

TOWARDS A PROPHETIC ESCHATOLOGY.
MISSIONARY ECCLESIOLOGY IN POSTMODERNITY

Abstract

Church mission has always emphasized the tension between the historic reality and the eschatological perspective. The world in which the Son of God came constitutes, for eternity, the object of the missionary work of God. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3, 16). He was not of the world, and neither were His disciples (John 17, 16). However, the disciples are sent in the very same world so that the world may believe in the Son and in the Father (John 17, 18-21).

The paradoxical relationship between God and the world can be easily seen in the passages from John mentioned in the paragraph above. It is a relationship with subtle theological implications, which presents the distinction between God and the world and confesses the presence of Jesus Christ in the world until the end of times (Matthew 28, 20).

The present thesis of habilitation describes God's antinomic relationship with the world. It shows how God, as a missionary, intervenes in creation in order to transfigure it and to guide it towards its eschatological fulfilment in the kingdom of God. The paper suggests the *prophetic way* as a guide to eschatological fulfilment and describes some characteristics of the missionary ecclesiology in the postmodern, contemporary times.

I started by restating that mission cannot be placed in the being of God the Trinity. In western theology, this produced a fracture between the immanent and the economic aspect of the Holy Trinity. Mission cannot be placed in the immanent Trinity without causing a division between the two aspects, without reducing the immanent Trinity to natural, temporary, human terms. The identity between *procession* (the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father, through the Son) and *mission* (the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the world) produced confusion and created the theological premises for *filioquism*, a doctrine that is contested by the Orthodox theology.

Eastern tradition refused the possibility to deduct the intra-Trinitarian relations from the divine economy of the Holy Trinity and instead emphasised the distinction (not the separation) of the two plans, that of theology and that of the divine economy. According to Eastern theology, the Son of God descends from the life in the Trinity, from the plan of Theology (ad intra) into the plan of divine economy (ad extra) and this descent has a missionary character.

When the Capadocian fathers distinguished between the plan of theology and that of the divine economy, they wanted to acknowledge both God's freedom in the creation and the salvation of the world, as well as the apophatic character of theology. The act of creation and salvation is a missionary act, but we cannot define God's nature starting from it. At the same time, we cannot deny the connection between this act and God's essence. According to Orthodox theology, this connection is done through the theology of uncreated energies. In this context, we identified the apophatic character of missiology.

The missionary act makes the presence of God in history permanent and this allows an interpretation of history in a theological key. Thus, I emphasized the fact that only in the eschatological light may the true sense of history be revealed. An evaluation of the historical events needs the eschatological perspective that brings hope to the world and determines those involved in missionary work to adopt a position of humility as they become aware of the fact that, while leading a limited human existence, they only have limited knowledge and are confined to living in a short period of time from the long journey of history towards eschaton.

The short period of time referred to here is postmodernity. Postmodernism criticizes some of the tenants of modern philosophers like I. Kant or R Descartes, especially their foundationalism. According to foundationalism, men of science, freed from their prejudices, are able to know the world as it is. The ability to have an objective understanding of reality is one of the main ideas criticised by postmodernism. Postmodernism offers a framework which records the changes that occurred in western thought regarding the individual's relationships with himself, alterity and the world around him. Its fluidity and lack of coherence make it difficult to describe and characterize.

Within this theoretical framework, I emphasized that one of the most important tasks of theology today is to understand and to accept change. The fact that the world changes is a constant throughout history. The only difference comes from the nature of the change. The change must be interpreted by taking into account the eschatological perspective and the prophetic criteria. In order to define this particular type of discourse in missiology, I called it *prophetic eschatology*. To sum up, I suggested that the mission of the Church in postmodernity needs a prophetic and eschatological vision. Inaugurated eschatology is the criterion for any missionary enterprise, while prophetism represents the missionary norm of the Church in postmodernity. The mission of the Church is to point towards the values of the Kingdom of God. The main principles according to which we recognise these values are the biblical, canonical, triadological and Christological principle.

I then suggested that a way to connect the life of the Church to postmodernity would be to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, as perhaps the postmodern mind is so attracted to it because it is in fact in search of the long lost universal principles.

Thus, to the extent to which our Christian life, at a personal level or at the level of the society, resists the application of the prophetic principles and is placed in an eschatological dimension, the path to the final fulfilment is lighted through all the ways of darkness.