

KRZYSZTOF LEŚNIEWSKI  
Lublin

## THE ORTHODOX IDEA OF MISSION TO THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

### I. THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

What is the human situation today? Firstly, one can notice that the people on earth now live in an interconnected and interdependent world system, which has never before existed. The factors of this global situations are economics, politics, communications, transportation, military deployment and education. Also medical technology and healing can be shared instantly. Even ecological concerns teach us we are a common family. Increasingly persons of different, often conflictive nations, races and cultures are realizing that they share a single atmosphere the same small earth. We live under the shadow of the same bomb which gives us the means of destroying civilization and the human life. Apart from this global consciousness there is the second reality which is shaping our new history – pluralism. It has many forms – religious, cultural or ideological and can be described as a situation „in which various religions, philosophies and ideological conceptions live side by side and in which none of them hold a privileged status”<sup>1</sup>

Pluralism has long been present in human history, but in the end of twentieth century it was reached new heights of sensivity and acceptance. People have developed a sense of pride in their own culture, ethnicity or nation. In this ascendancy of pluralism the value of one’s history is claimed positively and publicly. Diversity is accepted as creative and constructive for human relations. But pluralism has increasingly become a critical issue in the quest for human community. Therefore pluralism is an existential matter. It has the

---

<sup>1</sup> W. A. Visser’t Hoft, *Pluralism – Temptation or Opportunity*, „The Ecumenical Review”, 2(1966), p. 129.

potential for conflict and new alienations, or for convergence and new bridges of understanding. Awareness of the contemporary world situation is the basis for the question of active presence of Christians in mission to call this world, to accept God's destiny. So, what is the Christian contribution in the quest for human community in pluralistic situations?

Christian mission in such a dramatically pluralistic society brings two implications to the fore. First, that the Church must accept more intentionally the pluralism in its own life as permanent positive attribute. The history of Christianity is rich with diversities in theology, liturgy, spirituality, many of which until recent years suffered under the presumed dominance of one tradition. Y. Congar considers the acceptance of pluralism as the intrinsic value of unity<sup>2</sup> Second, mission in the new pluralism gives more importance to the partnership between Christians. In ecumenism the Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants need the others. For the Church the destiny of earth and the survival of the human family are very important theological issues. When Christians and other people of moral conscience are feeding and caring for the poor and destitute, trying to maintain health and a meaningful quality of life, striving for peace, proclaiming Christ's reconciling love among the divided Churches, they are participating in the fulfilment of spiritual and moral goals which are related to God's creation and redemption.

## II. THE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY: OUR COMMON HISTORY AS CHRISTIANS

M. Wiles speaking of the relevance of traditions of the earthly Church for our time points out that the essence of historical consciousness in our day is that we are all, in one degree or another, historical relativists. That means, we recognize the need to assess all statements in relation to the particular situations of the time. The present cannot be properly understood without reference to the past. The Church cannot ignore any aspects of its past: theology must be concerned with the Church history as a whole<sup>3</sup>

Wiles raises the question of identity. „By what criteria are we to judge if we stand in a true succession to the Church of earlier generations?”<sup>4</sup> In other

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Y. Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, Connecticut 1985, pp. 40-43.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Wiles, *Working Papers in Doctrine*, London 1976, pp. 93-99.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

words: what is the essence of our Christian Tradition? According to him, the test of identity cannot be located in any specific isolatable elements of Christian belief or practice. We cannot say in advance of any particular tenet that it is and always be a test of the true Church. Continuity can be expressed not only by the continued presence of specific elements. It can also be expressed by a kind of family likeness which may persist even when there is a change in respect of each individual item involved. It is surely identity of this kind for which we should look in the life of the Church.

It will be difficult to know when we have it and impossible to be certain. But is it not the kind of continuity and identity that is appropriate to the realm of the Spirit?<sup>5</sup>

At a time when ecumenical discussion on continuity and tradition is based on common belief and ecclesiastical structures, it is interesting to hear a different point of view but for all historical Churches it seems to be impossible to accepted it.

The early Church understood the nature of the universality of the Gospel in its confrontation and dialogue with Greco-Roman culture. It was a discovery for the early Church as it engaged in mission.

The Jews had a negative attitude to all that was pagan, as they believed that God had elected them to be exclusive nation uncorrupted by heathen influences. It was obvious that the first Christians, being Jew shared the Jewish attitude to pagans and Roman society in general.

When the Church crossed the boundaries of Palestinian Judaism and entered into the wider area of the Greco-Roman World, it found itself in the midst of a religiously and culturally pluralistic society and the question of the Church's relation to pagan society and culture became a crucial theological one.

The attitude of Christian in general to pagan polytheism and idol worship was, of course, absolutely negative. But a creative encounter took place between Christianity and Greek culture and philosophy. In this there was no one tradition universally followed by all Christians. For example, Justin the Martyr was very positive in this evaluation of Greek philosophy. He stressed

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

that the seed of the Logos is implanted in the whole human race<sup>6</sup> In the First Apology he explains:

We have been taught that Christ is the First-begotten of God, and previously testified that he is the Logos of which every race of men partakes. Those who have lived in accordance with the Logos are Christians, even though they were called godless, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and others like them; among the barbarians, Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, Misael, and Elijah, and many others, whose deeds and names I forbear to list, knowing that this would be lengthy. [...] Those who lived by the Logos, and those who live so now, are Christians, fearless and unperturbed<sup>7</sup>

The similar view had Clement of Alexandria believing that the idea of God was implanted in all people at creation. All wisdom is summed in Christ who is the Uniting Principle: „There is the one river of truth, but many streams fall into it on this side”<sup>8</sup>

Because of this positive attitude, the Church Fathers were able to use Greek philosophy and culture not only to express Christian faith but also for a deeper understanding of it. In this encounter with Greek culture the Church no longer understood itself as a Jewish sect living in a Semitic environment but a universal religion which can find its home in all cultures. It was in its missionary encounter with Greco-Roman culture that the Church grasped the universalism of the Gospel, which made it possible for the Church to express itself in all cultures and in all particular situations. It finds its own form and expression in each situation and in each age. Plurality is something inbuilt in the very nature of the Church because it is an element of the Gospel itself. Jean Daniélou points out:

The transition of the religion of Christ from the Jewish World, within which it made its first appearance, to the pagan world is the great revolution that occupies the first and second centuries. This was the natural outcome of the very nature of the Christian message, which is not the religious expression of culture, as were the great pagan religions, and not the election by God of one people for an historic mission, as was Judaism, but is the proclamation to all mankind of the advent of the last things.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Justin the Martyr, *II Apologia*, 8, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Idem*, *I Apologia*, 46, 1-4.

<sup>8</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1, 5.

<sup>9</sup> J. Daniélou, *The Crucible of Christianity*, London 1960, p. 275.

Thus, the preaching of the Gospel in each generation and each situation, the ability of the Gospel to find its expression in each culture and in each situation and the manifestation of the catholic nature of the Church and its ability to create fellowship – all these are basic elements of traditions of the Church and therefore our common Christian heritage.

Our common history is the history of how the universality of the Gospel and the catholicity of the Church are manifested in each age and in each situation. Both catholicity and universality are dynamic qualities and can be expressed or manifested in the Church's mission as it lives in constant dialogue with the world.

### III. THE ORTHODOX APPROACH TO MISSION

Every Christian body feels its missionary responsibilities as a very important part of proclaiming the Good News. The Orthodox Church developed the theology of mission, which is based on the missionary imperative and goals of mission. Usually the incarnational model of missionary activity is one of greatest importance for the Orthodox missionaries.

#### 1. *The Missionary Imperative*

It was the common opinion in the West, that the Eastern Orthodox Church was regarded as a non-missionary Church. Today there is scarcely an area of the Western World in which a branch of the Eastern Orthodox Church does not exist.

As a result of the spread of Orthodox Christians to other lands and the concerted efforts of Orthodox missionaries in evangelizing non-Christians, the Orthodox Church is to be found on all six continents. But it must be said that still Orthodoxy is not understood in the West. The expectations of the Western Churches frequently force Orthodox leaders to construct an Orthodox position in opposition to the Protestant and Roman Catholic position. Father A. Schmemmann, a spokesman for Orthodoxy in the ecumenical movement, pointed out that, this is a false position for Orthodoxy to occupy<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Moment of Truth for Orthodoxy*, [in:] K. R. Bridston, W. D. Wagoner (eds.), *Unity in Mid-Career*, New York 1963, pp. 48, 54-56.

The Western Churches should understand that the different history of the Orthodox Church led to a different theological development. There is the lack of systematical development in certain theological areas, among them missiology. But a great deal has been written by contemporary Orthodox theologians that indicates the basic structure of the Orthodox understanding of mission<sup>11</sup>

The main reason for the participation of the Orthodox Church in the World Council Churches (WCC) is based on the missionary vocation of the Church:

The mission of the Church requires it. As Orthodox we have no right to ignore the world among us; this world requires our presence and our voice wherever it can be heard, precisely because our message is unique and because the Church is the guardian of a Universal Truth<sup>12</sup>

This missionary imperative is the essential expression of the Church as gift of fullness, its projection in the time and space of this world<sup>13</sup>

Everybody in the Church is called to missionary activity. „Go and make disciples of all nations” said the Lord (*Matt. 28:19*). This order of our Saviour never ceased to be obligatory.

For mission is not the function of a few ‘specialists’ only but all Christians. If one believes to possess the true knowledge of God and keeps it for oneself only, one is not truly faithful to God. Christ came on earth to save not only us, who know Him, but also the millions who ignore Him. It is our duty to let them know, to give them the ‘Good News’ of God’s Love for them. This is why the Lord’s call – ‘Go ye’ – is addressed to each one of us<sup>14</sup>

Speaking about the missionary imperative one can not to forget the importance of the soteriological and eschatological dimension of the mission of the Church:

One the day of Pentecost, when the fullness of the Church was realized once and for all, the time of the Church began, the last and the crucial segment of the

---

<sup>11</sup> Bibliography one can find in a book by J. J. Stamodis: *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today*, Maryknoll, N.Y. 1986, pp. 175-187.

<sup>12</sup> J. M e y e n d o r f f, *Witness to the World*, Crestwood, N.Y. 1987, p. 177.

<sup>13</sup> A. S c h m e m a n n, *Church, World, Mission*, Crestwood, N.Y. 1979, p. 214.

<sup>14</sup> M e y e n d o r f f, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

history of salvation. Ontologically the only *newness* and, therefore the only *soteriological content* of this segment is precisely *mission*: the proclamation and the communication of the *eschaton*, which is already the being of the Church and indeed its only being. It is the Church as mission that gives to this time its real significance and to history its meaning. And it is mission that gives to the human response in the Church its validity, makes us real co-workers in the work of Christ<sup>15</sup>

The whole history of the Orthodox Church from this point of view shows us the concrete participation of Orthodoxy in the societies and cultures and its identification with nations and peoples, yet without betrayal of the eschatological communion with the heavenly Jerusalem.

## 2. *The Goals of Orthodox Mission*

It seems appropriate to follow the distinction which was proposed by the Greek theologian – A. Yannoulatos. He indicates that in the Orthodox approach towards missionary work there are two levels of goals: ‘the ultimate goal’ and ‘the immediate goals’<sup>16</sup>

### a) The Ultimate Aim: The Glory of God

The theme of the glory of God is one of the primary emphasis of Orthodox theology. Yannoulatos writes:

A key to the Orthodox understanding of the process of history is, I think, ‘the glory of the most holy God’, viewed in the perspective of His infinitive Love... The process of human history of which the Bible speaks, begins and ends with the glory of God<sup>17</sup>

The glory of God was a precondition to creation (*John 17:5*) and will be as continuous manifestation in the eternal future. From the historical point of view the revelation of God’s glory and its increase by praise of mankind is seen in a different way:

---

<sup>15</sup> S c h m e m a n n, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>16</sup> A. Y a n n o u l a t o s, *The Purpose and Motive of Mission*, Athens 1968, pp. 11 and 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Man rejected the absolute glory of God and is seeking to create his own glory and in worshipping himself he separated himself from the living God and provoked a cosmic catastrophe – the appearance of a new condition, death, in which the glory of the living God is overshadowed. The sin of men is a continual hindrance to the diffusion and manifestation of the glory<sup>18</sup>

However God does not give men up and He does not cease to reveal His glory to them (e.g. *Exod* 3:2; *Is* 6) and finally in the fullness of time, He sends His Son in order to regenerate all things („so that God will be glorified in Him” – *John* 13:32, cf. 11:1-10). Yannoulatos points out, that the whole life of Jesus was characterized by glory. On the Mount of Transfiguration the demonstration of the glory was seen by his disciples<sup>19</sup> (God’s glory is given for individuals to share<sup>20</sup> The most full revelation of the glory of God is the cross and the Resurrection.

In Orthodox worship, the cross is presented mainly as the symbol of victory and glory, and always closely connected with the Resurrection. The distinction between the agony of the cross and the glory of the Resurrection which is so common in the West is unusual in the Orthodox Church. Both are revelations and manifestations of the glory of God. In general, the Incarnation, the Passion, the Resurrection – the whole divine movement of the divine philanthropy in *kenosis* – are not only expressions of the divine love, but at the same time new manifestations of the glory of God. One could say that *agape* and glory are two aspects of the same thing: the life of God<sup>21</sup>

These central themes of Orthodox theology (*agape* and *glory*) form the focal point for Orthodox worship and they therefore are very important in Orthodox missiology. God’s mission of Love is first of all the redemption of humankind and the restoration of the universe. In all this, the glory of God is revealed.

If the ultimate purpose of God’s mission is the revelation of His glory, then God’s purpose in calling humankind is for human beings to be partakers of the divine glory. Furthermore God has given a share of his mission to the

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> V Lossky (*The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Crestwood, N.Y., 1976, pp. 149, 215, 220-235) presents the Transfiguration features in Orthodox theology and spirituality.

<sup>20</sup> See J. Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Tradition*, Crestwood, N.Y. 1974, pp. 165-166.

<sup>21</sup> Yannoulatos, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.



Church so together they constitute the same mission. Since the Christian mission is incorporated into God's mission, the final goal of our mission surely cannot be different from His. And this purpose, as the Bible (especially Ephesians and Collosians) makes clear is the 'recapitulation' (*anakefalaisios*) of the Universe in Christ and our participation in the divine glory, the eternal, final glory of God<sup>22</sup>

Our participation in this glory has already begun with our baptism – by which we have been incorporated into Christ<sup>23</sup> But the process of glorification is not yet having been completed. When everything will be subjected to Christ and the reconciliation of creation will be completed the glory of God will fully fill the Universe.

When everything has been subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will be subjected to the One who has subjected everything to Him, so that God may be all in all" (*1 Cor 15:28*).

Thus the purpose of mission is connected with God's cosmic plan from eternity. The Church's mission and as well the mission of every Christian is to acknowledge, promote and participate in the glory of God.

#### b) The Immediate Goals of Mission

The immediate goals should be understood as stages or steps, by which the ultimate goal is approached. They should be in harmony with the ultimate aim, as Yannoulatos states:

The immediate goals of mission must surely follow the same line and direction as the ultimate goal; they must be the starting-point on preparation for that goal. In the march of the Christian mission our eyes must constantly be fixed on the objective, on the end, the *telos*, if mission is not to lose its ultimate direction<sup>24</sup>

The basic immediate aim of mission is the establishment of local Churches in which people can worship God in the light of their own natural gifts and characteristics giving to the Church Universal their distinctive contribution

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> In Byzantine theology there is a distinction between Divine glory and Divine essence. Human beings share in the glory of God's nature but not in the Divine nature itself. See J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, New York 1974, pp. 184-188.

<sup>24</sup> Yannoulatos, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

to the praise of God. In each country the Church is called to glorify God with her own voice. In the Orthodox Tradition and the best Orthodox missionary practice that means there must be a sincere respect for the identity of every nation; an investigation into the way in which God gave His witness in the past of each particular people (*Acts 14:16-17*). The establishment of the local Church is also the work of incarnating the Logos of God into the language and customs of the country<sup>25</sup>

So what are the necessary prerequisites for the establishment of a local Church?

First of all it is preaching of the Gospel, what is the very heart of mission, which has as its aim the transforming of human beings. Through the preaching of the Gospel people might believe and be converted. Those who are outside of the Church need to be introduced to the grace of God, in Christ. Mission is not only for those who are outside of the Church, but it is also „the way in which Church people try to arose the sleeping faith of the nominal Christians”<sup>26</sup>

The aim of the mission is not merely the gaining of converts, but the active incorporation of the believers in the life of the Church. Orthodoxy stresses the need of experience of the grace of God. This grace is transmitted to peoples by the work of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments:

The sacraments constitute the Church. Only in the sacraments does the Christian community pass beyond the purely human measure and become the Church<sup>27</sup>

Particularly in the Divine Liturgy people partake of the spiritual nourishment needed to share in the life of Christ (cf. *John 6:53-58*).

In addition there is the second missiological emphasis on the incorporation of the convert into the Church: it is that, the Church itself in its doxological and liturgical service forms the Orthodox witness to the world. One can recall the distinction proposed by Father A. Schmemmann, who saw two aspects of the Church response to the Gift of God:

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> N. A. Nissiotis, *The Ecclesiological Foundation of Mission from the Orthodox Point of View*, „The Greek Orthodox Theological Review”, 7(1961-62), p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> G. Florovsky, *The Church: Her Nature and Task*, [in:] *The Universal Church in God's Design*, New York 1948, p. 47.

The first one is *God-centered*, it is sanctification, the growth in holiness, of both the Christian individual and the Christian Community, the 'acquisition by them of the Holy Spirit'<sup>28</sup>

The second aspect in the Church's response is *man or world-centered*<sup>29</sup>

Thus the Church not only fulfils the conditions leading to its own members' sanctification, but also witness to the world. These two aspects are inseparably connected:

Mission is certainly not simply synonymous with activism, but requires an inner transformation of the communities and the individuals. It must be remembered that the apostles of Christ, the teachers of the Church, and the missionaries who brought the Orthodox faith to generations of men and women in many countries were themselves not 'activists' but saints<sup>30</sup>

In this context more can be said of the powerful witness of the Orthodox Liturgy. There is the traditional story of the conversion of Prince Vladimir and through him the Russian people in the Russian Primary Chronicle. Vladimir, Prince of Kiev, while was still a pagan dissatisfied with the religion of his father, examined in turn the four main options open to him: Islam, Judaism, Latin Christianity and Orthodox Christianity. After examining representatives of each position, he sent a high commission to observe the practices of each religion in its own territory. Unimpressed by the other rites they observed Vladimir's nobles returned with glowing accounts of what they had seen in Saint Sophia in Constantinople:

We knew not whether we were in Heaven or on earth, for surely there is not such splendour or beauty anywhere upon earth. We cannot describe it to you: only this we know, that God dwells there among men, and that their service surpasses the worship of all other places. For we cannot forget that beauty<sup>31</sup>

Thus in the case of the beginning Christianity in Russia, the liturgical witness of the Orthodox Church plays an important if not decisive role.

---

<sup>28</sup> A. S c h e m m a n n, *The Missionary Imperative in the Orthodox Tradition*, [in:] G. H. A n d e r s o n (ed.), *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, New York 1961, p. 253.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>30</sup> J. M e y e n d o r f f, *Witness to the World*, Crestwood, N.Y. 1987, p. 185.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted by T. W a r e, *The Orthodox Church*, London 1964, p. 269.

All these aims are not peculiar or unique to Orthodoxy. They are in line with the missionary aims of other Christian Churches. But it should be underlined that in the Orthodox Church there is a greater degree of development of the place of the Liturgy in mission and the incarnational concept of the Church in mission.

### 3. *The Incarnational Approach of Orthodoxy in Mission*

The very essence of incarnational approach is the embodiment of God's truth in the language and culture of people. As Christ translated God's thoughts to humankind the missionary in turn translated them into another language to fulfil the gospel commission (*Matt.* 2:14; 28:19).

The Incarnation is the central theme in Orthodox theology. „God made Himself man, that man might become God”<sup>32</sup> These powerful words of St. Irenaeus we can find in the writings of St. Athanasius<sup>33</sup>, St. Gregory of Nazianzus<sup>34</sup> and St. Gregory of Nyssa<sup>35</sup> From the Fathers to the present Orthodox theologians emphasized the necessity of the Incarnation for the salvation of humankind<sup>36</sup> In the thought of the Fathers the Incarnation of the Word is very closely linked to our ultimate deification<sup>37</sup>

In the same manner in which it was necessary for the Second Person of the Trinity to assume human flesh to communicate the message of salvation, the truth of God must assume a form in which the message of salvation can be communicated. The written word must become incarnate as the Living Word become Incarnate.

It is therefore convenient to refer to the missionary method that stresses the translation of the Bible, liturgical texts and other religious literature into the vernacular of the target people as the incarnational approach. In the past, missionaries from Byzantium consistently employed this method in their efforts to bring the message of salvation to the heathen tribes. The use of the

<sup>32</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, V, preface. PG 7, 1120.

<sup>33</sup> *De Incarnatione Verbi*, 54. PG 25, 192B.

<sup>34</sup> *Poema Dogmatica*, 10, 5-9. PG 37, 465.

<sup>35</sup> *Oratio Catechetica Magna*, PG 45, 65D.

<sup>36</sup> See L o s s k y, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, passim; M e y e n d o r f f, *St. Gregory Palamas*, passim.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. V L o s s k y, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, Crestwood, N.Y. 1974, p. 98.

living language of the people has been distinctive feature of Orthodox worship:

In its services of the Orthodox Church uses the language of the people: Arabic at Antioch, Finnish at Helsinki, Japanese at Tokyo, English (when required) at New York. One of the first tasks of Orthodox missionaries – from Cyril and Methodius in the nine century, to Innocent Vieniaminov and Nicholas Kassatkin in the nineteenth – has always been to translate the service books into native tongues<sup>38</sup>

The incarnation is not only limited to the translation of the texts. To be an effective communicator of Christ to the people, the missionary must live in a manner that communicates Christ's life. The incarnation is in the close contact with the real world. Following the pattern of a certain type of Orthodox spirituality and in conscious or subconscious imitation of the Lord who „became poor” (2 Cor 8:9) Orthodox missionaries lived in „evangelical poverty”<sup>39</sup> In addition to the spiritual benefits of this lifestyle, the disruption to the local culture is minimized.

The Orthodox mission is sensitive to the culture of the natives. Orthodox theologians stress the need for the penetrating the intellectual environment of the natives in order to understand their way of thinking. Then the missionary must adopt his pattern of thought and expression to that of the nationals so that his preaching will be fruitful<sup>40</sup>

The other aspect of the incarnational approach is the emphasis on the indigenization of the ministry. The advisability of having ministers of the same tribe, nation or race as the congregation is nothing new to Orthodoxy. The use of indigenous clergy has been the traditional methodology and that it is still seen as the present practical method of approach. The purpose of mission is not to maintain permanently missionaries in the country of mission. A mission attains its purpose when a flourishing local Church joins the respective patriarchate. When several native priests are ordain in the country of evangelization the missionary work is finished.

---

<sup>38</sup> W a r e, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 273-274.

<sup>39</sup> See G. K h o d r e, *Church and Mission*, „St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly”, 6(1962), p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> E. V o u l g a r a k i s, *The Greek Orthodox Missionary*, „Philoteos, Porefthendes”, 10(1968), p. 42.

## PRAWOSŁAWNA IDEA MISJI WE WSPÓŁCZESNYM ŚWIECIE

## S t r e s z c z e n i e

Problem misji w ciągu wieków nie stracił nic ze swej aktualności. Autor na wstępie artykułu zastanawia się, jaka jest sytuacja współczesnego świata oraz co może ofiarować chrześcijaństwo pluralistycznemu społeczeństwu u schyłku XX wieku. Następnie, odwołując się do postawy pierwszych chrześcijan, wskazał, iż chrześcijaństwo stało się religią uniwersalistyczną w wyniku spotkania z pluralistyczną pod względem religijnym i kulturalnym cywilizacją grecko-rzymską. To stanowi punkt wyjścia do przedstawienia prawosławnego stanowiska odnośnie do misji. Po omówieniu „imperatywu misyjnego”, który wynika z samego nakazu Pana (por. Mt 28, 19), Autor skoncentrował się nad celami misji. W teologii prawosławnej akcentuje się dwa poziomy celów misji: pierwszy z nich – ostateczny – to urzeczywistnienie się chwały Bożej; drugi poziom – to cele pośrednie misji. Zalicza się do nich wszystkie działania na rzecz założenia Kościołów lokalnych, w których głoszone będzie Słowo Boże, i sprawowanie sakramentów. W prawosławiu wielką rolę przypisuje się celebracji Boskiej Liturgii, będącej duchowym pokarmem dla wierzących. Celem misji jest nie tyle zdobycie nowych wyznawców, co aktywne wcielenie wierzących w życie Kościoła. W ostatniej części artykułu została przedstawiona inkarnacyjna postawa Kościoła prawosławnego praktykowana na misjach. Polega ona na wcieleniu Bożej Prawdy w języku i kulturze nawracanego ludu. Za najlepszy przykład służy samo Słowo Wcielone – Jezus Chrystus. Wcielenie jest centralnym tematem teologii prawosławnej. Już od czasów pierwszych Ojców Kościoła nauczano, iż jest ono niezbędne dla naszego zbawienia i przeobstwienia. Tak jak Druga Osoba Trójcy Świętej przyjęła ludzkie ciało, aby przekazać Dobrą Nowinę, tak też Prawda Boża musi przyjąć formę, dzięki której będzie zrozumiała dla słuchających jej ludzi. Stąd też konieczność przekładu Biblii, tekstów liturgicznych i innej literatury religijnej. Metoda inkarnacyjna stosowana była przez bizantyjskich misjonarzy, głoszących Ewangelię plemionom pogańskim. Trzeba podkreślić, że misja prawosławna cechuje się wrażliwością na rdzenne kultury i zrozumienie sposobu myślenia rdzennej ludności. Za koniec działalności misyjnej uważa się moment, gdy wyświęci się co najmniej kilku kapłanów pochodzących z danego terenu, a Kościół lokalny przyłączy się do patriarchatu.

*Streściła Iga Czaczkowska*