every day, especially in situations of fear, danger and

50 Rusecki – Mastej, "Eklezjotwórczy wymiar modlitwy," 114–120.

51 Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 205.

52 Rusecki, "Miłość jako motyw," 229–247; Drączkowski, *Miłość syntezą chrześcijaństwa*; Balthasar, *Glaubhaft*; Kaucha, *Miłość za miłość*; Kaucha, "Agapetologiczny argument," 184–192; Mastej, "Permanentna eklezjogeneza," 123–125.

53 John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, no. 14.

anxiety. The Church's constant concern for man is evident on many levels. In addition to the areas already mentioned above, the professor recognizes the contribution of the Ecclesia to spiritual and material culture. The Church, concerned with the welfare of the human person, has contributed to the development of education and science, which is evident in literature, art, architecture, music and film.<sup>54</sup>

### 3. Recognition of the Benevolence-based Credibility of the Church

The considerations carried out allow us to conclude that goodness is connected with the genesis of the Church, belongs to its identity, and thus constitutes its vital note.<sup>55</sup> In presenting the issue of recognizing the benevolence-based credibility of the Ecclesia, we will refer to Rusecki's preferred personalistic and sign-based understanding of the Church.<sup>56</sup> The concept he proposed takes into account the personal nature of the Church and its realization of signs in history. Recognizing the credibility of the Ecclesia involves noticing and analyzing in detail the signs of its presence in the world.<sup>57</sup>

The signs of the Church's credibility are analogous to the Church itself: visible and invisible, natural and supernatural, historical and suprahistorical.<sup>58</sup> The correct and complete reading of them involves discerning the visible element and recognizing its supernatural meaning and significance. While the first element is empirical and subject to the senses and reason, the second (given meaning, significance) refers to Revelation. Fully recognizing the signs of the Church's credibility requires both a correct perception of the reality around us, rational knowledge, as well as faith, which helps to accept the supernatural.<sup>59</sup>

In recognizing the benevolence sign of the Church's credibility, reason plays a leading role. However, the whole human person participates in the full reading of the sign, and its definitive clarification is done by faith (*fides et ratio*). Recognition,

<sup>54</sup> Rusecki, *Dziejowe znaczenie chrześcijaństwa*, 64–126; Rusecki, *Fenomen chrześcijaństwa*, 131–197; Rusecki, *Traktat o Kościele*, 347–402.

<sup>55</sup> Rusecki ("Czy Kościół w Polsce jest wiarygodny," 147–148) distinguishes the four basic notes of the Church, which are listed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and defines the Church of Christ as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic – and are traditionally referred to as marks – other qualities that testify to its credibility are called signs. Therefore, in the remainder of this article, we will generally use the term "benevolence sign."

<sup>56</sup> Bartnik, "Metoda znakowo-personalistyczna," 69–73; Dola, "Metody teologicznofundamentalne," 25–39; Dola, "Personalistyczna koncepcja," 59–67; Prawda, *Personalistyczno-znakowa chrystologia*, 170–218.

<sup>57</sup> Kaucha, "Wiarygodność Kościoła i jej uzasadnienie," 133–146; Krzyszowski, "*Mysterium Ecclesiae*," 123–131.

<sup>58</sup> Rusecki, "Czy Kościół w Polsce jest wiarygodny?," 147–148.

<sup>59</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o Kościele*, 286.

through intellectual reasoning, involves trying to explain the nature and genesis of the good that exists in the Church. Seeing the external manifestations of goodness, such as selfless help to those in need, forgiveness, and sacrificial and selfless dedication to others, one must find their ultimate source. The correct reading of the benevolence sign can also be helpful in comparing the Church with other communities. While such a juxtaposition significantly highlights only the natural plane, it can help to see the uniqueness of Christian kindness. Its originality and uniqueness are evident both in the frequency of good deeds and in the selflessness of those who perform them.<sup>60</sup>

Reading the benevolence sign involves answering the question: what kind of goods exist in the Church? Undoubtedly, both natural and supernatural goods are involved. The ecclesia, in serving man, does not stop at the purely natural plane but proclaims and realizes supernatural goods.<sup>61</sup> The goodness present in the Church involves concern for the whole person and concerns both his physical and spiritual spheres. Therefore, it is legitimate to put it in personalistic and sign terms since it has a personal character and its definitive explanation demands reference to God. The benevolence-based credibility of the Ecclesia is evident in the fact that it cares for people not only by ensuring that they have decent material conditions for their daily life and health but also provides them with spiritual care, especially sacramental care.

The following are helpful in recognizing the credibility of the Church based on benevolence:

- The Church's faith in God, who in his Son Jesus Christ reveals himself as the Good Father. The Church believes not only in the existence of God but also in His living and personal presence and salvific action for the good of man, the completeness of which was accomplished in Jesus Christ.
- Expressed in the teaching and confirmed in the life of the Ecclesia, the conviction that Christ is the fundamental good of the Church. A credible Church is therefore transparent as to Christ and does not obscure Him with itself. Unfortunately, today the Church in Poland is too preoccupied with itself and its petty affairs and forgets about the Lord, who is its greatest asset.
- The Church's self-awareness that it has received salvific goods from Christ and the mission to spread them in the world. This conviction is expressed in teaching and made evident in the daily life of the Ecclesia. Ecclesial goods are universal (catholic) – they apply to all people: all places and times. Benevolence-related aspects should constantly be present in homiletic and catechetical preaching, and the liturgy and sacraments should be the actual realization of the goods that God gives to man on the path of salvation.

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<sup>60</sup> Mastej, "Miłosierdzie w funkcji eklezjotwórczej," 34–35.

<sup>61</sup> Rusecki, "Miłość jako motyw," 245.

- The Church’s clear opposition to moral relativism.<sup>62</sup> The Church emphatically rejects moral relativism, for which there is essentially no difference between good and evil; there is no objective and unambiguous definition of what is good and what is evil. In the modern world, in which the relativization of good and the blurring of the distinction between good and evil are taking place, the test of the Church’s credibility becomes its fidelity to the truth revealed in Christ and its clear and unambiguous indication to man of what is good and what is evil.
- Verification of goodness in light of truth. Goodness is inseparable from the truth, which safeguards it from distortion. Rusecki describes this relationship as follows: “If the relationship between good and truth is severed, then the danger of subjectivism and a selective grasp and understanding of the good becomes apparent. In light of Revelation, the problem is decidedly different. Jesus Christ constantly links good and truth, when only truth sets safe boundaries for the Christian view of good, definitely different from its modern, utilitarian understanding.”<sup>63</sup> In Christianity, good is objectified and defined “by truth, the Supreme, Revealed Truth, which is God (Christianity preaches the primacy of truth over good).”<sup>64</sup>
- The uniqueness of the Christian concept of goodness. Since goodness is a value in the religious sense but also in the philosophical and anthropological significance, therefore benevolence-based credibility has a multifaceted meaning. The Christian understanding of goodness is clearly linked to God’s Revelation: goodness comes from God, and it is He who reveals what it is in no uncertain terms. In the case of classical philosophy and anthropology, as well as theology, the rational reflection on goodness is mutually complementary – man is sensitive to goodness, wants to experience it from others, has an inner need to show goodness to others, and finds the source of goodness in God.<sup>65</sup>
- Preaching the primacy of spiritual over temporal goods. Although goodness in the Christian view concerns the whole person – both the spiritual and corporeal dimensions – the Ecclesia proclaims the primacy of spiritual values over material ones. Thus, the credibility of the Church is undermined by its lack of holistic concern for humankind, as well as the misplaced priority of spiritual values over temporal ones. Neglecting the provision of good in the spiritual dimension, and focusing only on material aid, puts the Church’s charitable activities on the same plane as those of strictly humanitarian organizations.
- Highlighting the benevolence-based nature of liturgy, sacraments, and prayer. It is worth noting the need to make the faithful aware of the value of supernatural

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<sup>62</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 199.

<sup>63</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 199–200.

<sup>64</sup> Rusecki, “Bonatywny argument,” 154; cf. Kaucha, *Cóż to jest prawda?*, 15–66.

<sup>65</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 198.

gifts, which are the fruit of participation in the liturgy, sacraments, or prayer, since sometimes they focus only on temporal goods, for example, the object of prayer intentions are earthly goods (health, passing an exam, etc.). While trust in the power and goodness of God should be appreciated, the credibility of the Ecclesia is enhanced when believers place supernatural values above temporal ones.

- The outlook on life of the faithful concerning both good and evil, which is its opposite. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, instructs: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21). The Christian life is guided by the conviction that evil does not lead to true victory. By heading down the path of retaliation, the Christian will not succeed in defeating evil but will be defeated by evil. True victory is achieved by overcoming evil with good. Thus, the Christian attitude of forgiveness and remitting the wrong-doers speaks to the credibility of the Church.
- A personal testimony. The truthfulness and uniqueness of the Church are evidenced by the outlook on life – personal testimony – of believers in Christ. Acts of kindness speak more powerfully than mere words. The testimony becomes clear and credible, especially in the context of indifference and violence. Good becomes powerfully apparent when juxtaposed with evil, to which it remains in opposition. The realization of good in life requires the believer’s effort and cooperation with God’s grace; sometimes, it is also combined with heroism, when for the sake of the good of another person, you have to endanger or sacrifice your own life.<sup>66</sup> A telling example is the Poles who risked their lives to save Jews during the German occupation. The testimony of the family of Wiktoria and Józef Ulm from Markowa, executed by the Germans together with their children, including an unborn one, for helping a Jewish family, is beautiful.
- Selflessness in doing good. The credibility of the Church increases if the good deeds of believers do not involve gaining benefits. Words and deeds that are selfless appeal to modern man. Christian kindness expressed in prayer, the good word or acts of love, has its source in the goodness of God himself. Therefore, the manifestations of goodness in the life of a Christian point to God, who is the source of all goodness.

The elements indicated above help to recognize the benevolence-based credibility of the Church. Their detailed presentation and highlighting are important in demonstrating its credibility. Their careful analysis can also inspire the identification of new ones. Recognizing the credibility of the Church requires sensitivity and openness to values, especially goodness and love. The value of the benevolence sign is related to the fact that there is a demand for and pursuit of goodness in man.

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<sup>66</sup> Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności*, 197; Mastej, “Pneumatologiczna wiarygodność Kościoła,” 236–237.

According to Rusecki, “a person who has experienced goodness knows how to enjoy and share it (*bonum est diffusivum*).”<sup>67</sup>

Finally, we still need to ask an important question: is the Church today a “place” where people can experience the goodness of God? The answer is not at all easy because, on the one hand, we can see the immensity of the good done in the Church and thanks to the Church (although it is often unnoticed and unappreciated), and on the other hand, evil and sin are present in the Church; among other things, the sins and weaknesses of people of the Church are evident (for example, the wounds inflicted on children by the clergy still hurt). We must never forget these wounds and do everything possible to heal them.

We can see a great tension that appears with the statement: “The Church is good.” In attempting to explain this tension, it is necessary to refer to the sign concept of understanding the Church, which highlights its visible and invisible elements. The common perception is that the human element present in the Church overshadows the supernatural reality present in it. It is also worth remembering that the Church is still on its path to holiness; thus, it is not yet perfect, but it is holy by the power of Christ living in it and the Holy Spirit working in it and by the holiness of holy people. Similarly, we can say that the Church, although not perfect, is good due to the goodness of God and the people who live in it (both in heaven and on earth).

The Holy Church of sinful people is credible when it recognizes evil and responds firmly and accordingly. Unfortunately, downplaying evil and concealing or “sweeping under the rug” complex issues of the Church significantly weakens its credibility and sometimes makes it even unreliable in the eyes of the world, which makes it much more difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to say the words: “The Church is good.” Benevolence should therefore be viewed even more explicitly as a task that the Lord sets before the believers who are His Church again and again. It is also worth adding that the recognition of the benevolence sign should be done by accounting for other signs of the Church’s credibility, especially the signs of holiness, praxeology, martyrdom, agapetology, veritability, or option for the poor.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to show the benevolence-based credibility of the Church in the light of the works of Marian Rusecki. The problem addressed was elaborated and resolved in three stages. In the first stage – invoking the Ecclesia-forming activity of Jesus – the benevolence-based aspects related to the genesis of the Church were pointed out. In the second stage, the benevolent identity of the Ecclesia was

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<sup>67</sup> Rusecki, “Bonatywny argument,” 155.



presented, for which well-being is an essential part of its life and mission. The final stage addressed the issue of identifying the Church's credibility based on benevolence, taking into account Rusecki's preferred personalistic and sign-based understanding of the Church and the signs of its credibility. Elements that can be helpful in recognizing the benevolence-based credibility of the Church were also identified. In reading the signs of the Ecclesia's credibility, it is necessary to simultaneously engage reason and faith (*fides et ratio*).

The Church's benevolence – which is rooted in the life and work of Jesus – is clear in its connection to the entirety of human life. Goodness is the overriding value that man needs in life, especially in illness, suffering or misfortune. The Ecclesia is a clear and credible sign of God's goodness, when aware of the salvific goods which it has received from Christ, it bestows them on human beings, remaining particularly sensitive to human injustice and evil, and takes the side of the disadvantaged and the suffering, providing them with concrete help, both spiritual and material.

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