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ACTA MISSIOLOGICA

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**Thematic focus
of this issue:**

**RELEVANT RESEARCH
FOR THE INTERNATIONAL
SCIENTIFIC PUBLIC ON THE
SERIOUS NEGATIVE EFFECTS
OF COVID-19 ON THE SOCIAL
AND HEALTH SPECTRUM
AND ON SELECTED
THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH
CARRIED OUT IN RESPONSE
TO VARIOUS INTERESTING
PERSPECTIVES**

ACTA MISSIOLOGICA

Peer-reviewed academic journal

Our mission is to create an international platform for experts engaged in the field of Christian mission and missiology, charity, social and humanitarian development work at the theoretical, research and application levels. The journal has been creating room within this international platform for further specificities covering the aforementioned fields that will produce new relevant findings and interconnections in order to promote the journal more to the widest possible professional community and stimulate a greater interest within it. One such field is international public law with its unique scientific and relevant, direct and close link to international missionary work, and several other relevant aspects from other fields on which the journal focuses. The journal publishes a wide spectrum of articles relevant for education with special focus on assisting professions in the aforementioned areas. This area includes all educational, health, social, legal (especially international humanitarian law, international human rights law, diplomatic law and international treaty law), international organization and spiritual topics connected to the missionary context.

As of Autumn 2020, the journal will be focusing on specialised unique scientific and expert research at the international level, covering all the topics the journal has focused on thus far while also introducing new ones. One such aspect of scientific and expert research that the journal is going to focus on is the support for the family structure and its value in today's society, as well as the promotion of human dignity and value in various essential aspects of life with a view to opening up effective dialogue on various relevant and interesting ideas about non-radicalised Islam, thus also benefiting the Christian environment.

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EDITORIAL**Dear colleagues and readers of *Acta Missiologica*,**

Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, the originator of COVID-19 pathogen, has rapidly spread across the world with very high mortality rates. For symptomatic COVID-19 patients, the disease exacerbates quickly, which is characterized mainly by a systemic decay of vascular physiology, pulmonary functions and the immune system manifested in different ways. Since the outbreak and spread of the disease, medical and scientific experts have been developing therapeutic fact and evidence-based approaches, as well as worldwide research focused on COVID-19. The aim of medical scientists is to further increase these efforts to find efficient ways to face the spread of SARS-CoV2, and thus protect non-hospitalised persons and persons who do not show any symptoms to a maximum extent. Recommended treatment remains unchanged: supportive care and symptomatic treatment. One of the options is systemic oxygen therapy O2O3, which has demonstrated positive effects on infection control, immune system stimulation, antiviral abilities, protection against ischemia-reperfusion injury, positive impact on proteasome and infection and it can be said that it is a new immune system therapy, and it has been shown by the following studies: its use in combination with other treatment forms in COVID-19 patients can be legitimate, useful and synergic. However, this alternative is still a subject of research focusing for example on gas concentration, administration methods, safety, disease stage in which it is administered, selection of patients, contraindications, simultaneous antioxidant administration, etc. In this relation, it is also necessary to deal with other aspects linked to potential application of this treatment on specific COVID-19 patient groups. Based on opinions of scientists and experts who have been involved in this issue for a long time, ozone therapy could be an option which might deserve to be investigated while we are waiting for a COVID-19-specific treatment and vaccine. However, the coronavirus pandemic has much broader consequences – it has negatively affected economic standards of the population and it has placed a significant burden on the healthcare system, as well as many other areas essential for dignified human survival. Let us take Italy as an example. The second pandemic wave has also shown that Italy is not ready to handle increasing numbers of infected people in terms of hospital facilities and logistical mechanisms. The country has already reported major damage caused by lockdown with consequences that will last for many years to come and will significantly influence future generations. Another serious consequence of COVID-19 pandemic is post-traumatic stress disorder discovered not only in patients, but also in front-line medical staff. All the above-mentioned aspects related to health and different negative consequences of COVID-19 are alarming, they provoke many worries and relevant questions which need to be dealt with not only on a practical level, but also on a scientific and expert level through research and studies. This issue of *Acta Missiologica* focused on *Relevant research for the international scientific public on the serious negative effects of COVID-19 on the social and health spectrum and on selected theological research carried out in response to various interesting perspectives* presents such type of research and analysis and strives to find relevant and efficient solutions to identified problems, as well as to open up space for further research with beneficial results for the international scientific and expert community. As indicated by the thematic focus of this issue, it also deals with research in other areas which are relevant and new, with a potential for further research perspectives. For instance, let us mention significant theological and missiological aspects of Christianity in various connections and links, the area of Jewish and Christian relations or important and beneficial aspects of Islam linked to several other important expert areas. With regards to its objective, *Acta Missiologica* set itself a goal in its

spring 2020 edition: to make sure that the journal *in its uniqueness and competitiveness adheres to the international expert community and sparks interest of the community to an even larger extent. With this aim in mind, starting from 2020, the journal within an international platform opens up space for various one-of-a-kind specificities with new, unique, scientific, directly relevant and close connection to its profiling focus.* A similarly unique and rare specificity is research in various areas of non-radicalized Islam, thanks to which a mutual effective dialogue can be initiated with a primary focus on promoting a valuable and dignified life of a human being and supporting family and its values in today's society.

Through such open and effective dialogue, this new specific research area included in the journal aligns with areas which the journal has been focusing on in its research for a long time. In this manner, *Acta Missiologica can continue bringing new and relevant findings and mutual links in various areas which were not analysed before, providing a new contribution and benefit to the international expert community.*

This issue of *Acta Missiologica* presents new areas which have not been sufficiently analysed before in order to create an opportunity for further scientific and expert studies, reflections, new relevant scientific discussions, as well as inspirational impulses for further work of academics and experts engaged in different scientific and expert areas.

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THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX MISSION IN AMERICA OF THE XVIII-XIX CENTURIES: A SCIENTOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF THE INFORMATION ARRAYS



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Abstract

Background: The work reveals for the first time the available information resources and traces main trends of studying the Russian Orthodox mission in America of the XVIII-XIX centuries. To study the problem it uses two databases of different levels: the international DB Web of Science by Clarivate Analytics, and the regional DB “Scientific Sibirika” generated by the State Public Scientific Technological Library of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. It's important because the analysis of regional information resources is rare presented in scientific literature, but they are quite significant to study regional issues. Applying scientometric techniques, it represent the analysis of the information arrays selected of databases with analytical tools. It gives characteristics of the temporal, type-specific, and language structure of documentary corpuses, reveals main research areas, names the most productive periodicals, scientific events dedicated to the Russian America Christianization. These information arrays are the information base to support further research by scientists and specialists on the above-mentioned problem, because the history of Russian Orthodox Mission in Alaska await development. These studies are possible through creating scientific team of Russian and American historians and clergy.

Conclusion: The starting point for further research should be exchange and analysis of accumulated information resources on the topic.

Keywords: Christianization. Russian America. Scientometric analysis. Web of Science. DB „Scientific Sibirika“.

Introduction

The Russian Empire lands at the Pacific North American coast in the XVIII - early XIX centuries (called „Russian America“) have always attracted the attention of researchers. Various aspects of the Russian America history are covered in the works of Russian and foreign scientists, but the greatest publication amount is noted on the eve of events dedicated to numerous memorable dates in the region. The Russian Orthodox Church, its first mission sent to Alaska from Saint Petersburg in 1793, has a special place in the life of Russian America. The Church mission had the following goals: 1) providing spiritual assistance to Russian explorers and merchants, 2)

✉ Contact on author: Professor Valentina Rykova – email: rykova@gpntbsib,ru

preaching Christian norms to the native population and baptizing local residents, 3) representing the state interests in the new Russian lands according to the will of the Empress Catherine II².

At the 275th anniversary of the Kamchatka Spiritual Mission (1745–1761), which spread Russian Orthodoxy on the territory of the Kamchatka Peninsula, Kuril Islands, Aleutian Archipelago and Alaska, it is important to summarize all the printed materials devoted to this problem, to determine the information base of its further study.

The mission of libraries to meet the information needs of consumers in the field of science, education, culture in the digital era has not become less relevant, because at present the availability of information resources is not associated with their absence, but with the difficulty of navigating the multiply increasing volume of information. Information products as an integral part of scientific, educational and scientific activities accompany all stages of research - from the choice of a topic to the presentation of the results. Currently, the sources of systematized information are electronic databases (DB), many of which are free in the Internet.

At the stage of formulating a scientific problem, an analysis of the available literary sources is necessary to identify the lack or inconsistency of the available facts and knowledge. This period is marked by work with guidebooks to information resources, giving an idea of the multifaceted and multidirectional research that has already been carried out, or is being carried out in the world. Further work on the problem involves the definition of goals, objectives, object, subject and the choice of research methods, where work with full-text sources of information comes to the fore. Full-text information is also required during research. At the final stages, when formalizing the results of work, bibliographic managers and databases become a priority source of information.

Availability of a source base is of great importance as it allows studying the problem at a high professional level, makes it possible to clarify the topic, to expand or to concentrate efforts on a more in-depth study of individual aspects, to determine issues not studied sufficiently; it should be a basis to change or specify the research topic.

The growing volume of scientific publications and improving research information support put in the forefront the task to systematize documents solved within frameworks of bibliographic, abstract and full-text DBs. The paper objective is to carry on a scientometric analysis of information arrays (IA) devoted to the Russian Orthodox mission in America of the XVIII-XIX centuries selected in two DBs:

- the international DB of scientific citation Web of Science (WoS) by Clarivate Analytics,
- DB „Scientific Sibirika“ generated by the State Public Scientific Technological Library of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (SPSTL SB RAS, Novosibirsk) devoted to the Russian America Christianization.

Both DBs are information source bases of the issue further research, which is important to reveal bottlenecks in studying the Orthodox Mission in Russian America.

Materials and methods

The multi-disciplinary DB WoS includes information about publications in periodicals and conference proceedings indexed on a wide range of topical issues of natural and technical, social and humanitarian sciences; a search query is formulated using keywords and Boolean operators in accordance with the user requirements.

2 "Alaska. Successful missions," Russian Orthodox Church: website of the Moscow Patriarchate. 2014. URL: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3526722.html> accessed February 2, 2020.

Regional DB „Scientific Sibirika“ of SPSTL SB RAS' own generation is a multidisciplinary DB as well, with large thematic sections, including „History of Siberia and the Far East“³, that cumulates the information on Siberia and the Far Eastern region historical development, not only in the framework of modern political-administrative division, but ever part of Russia including Russian America. The geographical index allows users to select documents only for a desired region and get relevant regional documents for the topic under research. First, the information array on the request of „Russian America“, consisting of more than 1,200 publications issued in 1990-2019 was selected in DB „Scientific Sibirika“. Then, from the above array, an IA dedicated to the Orthodox Church activities in Russian America has been chosen.

Information arrays scientometric analysis

Information arrays from DBs WoS and Scientific Sibirika comprised 51 and 185 documents respectively; 89% of publications in DB WoS are in English, and works of DB „Scientific Sibirika“ are mainly in Russian (99%).

The dynamics of document corpus (Fig. 1) reflects the growing interest of scientists and specialists to this issue. In the 1990s, the works on the topic were few and not published every year. Nowadays, there is a steady flow of publications covering the spiritual life of Russian America. The works edited in 2019 are not yet fully included in DBs, so we can expect a further increase in the number of documents over the past five years. It should be noted that Russian-language editions still prevail. Russian journals have been actively working recent years to be included in the world citation indices, some of them either print articles in English or have a translated version of their publications, which will lead to raising the number of Russian scientist papers in the world DBs, and, consequently, to growing English-language IA on the research topic.

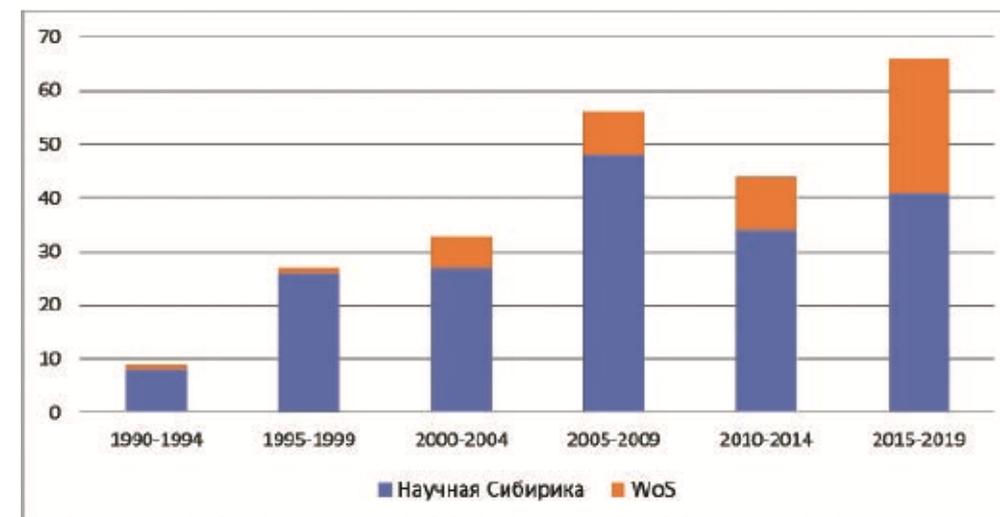


Fig. 1. Research publication dynamics on the topic in DBs WoS and Scientific Sibirika

3 Olga, Busygina Lavrik, Valentina, Tatiana Rykova. "Bibliographic Information Resources on the History of Siberia and the Far East," *Slavic and East European Information Resources* 2016, 4: 257-267.

The type-specific structure of documentary arrays in DBS varies due to different approaches to generate the DBs. WoS primarily includes publications from scientific journals indexed in it as the most advanced sources of information, less often – conference proceedings; while DB “Scientific Sibirika” is compiled based on an obligatory copy of published literature in Russia received by the SPSTL SB RAS according to the Law No. 77 of the Russian Federation (29.12.1994), as well as web resources, therefore the species composition of the documents in this database is much richer. The main type of WoS database documents is articles and book reviews printed in periodicals, which total 93% of IA (70% and 23%, respectively). The prevailing types of documents of DB “Scientific Sibirika” are conference proceedings (41%), and journal articles (27%), as well as works in thematic collections of scientific papers and monographic publications (15% each).

An analysis of the titles of publications made it possible to single out the most productive publications on the topic in the DBs. The leaders in publication activity among journals are: print media - “Russia and Asia-Pacific Region”, “Ethnosphere”, “Bulletin of the Irkutsk State University. Series: History”, “Domestic Archive”, “Russian History”, “International Affairs”, and e-journal “History”. As already noted, a significant part of materials on Christianization of Russian America were discussed and published in conference proceedings. Often scientific events are dedicated to the anniversary and memorable dates of the region, among them the following should be mentioned: *Innokenty readings: a scientific and practical conference dedicated to the 200th anniversary of I. Veniaminov (Chita, 1997)*; *The spiritual life of the Far East of Russia: a scientific and practical conference dedicated to the 2000th anniversary of Christianity (Khabarovsk, 2000)*; *Russian Orthodox Church in Siberia: history and modernity: a scientific and practical conference dedicated to the 350th anniversary of the foundation of Posolskoe village and Ambassadorial Transfiguration Monastery (Ulan-Ude, 2003)*; *In the service of God and Yakut people: Orthodox conference (Yakutsk, 2005)*; *Russian America: III International Scientific Conference (Irkutsk, 2007)*; *Russian North in the history of Russian-American relations: International scientific conference dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and the USA (Vologda, 2010)*; *Saint Innocent (Veniaminov) – a missionary, researcher, enlightener: scientific-practical conference (Irkutsk, 2014)*; *The legacy of St. Innocent (Veniaminov) and Orthodox missionary activity in Siberia, the Far East and adjacent territories: scientific-practical conference (Irkutsk, 2015)*, etc.

Particular attention must be paid to monographic publications. In addition to scientific monographs⁴, this group of documents includes historical and biographical essays⁵, dissertation abstracts⁶, memoirs, letters⁷, encyclopedias and reference books⁸, bibliography⁹. A great deal of

4 Sergei Shirokov, *Valaam Monastery and the American Orthodox Mission: history and spiritual ties*. (Moscow, 1996); Clement (Kapalin), Metropolitan. *Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska until 1917* (Moscow: OLMA, 2009).

5 Lev Lebedev, “*Russian Columbus*”: *Apostolate of the Russian Orthodox Church in America (XVIII-XIX centuries)*. (Moscow: Russ. Chronograph, 2003); Alexey Ulanov, *From Alaska to New York. The role of Patriarch Tikhon and his legacy in the formation of Orthodoxy in America* (Moscow: URSS, Lenand, 2016); Antonin (Pokrovsky; archbishop). *Life path, personal memories and correspondence. Missionary service: historical essay* (Moscow: GLAS, 2007); Dan Pakulak, *Life and work of Innocent, Metropolitan of Moscow* (Tyumen: Rutra, 1994).

6 Yulia Egorova, *Relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian-American company in the context of the colonial policy of the Russian Empire in Alaska (1793-1867): diss. abstr.* (Vologda, 2016); German Kapalin, *The activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska in 1741-1867: diss. abstr.* (Moscow, 2010).

7 *St. Innocent: his writings, letters and stories of contemporaries*, (Pskov, 2007).

8 Irina Yustus, (ed.) *Missionary Orthodox education: encyclopedia* (Ulyanovsk: MDC Publ. House, 2008); Yury Yakutin (ed.) *Shrines of Russia: a reference book* (Moscow, 2011).

9 *St. Innocent (Veniaminov), Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna, apostle of the peoples of Siberia and America: a bibliographic guide* (Novosibirsk, 1997).

monographic publications are dedicated to St. Innocent (Veniaminov) as a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russian America¹⁰.

The thematic structure of the IA is reflected in Fig. 3, which shows that almost half (47%) of DB Scientific Sibirika documents describe the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church clergy in Russian America. Among them, Saint Innocent (about 90 works) occupies a special place. 29% of works cover issues of the spiritual life of Russian America, and the role of the Orthodox Mission in it. 18% of publications describe the Orthodox Church missionary activities, and the indigenous population christianization in Russian America. 6% of documents related to the educational work of the American Orthodox Mission, creating Orthodox schools and seminaries in the region.

The papers of DB WoS mainly describe the missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church and the role of individual clergy in it.

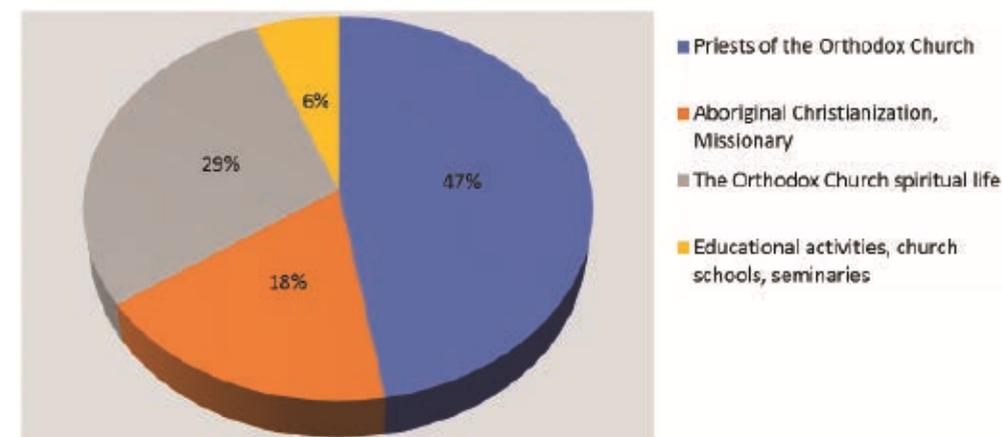


Fig. 3. Thematic structure of documents in DB “Scientific Sibirika”

DB „Scientific Sibirika“ includes materials on the activities of church representatives in Russian America: Metropolitan Gedeon of Stavropol and Baku, Metropolitan Nestor (Anisimov), Metropolitan Filaret, Archbishop Vladimir (Sokolovsky), Archimandrite Joasaph (Holocausti), Archimandrite Seraphim (Vinokurov), Hieromonk Makarii, Abbot Militov, Herman of Alaska, Saint Innocent (Veniaminov). It should be noted that I.E. Veniaminov’s activity in Alaska and his works are rather well reflected in printed works, as it was mentioned above, while it couldn’t be said about other representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church. The missionary activities of Metropolitan Nestor, Reverend Herman of Alaska and other prominent figures of the Russian Orthodox Church still await reflection and coverage in writings of church historians.

10 Maxim (Ryzhov), hegumen, *Russian people. Apostle of the Northern Peoples St. Innocent, Metropolitan of Moscow* (Moscow: Moscow, 2012); Victoria Tukish, *Pedagogical heritage of Metropolitan Innocent (Veniaminov)* (Magadan: New Printing, 2009); Igor Kurlandsky, *Innokenty (Veniaminov) - Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna*. (Moscow: IRI RAN, 2002); *Travels and exploits of St. Innocent, Metropolitan of Moscow, Apostle of America and Siberia* (Moscow: Danilov Evangelist, 1999).

Conclusion

Thus, the paper presents a scientometric analysis of IAs selected from the DBs WoS and Scientific Sibirika. It characterizes their temporal, linguistic, species, and thematic structures. It should be noted that access to the full texts of DB WoS is carried out based on a license agreement, all DBs of SPSL SB RAS' own generation, including Scientific Sibirika, are free for the Internet users on the library website (<http://www.spsl.nsc.ru>), options "Catalogs and Databases" - "Bibliographic Databases" - "Scientific Sibirika". The library resources allow creating a problem-oriented full-text database dedicated to the activities of the Orthodox Church in Siberia, the Far East. Search filters and the systematization of documents in both DCs makes it easy to find relevant documents on a topic that can form the basis for further research, as bibliographic materials can be obtained from any computer. Full texts of publications from WoS are possible either for a fee, or on a license agreement (except for Open Access publications). Regional materials from DB Scientific Sibirika by SPSL SB RAS are free, available on the library website www.spsl.nsc.ru (options „Catalogs and Databases“ → „Bibliographic Databases“ → „Scholar Sibirica“), where all e-documents are provided with hyperlinks from a bibliographic record to a paper full, publications with DOI provide a link to the publisher's website or to the work itself. All printed documents are stored in the library, a user can order a free full-text cope of any document on the library homepage (option "On-line order of e-article").

So, the analysis of the PD showed that the issue of investigating the history of missionary activity in Alaska is interesting for historians and ministers of the church. These studies are waiting to develop:

- identifying new documents on the activities of individual representatives of Orthodoxy in Alaska, highlighting their great mission;
- comprehending the role and activity of the Kamchatka diocese in forming the Russian spiritual mission in Russian America.

The existing „white spots“ in the history of Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska await further research. Despite the existing interstate borders, the problem should be solved through scientific collaboration of Russian and American historians and clergy. The starting point for further research is exchange and analysis of accumulated information resources on the topic represented in this work.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The mentioned author significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, the author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY AND IDEOLOGICAL ISLAM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALI SHARIATI

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Abstract

Background: The present article is an attempt at clarifying the concept of Ideological Islam in its theoretical and practical respects in the philosophy and ideas of the contemporary Islamic thinker, Ali Shariati. To that end, the main argument is concerned with how Shariati has actually analyzed and juxtaposed different conceptions and perceptions of Islamic thought and how he has distinguished the concept of Ideological Islam in terms of its effects on and embodiments in the Shiite Muslim society. According to the traditional and common teachings of Islam in the time of its emergence, the most prominent responsibility prescribed for a human being (a Muslim) was to carry out religious tasks and say prayers, and not to deal with social and political issues. That is, it was supposed that religion required that such a person stay away from social and political issues. The great contemporary thinker, Ali Shariati, however, proposed that the true and original Islam was basically an ideological religion based on social and political approaches. He took the example of Islamic revolutionary forces against the Shah of Iran to conclude that Iranian nationalist and Marxist parties were not able to demolish the tyranny of monarchy in Iran, while massive populations of people who believed in Islam would finally be able to overthrow the royal tyranny through a developing and mobilizing religion which was ideological and active not just a mere form of worship and prayer-saying practice.

Conclusion: The article's conclusion suggests considering new and beneficial research, while at the same time very effective scientific discourse on the beneficial philosophy and ideas of contemporary Islamic thinker Ali Shariati.

Keywords: ideological Islam; Alawite Shiite and Safavid Shiite; religious mobilization; monotheistic system

Introduction

Based on the social percepts proposed by Islam, every individual has a responsibility in the society based on which they are supposed to pursue and establish justice and freedom in their personal and social affairs. Relying on such percepts, the famous contemporary Iranian thinker and philosopher, Ali Shariati (1933-1977), believed that any real attempt for establishing justice and freedom is possible only through the application of a monotheistic religious system, because justice and freedom do not coexist in other religious systems worldwide. For further justifying his position, Shariati referred to the existence of two types of Islam: 1) Islam as a set of traditions and

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cultures and 2) Islam as the liberation ideology of deprived masses.¹² In fact, he tried to formulate a form of ideological Islam which worked on the bases of social formations and through the forces of the masses who sought liberation from the tyranny of the oppressors. The present article, thus, aims at tracing the idea of ideological Islam in the theories and philosophy of Ali Shariati as an innovative thinker and intellectual who was one of the key formulators of this concept in the time unrest in contemporary Iran. It also, explores the concept of Ideological Islam in its different aspects and how it is different from the traditional form of Islam preached by the oppressive dynasties. To that end, the discussion concerns the concept itself as a special ideology, the role of the intellectuals in the formation and spreading it and the role of Alawite Shiite as the appropriate ground for the development of it.

The concept of Ideological Islam

Definition of ideology: In its general sense, *ideology* refers to human's view toward history, society, religion, politics, and culture. It also is defined to comprise all the beliefs, practices and behaviors of a people or community in a certain social context or temporal space. As some scholars such as Hossein Bashiriyeh rightly believe, ideologies surround countries and nations.¹³ This implies that ideologies can, and surely would, affect every aspect of human lives and affairs. They are present in every human practice and relationship. The type of dominant ideologies that in their effects and implications for the people's lives, seek liberation in a society or community well depends on the type of shortages that people might have suffered from in that society or context. For example, immoralities, oppressions, injustices, and abuses that workers were oppressed with in Capitalist systems caused Marx to develop the ideology of a classless system that was supposed to work on the basis of justice. Likewise, in centuries after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, for example, the type of autocratic kingdoms that came about encouraged the European philosophers to devise liberalism as a means for setting people free from the tyrannous kingdoms. In fact, with the impetus from the ideologies of liberation, human beings might resort to them to set themselves free from sufferings they are faced with. It is widely believed that every religion is also a sort of ideology and as such, it is a great and indispensable force in the life and being of the society. Islam, as one of the major monotheistic religions in the world, is not exempt from this idea. Based on the line of ideas we peruse here, we might generally divide the ideologies or worldviews into two general types: 1) Materialistic worldview and 2) Religious worldview. As a religious worldview, Islam is also an ideology which not only concerns the material life of human being on the earth; it also devotes a notable portion of its teachings and percepts to the hereafter and the psychological well-being of the people. Furthermore, from the very beginning of its emergence, Islam has also been presented as a political philosophy to be observed by the rulers of Islamic society. Relying on such quality of this religion, the contemporary Iranian scholar, Ali Shariati, has attempted at formulating the concept of Ideological Islam as a doctrine and as a great liberating force behind that revolutionary movements that have sought to overthrow the oppressive dynasties.

Ideology according to Shariati

In his discussion on ideology, Shariati also begins with and refers to human's role in the universe, and considers it of great value. Quoting from the Holy Quran, he states that human beings have such a high position in the universe that while creating them, God told the angels (when they

12 Malik Mohammad Tariq, "Ali Shariati's View of Islam Modernity". *Middle East Journal of Area Study Centre* Vol .VII., 2002.

13 H. Ahmadi, *Shariati in the World. Proceedings by foreign Researchers* (Tehran: SahamiEnteshar Company, 2004).

asked Him on His reasons for creating human beings) that “He was aware of things they were not aware of.”¹⁴ In religious worldviews, there exists a supernatural world that is beyond the tangible nature, God governs both the corporal and supernatural worlds, human is under His rule and has no authority of himself and whatever he has belongs to God, the Almighty. Wisdom is also a divine blessing that is best owed upon human beings. Next, according to Shariati, religion is a leader that guides human beings all through the way from the material world to the celestial one and from depression in everyday life and inferior material life to the world of light and heaven.¹⁵ In religious worldview, prominent among which is the Islamic one, also there is a strong link between wisdom and faith so that human beings cannot prosper with relying just on wisdom and disdaining faith, because it is believed that mere wisdom takes them away from morality and turns them into materialistic, selfish, profit-seeking, and seductive creatures. Likewise, mere faith, without wisdom, hand, leads human being to be a recluse in monastery or an austerity house and to stay away from social responsibilities. None of such stances are acceptable as they are extreme, defect and partial. In the school of Islam, however, wisdom and faith are like the two wings of a bird with which it flies through the skies to reach its perfection, and without any of which it fails in reaching anywhere.

From such well-formulated argument, Shariati goes on to maintain that monotheistic religions, particularly Islam and Shiite, are naturally dynamic and in contrast with many of the current ideological stances. His next natural propositions that such religions are also basically ideological which means they give individuals an ideology or way of life and thinking that guides them in their social, political, and cultural lives.¹⁶ In fact, we can say that Shariati’s ideological view toward religion begins at the point where he considers the history as the permanent battle scene between the right and the wrong. He states that considering dynamism in the nature of religion, if religion is often considered as a type of protest and a request for change which aims at eradicating poverty and achieving freedom and social justice, then it will have no conflict with ideology, and, this way, ideology can take up a religious dimension.¹⁷

Shariati introduced two types of religion: 1) Religion as a form of ideology, and 2) Religion as a social tradition, which is to some extent, mixed with social norms and practices. As a tradition, religion refers to a set of inherited ideas, feelings, imitations, relationships, social rituals, and practical provisions. This type of religion has a hereditary, conservative, and profit-seeking nature based on which human beings worship God as a means of avoiding the hell and embracing the heaven.

In his book *Alawite Shiite and Safavid Shiite*, Shariati argues that what the Safavid spread as Shiite was traditional Shiite comprising the three elements of nationality, monarchy, and Sufism. The reason for preaching such a traditional form of religious belief was that the

Safavid leaders wanted to preserve the religion and nationality of Iranian people against the invasion of the Ottoman Empire which preached Sunnism. The second type of religion, according to Shariati, is the one which is acts as an ideology. It is a type of religion that an individual, a social class, or a nation may select knowingly. Traditional religion, on the other hand, is not selected by anyone, but it is somewhat hereditary. The will that is exercised in selecting the ideological religion is the point that Shariati emphasizes in his discussion of the religious ideas as the point that gives the ideological religion priority. Therefore, in ideological religion, a human being selects his

14 Malik Mohammad Tariq, “Ali Shariati’s View of Islam Modernity”. *Middle East Journal of Area Study Centre* Vol .VII., 2002.

15 Malik Mohammad Tariq, “Ali Shariati’s View of Islam Modernity”. *Middle East Journal of Area Study Centre* Vol .VII., 2002.

16 H. Tavanayifard, *The Fourth view and its Spokesman: Ali Shariati*. Tehran: Chpakhsh Publication, 2000.

17 H. Tavanayifard, *The Fourth view and its Spokesman: Ali Shariati*. Tehran: Chpakhsh Publication, 2000.

religion not only knowingly, but also based on their current needs and in order to actualize part of the ideals that they seek. It naturally follows also that the vigilant individual might feel the political, economic, and social conditions of their time, and if they are not dissatisfied with abnormal social factors, they wish for a change.

Based on the above argument, the philosophical approaches of Shariati toward ideological religion looks into that ideology in search of a solution for the abnormalities and problems of the world and people’s lives. In actual practice, the argument works well with the cases of Third World countries that had been harassed by world powers or local monarchies. That is why Shariati believed in the need for a comprehensive revolution in the Third World countries including Iran. This is an idealistic revolution that would happen in political, economic, and cultural dimensions, demolish all forms of imperialism, and replace western domination with local, national, and religious cultures.¹⁸

The Effects of Ideological Islam

It should be noted that there were at least, two major discourses in Iran of Shariati’s time: 1) A discourse based on modernism which had its roots in the Constitutional Revolution Era, and sought the ideal society beyond the borders of the country, and 2) Ideological traditionalist discourse which attempt at reviving the Islamic society and particularly ideological Islam, i.e. Islam as a school.¹⁹ Ali Shariati’s philosophical outlook originated from the second discourse.

In his discussion of a political regime derived from the ideology of Islam, Shariati considers Imam Ali’s (AS) strategy as the most outstanding aspiration and regards that strategy as an ideal for human societies. Islam in Imam Ali’s political strategy is the one in which Zakat and justice are dealt with as the most important tasks of Muslim society right after prayer. It is an Islam far different from those of the Ottomans, Mu’awiyahs, Umayyads, and Abbasids whose ideologies and political systems were imperialist in nature. Ali’s (AS) Islam, however, is Islam of the poor people of the society and history. It is a grand ideological Islam in which Muslims are not restricted to carrying out religious practices and exempt from social participation.

Likewise, in his discussion of political Islam, Shariati consults the theories of Seyyed Jamal Asadabadi who did not believe in restricting Islam to the affairs of mosques and religious places. Here also, he introduced a socially and politically active and struggling Islam which can be considered the pioneer form of ideological Islam in the contemporary era. This school of ideological Islam, according to Shariati, actually tries to enhance an ideal human being; one that is dynamically developing and not just existing idly. This ideal human being is also a citizen, a social being that knows his /her direction and goals and struggles in that direction and toward those goals. This ideal human being or citizen lives in an ideal society in which a divine spirit is the dominating force, and the originality of material has no meaning²⁰, and this nation also attempts to establish and follow an Imamate system as its final political regime.

Such argument was not to remain as an abstract theory for Shariati whose actual aim was to fight all forms of tyranny and colonialism that had plagued Iranian nation for hundreds of years. He wisely proposed that the only way to fight these two ominous phenomena was for the majority of people to mobilize and fight against all forms of oppression. However, he well knew that

18 Ervand Ebrahimiyan, (1982). “Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution”. *MERIP (Middle East Research and Information Project) report*, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://merip.org/1982/01/ali-shariati-ideologue-of-the-iranian-revolution/>,

19 H. Ahmadi, *Shariati in the World. Proceedings by foreign Researchers* (Tehran: SahamiEnteshar Company, 2004).

20 Malik Mohammad Tariq, “Ali Shariati’s View of Islam Modernity”. *Middle East Journal of Area Study Centre* Vol .VII., 2002.

a strong, dynamic, real and, at the same time, modern ideology was needed for mobilizing the people and inspiring them into action. For that mobilizing force, he did not resort to the liberal and Marxist ideologies because he maintained that they do not lead to people's mobilization. It seemed natural enough because people did not have a deep ideological and intellectual link with such ideologies. Religion, however, was deemed to be able to play that role very well. Nevertheless, which religion, conservative or ideological? As was mentioned above, he believed that the conservative religion that sometimes even confirmed and reaffirmed the authority of the current governments in the history, could never play a positive role, while revolutionary and ideological religion can mobilize and lead people toward social and political revolution.

Regarding ideological Islam, Shariati continues as follows:

As far as Islam is proposed in a hereditary and irresponsive framework, as far as the relationships between the individual and God and between individual life and life in the other world matters, it, like any other belief, has no enemy and no one gets his right because it is not proposed as a power in time and is open to contradiction. Such Islamic paradigm is exactly like a country that does not have oil, gold, or rubber resources; therefore, it is sure to be safe from colonialism and the world will be a peaceful place for it. Whoever comes, whatever happens, and whoever is in power in it, a true Islamic political system will always be respected, but why? Because it is a power that certainly causes no harm to any other power, but it will have advantages up to 95% to all. At least, it is used to provide for people, and this is a role that is useful for any power with any form or ideology. However, Islam requires a force to get out of its traditional solid shell, and release itself from its individual relationship, moral and internal, mental and personal limits and turn into a wave, an invitation, or a sort of responsibility mission, or else a force for enhancing humans and attracting the new generations. If it is proposed in the middle of the time and place, however, it will become dangerous. *Umma al-wosta*²¹ means a group that is proposed in the middle of time, not a nation that is located in the geometrical and mechanical center with equal distances from each side²²

Shariati states that ideological Islam leads social forces to play their role based on a motivation that takes its lead from Islam. This ideological Islam is the force that leads the

Muslim away from his/her alter, school, and chamber to the middle of the social scene, the alleys and streets, and engages him in thoughts and acts from within time and scene. As a result of the consciousness that the individuals may gain out of this ideology, they hold up social positions and come to know their friends and enemies. Their knowledge or awareness, however, is based on the guidance that religion has bestowed upon them. Such a conscious citizen, therefore, fights and resists the oppression of the ruling class, their ideas evolve as they engage in hazards and reactionary forces they may even bring about his death or help them conquer the oppressor.²³

Shariati was also well aware of the problems that such form of ideology is faced with. Thus, he believed that this ideological and dynamic Islam is in danger in two fronts; one is domestic conservative reactionary powers and the other is foreign imperialism. And in the face of these domineering dangers, a Muslim human has two responsibilities: obtaining self-awareness and self-construction in order to move toward an ideal monotheistic society. In Shariati's opinion, this Islamic ideology causes a revolution in both the individual and the society and he takes the example of Jundubibn Junādahibn Sufian who was turned into Abu Dhar al-Ghifari, and the case

21 literally, the middle nations.

22 Ali Sharaiti, *Worldview and Ideology*. Collection 23. (Tehran: Enteshar Corporation, 2006).

23 Ali Sharaiti, *Worldview and Ideology*. Collection 23. (Tehran: Enteshar Corporation, 2006).

of sixth Century Arabia that was in political and social isolation, but was turned into the center of political, social, and religious changes which could mobilize the world as source of great changes in the future.²⁴

The Role of the Intellectual

As to the dynamic and interactive nature of it, Shariati believes that Islamic liberating ideology can be effective when the society and masses of people mobilize and join it, and there is the turn for the religious scholars and thinkers to inform people on the link between these two. Such a responsible thinker is the one who knows and has studied the ideologies of their time, but are not fascinated by or assimilated into them. Such a thinker does not imitate, but derives. Even if they might rely on their old and traditional origins, their actions are informed and aimed at obtaining a grand new goal.²⁵ In fact, Shariati believes that the ideal Islamic ideology should be explained by responsible and informed scholars and provided to people, so that they are encouraged to move toward the ideal monotheistic society.

In more detailed discussion, Shariati suggests that the intellectual's duty is to awaken the conscience of the community, make people self-aware, interpret and analyze the current social conditions both religiously and ideologically for them, determine ideals and policies, include realities in the norms of moral, cultural, and social life, inform people and extract the written spiritual and intellectual sources from the history and culture of the nation, and finally teach policy and ideology to people.²⁶

Alawite Shiite as Ideological Islam

Shariati believes that in the field of ideological Islam, Alawite Shiite is the only religion that claims to be ideological, and states that: "Islam was divided into two factions from the very beginning: A faction that inclined toward right and began with Abu Bakr and Omar and reached its peak in Othman, then it took the form of Bani Umayyad and Bani Abbas dynasties and the traditional class system. But revolutionary Islam started with Ali and remained revolutionary for a thousand years, and took are actionary form in the Safavid era Shariati believed that the true ideological Islam was turned into a static.²⁷ Islamic state in the 15th Century by the Safavids. Safavid government attempted to propose a localized Iranian Islam which included the three components of monarchy, nationality, and Sufism. Further, he concluded that the Safavid took out the ideological spirit from Shiite. In tangible contrast to the Safavid Shiite which he carefully analyzed, Shariati introduced Alawite Shiite (originating from Imam Ali's discourse) which he defined as the Shiite of continuous struggle and resistance against oppression, tyranny, and exploitation. In short, he believed that true Islam is Alawite Shiite. As a prime example of the force and effect of Alawite Shiite, he refers to the case of Imam Hussein's outbreak against the tyranny of Yazid and goes on to explained that the red flag raised on the dome of Imam Hussein's (AS) shrine indicates the distinction between the right and the wrong which has continued and will continue until the complete demolition of the wrong. Shariati proposed *being ideological* as the main distinctive feature of Alawite Shiite, and in defining ideological religion, he goes on to explain: "Religion as an ideology is a belief that is chosen knowingly and based on the current needs and norms in

24 Ali Sharaiti, *Revolution and Us*. Collection 5. (Tehran: Elham Publication, 2005).

25 Ali Sharaiti, *Revolution and Us*. Collection 5. (Tehran: Elham Publication, 2005).

26 Ali Sharaiti, *Revolution and Us*. Collection 5. (Tehran: Elham Publication, 2005).

27 Ali Sharaiti, *Worldview and Ideology*. Collection 23. (Tehran: Enteshar Corporation, 2010).

order to actualize the ideals which the individual, group, or society always seeks in order to reach greater ideals.²⁸ Then he explains the conditions of a society that chooses ideological religion:

Therefore, the individual feels their own class, political, economic, and social status; they are dissatisfied, suffer, and are aware of abnormal factors; they are critical of the current conditions and hope for change. Then as the ideology is proposed, and they are placed in its path, they find solution for the current abnormalities. It is a solution to change the current conditions of which they are critical, and they find the mottos of that ideology in agreement with their own ideals. Afterwards, they select the ideology which, in this case, is equal to the religion.²⁹

Permanence of Ideology

Shariati believes that a true ideology does not become obsolete with passage of time and changes that are wrought through the society's conditions, because there is a need for the liberating ideology in human nature and being. Therefore, ideology lasts as long as there are human beings and societies to be held. Also of importance is the fact that an ideology has some stable features that do not change with the passage of time. The spirit of justice and struggle against oppression never become obsolete in such an ideology. He states that ideologies would certainly undergo changes, but they continue to be active and effective as ever, i.e. they change with evolution of humans that means that the stable components of ideologies remain the same, but some secondary elements change and evolve. The stable components of ideologies have their roots in stable ideals and goals of human beings, whose stability originates from its existential stability.³⁰

In justifying this issue, Shariati states that for an ideology to continue, it needs true social forces that are stable and loyal to it, and in Islam, it is the poor people and classes that stay stable in supporting its ideology. He believed that Islamic and social scholars, thinkers, intellectuals, and elites should try to revive the ideological aspect of religion whose revival means the revival of society. In his opinion, what leads to creation of a civilization and culture is ideology, and the continued movement of the society depends on consistency of the ideology. He believed that it was ideology, Islamic ideology that led to emergence of Ibn Sina, Ferdowsi, Razi, Ibn al-Haytham, and other great thinkers.³¹ He also believed that in Iran, it was Islam that gave birth to Ferdowsi, Sa'di, Rumi, and other great poets who have expressed Islamic mysticism in its truest sense.

Conclusion

The present discussion has explored the concept of Ideological Islam and its special features in the philosophy and thought of Ali Shariati. In general, by differentiating traditional Islam from ideological Islam, Ali Shariati wanted to both juxtapose the true concept of Islam which he considered to be ideological and to help develop the spirit of dynamic religion in his native country, Iran, in order to help people get rid of the tyranny of monarchy and move toward an ideal society. For him, such a movement was based on two factors: First, informing the people by the religious scholars and intellectuals, and second, removing non-original and superstitious remnants from the people's ideas of religion. He consulted the strategies and teachings of such great religious leaders as Imam Ali, as the origin of Alawite Shiite, to justify that the true form of Islam is ideologically a liberating force that is mostly supported and enhanced by the masses and common people. He sought the true mobilizing force of ideological Islam in the Shiite Islam

28 Ali Sharaiti, *Worldview and Ideology*. Collection 23. (Tehran: Enteshar Corporation, 2010).

29 Ali Sharaiti, *Worldview and Ideology*. Collection 23. (Tehran: Enteshar Corporation, 2010).

30 Ali Sharaiti, *Worldview and Ideology*. Collection 23. (Tehran: Enteshar Corporation, 2010).

31 Ali Sharaiti, *Worldview and Ideology*. Collection 23. (Tehran: Enteshar Corporation, 2010).

and considered the national Shiite of the Safavid era as a false one which took the individual out of the social scene into isolation and passivity. In actual practice, Shariati was striving toward gaining a mobilizing force for helping people overthrow the tyranny of Pahlavi dynasty in Iran of his time. Finally, the thoughts and theories of Shariati and other religious scholars formed part of the force that led to Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, just two years after his premature death in England. Therefore, some call Shariati the teacher of Iran's revolution.³² The philosophy and ideas of contemporary Islamic thinker Ali Shariati are beneficial to such an extent that they may serve as the basis for new research at the scientific level, as well as at the level of very effective discourse in various scientific and professional fields.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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32 Enayat, H. "Political thought in the contemporary Islam". trans. Bahauddin Khoramshahi. (Tehran: Kharazmi Publication, 1993).

WEB CONTENT ON THE PHENOMENON OF REPETITION OF QURANIC STORIES AND THEIR ARTISTIC IMPACT - AN ANALYTICAL STUDY



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Abstract

Background: Availability Rules for Web Content are part of a succession of guidelines published by the WWW Association. This research aims to demonstrate the phenomenon of repetition in the Qur'anic stories and its artistic impact.

Methods: This research has adopted descriptive and analytical approach, which means describing the phenomenon in a precise description and then analyzing it with a technical analysis, and explaining its impact on highlighting and crystallizing the meaning.

Results: It has a meaning, especially in the methods of Quranic storytelling, and the importance of the research is highlighted in that it clarifies this phenomenon in great detail as one of the phenomena of the Arabic language, one of its original rules, and its technical impact, especially in the Qur'anic stories, and how it is not inserted into a verse and its Surahs, and it has a direct relationship with the intended meaning. It is closely linked to the Qur'anic Surahs in which the Qur'an story is mentioned. And one of the most important results of the research: that this phenomenon. One of the phenomena of the authentic Arabic language, and His wisdom, may He be glorified and exalted be He, wanted the Qur'an to be Arabic.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the article presents the results, which may form the basis for further new research with scientific benefits for various areas. The results also pave the way for varied scientific discourse and effective reflections in the respective fields. The article also introduces the following novelty/applications. In the Qur'an there is nothing in the language, on top of which is the phenomenon of repetition that repetition in scenes of Qur'anic storytelling was a necessity. The contexts of the verses, the difference in the angle of vision, and the different intended meaning of the narrative scene, so that it is repeated, and every time it adds a new meaning, the

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repetition of the story confirms the belief in the hearts of the followers, deters criminals, consoles the oppressed, gives hope to the faithful, and insists on any matter of repetition that establishes it in the souls and give him a strong warning.

Keywords: Web Contents. World Wide Web. The Internet. Quranic Stories. Phenomenon of Repetition.

Introduction

World Wide Web pages and websites are increasing steadily, and humans have become dependent on them as their primary source of information, and college and university students are not excluded; They use web resources and web pages to accomplish assignments and projects related to the learning process. Part of these sources are reliable, of quality and access to them with an unaffordable financial contribution for most of the students of science, and the available part of them, some of them are of quality, but difficult to distinguish between the huge number of unreliable sources; Therefore, providing the student with the efficiency of evaluating web resources and the content of their pages according to certain standards is a necessity to enhance the learning process.³⁴ By reviewing and exploring a number of relevant references and literature, five criteria were drawn, which are the authorship, accuracy, relevance, purpose and technical appearance of web pages.

The repetition of scenes of Qur'anic storytelling and its shots is a remarkable phenomenon, as it is repeated in different situations and many Surahs of the Holy Qur'an, and then its meaning and significance change according to the different contexts in which they are mentioned, and according to the different angle of vision, and this is a remarkable phenomenon in Qur'anic storytelling in general. And this phenomenon is a very clear distinguishing mark that distinguishes the Qur'anic storytelling from other human artistic stories, and this is one of the pictures of the graphic miracle of the Noble Qur'an. The recipient of the Qur'anic text with different meanings starkly contrasting, the recipient stands in front of these meanings, stunned by their exaggeration and magical beauty in terms of tightening systems, coherence of the narrative structure of repeated storytelling scenes, and at the same time from its semantic effect that is most suggestive.³⁵ And the technical impact, so the recipients of the Qur'anic text differ in the degree to which the semantic effect of the Qur'anic text is received. N other than other situations so that the intended meaning of Qur'anic storytelling becomes clear to him, and this phenomenon has not been paid by researchers commensurate with its importance in explaining the miracle of the Qur'an text, and then benefiting from this phenomenon in developing artistic and stylistic governing frameworks that can be used in developing this art (the art of storytelling) Especially since he is European by birth and origin.

Basic Principles and Rules for Web Content Availability

The Web Content Accessibility Rules 1.0 was published and became a recommendation by the World Wide Web Association late last century. Regarding the Web Content 2.0 rules was published and became a recommendation by the World Wide Web Consortium in 2008. A working draft for Web Content 2.0 rules was published by the World Wide Web Consortium

³⁴ Syarilla Iryani A. Saany, Elsayed M. S. S. Elawadi, Yasser M. Tarshany, M. Hafiz Yusoff, Yousef A. Baker El-Ebiary, Nur Hikmah Binti Ismail. "Utilizing the AR and Mobile Apps to Show the Rhetorical Miracle of the Fetal Growth Stages According Quran," *IJFGCN*, 13, no. 3 (2020): 1068–1081.

³⁵ Ibn Al-Atheer, *The Exemplary in the Literature of the Writer and Poet, Tahi El-Din Abdel-Hamid, The Modern Library* (Beirut, Lebanon, 1999 AD).

in 2001, the last version of the working draft was released in 2007. The nine years that it took to develop the draft is due to the diligent work and discussions in which people of all social strata from all over the world participated.³⁶

These basic principles of web content rules below are mostly based on the technologies and documents contained in the web content rules which contain explanations, strategies, and detailed examples.³⁷

- 1, Images: Use an alternate format to describe the function of each image, so that users who do not see the image at least recognize its content, such as users who are visually impaired or users who use devices with small screens or a slow web.
- 2, Image maps: Image maps should be used by the web browser (the client) only.
- 3, Multimedia (audio, image, movie, ...): You must submit a comment and provide written copies of any song, and written descriptions of any video.
- 4, Hypertext links, i.e. internet address: using meaningful text so it can be understood when read even without context. For example, avoid „click here.“
- 5, Organized page. Use structured and sequential headings (h1, h2, h3, etc.), menus, and consistent structure. CSS styling style sheets should be used wherever possible.
- 6, Maps and Diagrams: Use a summary (longdesc).
- 7, Scripts, Software, & Plugins: A foolproof alternative must be provided in the event that the software drivers are inaccessible or unsupported.
- 8, Spammers: Use the element without frameworks (noframes) and meaningful headings.
- 9, Tables: Make font reading possible. Provide a summary of the table. Use the table for the contents only and never use it for design
- 10, Check the work: Use the tools provided and check the validity of web pages, for example, web compliance manager.

Repetition in The Quranic Text

Repetition as a clear phenomenon of the Arabic language, and a stylistic structure of its many structures. The Arabic language knew it in its oldest texts that reached us through our ancestors through pre-Islamic poetry, pre-Islamic sermons and their prose, or what we received from its poetry and prose, then used by the Noble Qur'an and Hadith. And in all Arab speech, which is a common phenomenon between the sciences of grammar and rhetoric.

So repetition is the language: it is the source of the verb repetition or repetition, and the repetition: its source: he repeats it, repeats again, and repeats sympathy, and repeats it back, and repeats on the enemy it repeats, a man repeats and deceives, as well as the Persians, and the thing repeats: he repeats it over and over, and the ball: the time: And the plural of balls, and the repetition of the thing, including repetition.³⁸ Al-Zamakhshari mentioned a set of meanings associated with this word that he derived from the words of the Arabs, and they all revolve around

36 Yousef A. Baker El-Ebiary, Elsayed M. S. S. Elawadi, .M. Hafiz Yusoff, .Syarilla Iryani A. Saany, Yasser M. Tarshany, N. Jannah BintiAbdullah, "Mobile Application Utilizing 2D Animation to Learn Animals Stories in Quran in Multi Languages," IJFGCN 13, no. 3, (2020): 1082-1091.

37 Elsayed Mohamed Salem Elawadi, Zulazhan Ab. Halim, Najeeb Abbas Al-Sammaraie, Yousef Abubaker El-Ebiary, Bishwajeet Pandey, "Digitization of the Arabic Language Between Reality and Expectations", (IJRTE) 8, no. 2S3, (2019): 1151-1158.

38 Ahmed El-Sherbasi, *They Ask You About Religion and Life, Dar Al-Jeel* (Beirut: 4th Edition, 1980 AD).

one common general meaning, which is the repetition and repetition of that: "A repeated camel, which is that She exhales twice a day ... and it sounds like a rattle. „³⁹

As for repetition idiomatically: "It is the sign of the word echoing the meaning"⁴⁰, and Judge Al-Jarjani defined it: "It means bringing something over and over again"⁴¹, and Al-Suyuti said about it: "It is more powerful than affirmation and it is one of the advantages of eloquence."⁴² And Al-Jahiz said, "Repetition is not conscious, as long as it is for wisdom such as determining the meaning, or the speech of the stupid, or the negligent, just as the repetition of words is not an awareness unless it overcomes the need for absurdity."⁴³

The Noble Qur'an was revealed in the language of the Arabs, and then it was revealed to its Sunnah, meaning its rules and ruling frameworks, in it what is in it, and it was a high peak in eloquence for people whose only clear inheritance was, for they prostrated a reverent prostration for their statement, which they did not prostrate to their teeth, and as soon as it was revealed it drew the attention of ignorant Arabs to its excessive beauty and charm. A verse or a few verses were a reason for the belief of some Arabs, for their certainty that this is not from human words, due to their delicate sense and their unique linguistic and rhetorical taste.

So repeating words about one meaning in different verses similar to phrasing, meaning, eloquence, and eloquence of one of the secrets of the Qur'an. And observe it and not memorize from the books of God from the heart of anyone else."⁴⁴ Al-Zamakhshari comments in his scouting on this verse about the benefit of repeating it, saying: "Its use is for them to renew when hearing every news of the ancients an obduracy and exhortation, and to resume alerting and awakening, if they hear Urging them to do so and sending them to, and to knock the stick for them several times and to fall for them at times, lest they be overcome by forgetfulness and not be taken over by negligence." In another surah of the Qur'an, we find repetition clearly evident. In Surah Al-Rahman, the sentence was repeated (So what are the signs of your Lord lying) thirty-one times (31) The repetition here in Surat "Al-Rahman" has rhetorical benefits and contributes directly to crystallizing the intended meaning, as it is tantamount to reprimanding those who deny those who deny the countless blessings of God to his servants.

Was it not better for you that I did such-and-such with you, and it is better to repeat it because of the difference in what is decided by it."⁴⁵, and repetition confirms the intended meaning and establishes it in the mind of the recipient, namely, the innumerable blessings and blessings of God upon man, so the verse comes as a rebuking question for those who deny yes God, glory be to Him, is telling them where your minds are, for how do you deny these blessings that are clear

39 Al-Jahiz, *Al-Bayan and Al-Tabiyyin, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyya* (Beirut, Lebanon).

40 Jalal Al-Din Al-Suyuti, *Perfection in the Sciences of the Qur'an, under Muhammad Abu Al-Fadl Ibrahim* (Al-Asriyya Library, 1988 AD).

41 Al-Zarkashi, *The Evidence for the Sciences of the Qur'an, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyya* (Beirut, Lebanon, 1st Edition, 1988 AD, Part 3).

42 Al-Zamakhshari, *The Basis of Rhetoric* (1st Edition, Beirut, Lebanon, 2003 AD).

43 Abdel Hamid Jaida, *New Trends in Contemporary Arabic Poetry* (Nofal Foundation, Beirut, 1st Edition, 1980 AD).

44 Abd al-Salam Ahmad al-Ragheb, *The Function of the Artistic Image in the Holy Qur'an, Dar Faslat* (Aleppo, 1st Edition, 2001 AD).

45 Abd al-Karim al-Khatib, *The Qur'anic Stories in Spoken and Concept, House of Knowledge* (Beirut, Lebanon, 2nd Edition, 1975 AD).

and crystal clear, in addition to the fact that repeating this verse with equal weight gives a musical bell and a beautiful impact on the recipient's soul awakening his sense and places of faith in his heart, and giving his imagination the freedom to contemplate the blessings and blessings of God. This is all without feeling bored, because "the mind cannot accept regularly successive sounds without giving them a kind of grouping into units if the voices are not automatically organized into clear groups from the start"⁴⁶, and this miraculous and fascinating regularity is contained in the entire Qur'an text. We do not find a parallel in human creative texts. "The repetition in the Qur'an text has technical and psychological connotations indicating interest in a subject that is concerned, whether negative or positive, good or bad, beautiful or ugly, and this concern captures the human senses and faculties.

The repetition depicts the extent of the repetitive dominance, value and ability, and that each phrase in which a repeating word - within a scriptural stanza or in a Quranic verse - is a separating boundary for a specific psychological position, and it bears - that is, this repeated phrase - a certain emotional impulse, harmoniously in the rhythm of divided and equal music with its suffix and the previous one.⁴⁷, and repetition is an important means of the most powerful means of persuasion and influence, but it is necessary to diversify, because repeating the same thing without diversification may annoy the listener or the recipient. It is more effective in continuous suggestion because it avoids the listener or reader boredom and boredom and reminds him of the continuation of the goal, and deepens awareness in the meaning intended, and the repetition in the Qur'an text is a repetition that is called for by the context of the verses and is not intertwined with it and has a relationship with the meaning that is intended to strengthen it and confirm it in the recipient's soul, and urges him to make an insistence that makes it a bell to ring The ears have to wake up from negligence and forgetfulness, and repetition turns the repetitive thing into a firm belief in the souls of the recipient of repetition, and this is what is confirmed by the science of psychology and sociology. It is preserved and on top is the Holy Qur'an and at the heart of it are the Qur'an stories.

Repetition in Quranic Stories and Its Artistic Impact

The phenomenon of repetition is a remarkable phenomenon in the style of the Noble Qur'an - as it has been mentioned - and it is more apparent and clear in the scenes of the Qur'anic storytelling and its clips. You see the one story being repeated in many Surahs, such as the story of Adam, peace be upon him, the story of Noah, peace be upon him, the story of Ibrahim, peace be upon him and others The other stories, and the story of Moses, peace be upon him, are the most frequently mentioned stories in the Holy Qur'an, and this - as I said - is a remarkable phenomenon for the serious researcher to study it in order to reach beyond that repetition of rhetorical jokes, artistic effects and semantic features.

The Quranic style in its various contexts is limited to mentioning it On the facts that are consistent with the context of the meanings mentioned in the Surahs, and the Qur'an if he repeats an episode of his story, there is no doubt that he has mentioned something new in it that he did not mention before. He does not list the stories of the prophets as a date in which the chronological arrangement of the facts is taken into account, but rather he mentions them for what is in their events. He is through sermons, so he is limited to the facts of the story that fit the lesson

46 El-Qady El-Gorgany, *Definitions, Tahn Nasr El-Din Tunisi, Al-Quds Photography Company* (Cairo, 1st Edition, 2007).

47 Kamal Abu Deeb, *On the Rhythmic Structure of Arabic Poetry, Dar Al-Alam Al-Malayn* (Beirut, 2nd Edition, 1981 AD).

he wants to broadcast⁴⁸ and the Holy Qur'an did not come down to the Messenger and the noble Companions all at once, but his wisdom, glory be to Him, wanted him to descend an astrologer in twenty-three years, which is the life of the Messenger, may God bless him.

And peace be upon him among the honorable Companions, which is a divine Sunnah past in his creation, which is the year of graduation in order to facilitate the worshipers to memorize and learn, and he took the sermon and the lesson to warn them from the Sunnah of negligence and sharpen their hearts for renewing the sermon, and a copyist after abrogating them as an expression of them and a test of their insights, and the repetition of anecdotal scenes of one story. Its diversity is greatly required by the context because of its great role in highlighting the meaning, because the diversity of scenes and shots in the artistic image enriches the single meaning and confirms it in the minds, and makes it cling to hearts. And influence, and makes the Qur'anic image a united, coherent building and not separate parts.⁴⁹ And the narrative repetition in the Noble Qur'an has the splendor and majesty that makes you feel the highest meanings of the Qur'anic miracle." In it the splendor and majesty of the word is manifested so that no face can be seen in any language and in any form.

The pictures of the statement approach this face in its majesty, splendor and power.". The story of Adam, peace be upon him, has been repeated in many places of the Qur'an text, because Adam's story is an intensification of the story of all humanity, and it is the first teacher of humanity. The first building blocks of human civilization, the story was mentioned in seven surahs of the Holy Qur'an, namely: Al-A'raf, Al-Kahf, Al-Hijr, Al-Israa, Taha, and Al-Sa'a, all of which are Meccan, meaning you were revealed in Makkah, and Surat Al-Baqarah which is civil, and the repetition of Adam's story was the purpose. From it he set the first pillars of the rise of human civilization that will continue until the Hour of Resurrection, so I mentioned one time clarifying the position of man among creatures, commanding the angels to prostrate to him, and demonstrating the absolute obedience of the angels, and Satan's refusal to prostrate to Adam grew up.

The anecdotal scenes of the story of Adam, peace be upon him, were repeated and every time a concept of concepts was established, or a basis clarified from the foundations on which human life would be built, then we find another story from the stories mentioned in several areas of the Holy Quran, which is the story of Noah, peace be upon him As the first forerunner of God's messengers to the people of the earth at a time when they worshiped idols, and every time the story was repeated to show a strong link and a solid foundation of the foundations of prophet hood and the call to God Almighty, and the extent of the suffering suffered by the prophets, the shadow Our master Noah, peace be upon him, calls his people for a thousand years but fifty years, by all means and what is safe with him except a few, so the prophets and preachers do not despair of the result of their calling, then building the ship and the mockery of his people, so how the ship will go on dry land, they have not seen the flood yet, because it was Our fetus is still in the womb of the unseen, which is a categorical indication of the destiny of God that passes over the necks of the servants, then comes the final scene, the scene of the flood and the destruction of the unbelievers and the salvation of the believers to put an end to this disbelief and disobedience, then the story of Moses, peace be upon him, which is one of the most recurring stories in the Holy Qur'an.

48 Muhammad Zaghoul Salam, *The effect of the Qur'an on the development of Arab criticism, Dar Al Ma'arif* (Egypt, 2nd Edition, 1961 AD).

49 Nour al-Din Antar, *The Noble Qur'an and Literary Studies* (Directorate of Books and Publications, Damascus University, 1989 AD).

Its scenes are remarkable repeatedly, and I see that this abundance is to diversify the scenes and shots of this story - and God knows best with his will - because it deals with a serious issue that is one of the most dangerous issues in the life of mankind and its course on the right path or its deviation towards the abyss, which is the issue of tyranny and tyranny represented by Pharaoh, the symbol of the tyrant, and Haman The symbol of the submissive minister and the bad lining of the rulers, and Qarun the corrupt and tyrannical businessman who thought that what he obtained from livelihood was purely his effort and cleverness of his mind and then tyrannize and arrogance, and the submissive, submissive people, which tyrants underestimate, and the story deals with the Bani Esra Ail (the Jews) who have many global problems in the past and present, so the story scenes have been repeated because of the importance of the topics that deal with them, and the problems present in them that develop solutions for them and make all these phenomena living in front of humanity until the Day of Judgment.

These are just examples of repetition in the Qur'an story, and there are many stories that cannot be mentioned, and there is an urgent need for several serious studies that show what they are, and the semantic and artistic implications of this phenomenon.

Conclusion

All these findings may form the basis for further new research with scientific benefits for diverse areas. The results also open up diverse scientific discourse and effective reflections in the given fields:

- 1, Any web page must fulfill these conditions, otherwise it will be impossible for one or more groups of users (for example, poor eyesight, hearing impairments, or even users of small screen devices such as mobile phones) to access the web content.
- 2, Any webpage must fulfill these conditions, otherwise some groups will find it difficult to access web content.
- 3, Any webpage must fulfill these conditions, in order to make it easier for some groups to access web content.
- 4, The phenomenon of repetition is a common linguistic phenomenon between the sciences of grammar and rhetoric, and it is a phenomenon present in the Arabic language and in its various styles since the earliest eras of its use in pre-Islamic literature and its poetry and prose.
- 5, The phenomenon of repetition employed brilliantly in the Noble Qur'an, enriched the significance, influenced the artistic structure of the Qur'anic verses, and became a strong bond with the meanings of the Qur'anic Surahs in which they were mentioned.
- 6, The phenomenon of repetition was more prominent in the scenes of Quranic storytelling, and its shots, and the meanings differed according to the angle of view, and the context in which the narrative scene was stated.
- 7, The phenomenon of repetition of scenes of Quranic storytelling directly contributed to crystallizing the intended and intended meaning of the verse of the Holy Quran, and contributed to clarifying the miracle and uniqueness of the Holy Qur'an.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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- Al-Jahiz. *Al-Bayan and Al-Tabiyyin, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyya* Beirut, Lebanon.
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MISSION INTER GENTES AS A CONSEQUENCE OF MISSION AD GENTES? REFLECTIONS 55 YEARS AFTER THE DECREE ON MISSIONARY ACTIVITY OF VATICAN II AND LATER DEVELOPMENTS IN ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSIOLOGY*



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Abstract

Background: This article aims at reflection on the Ad Gentes Decree on Missionary Activity of Vatican II with the benefit of more than half a century's hindsight. First of all, it briefly reminds us about the document itself, the history of its creation, contents, and theological highlights. The second part of the article identifies some of the most significant changes and developments that happened during the decades following the Council. The most recent project of "mission *inter gentes*", as suggested by Jonatan Y. Tan, is introduced in the third section. And, finally, the concluding section attempts to answer the question of whether (or to what extent) the concept of mission among nations (*inter gentes*) is a consequence and creative continuation of how Vatican II understood mission to the nations (*ad gentes*).

Conclusion: The conclusion suggests that mission among nations (*inter gentes*) is closely linked to mission *ad gentes* because it represents a concrete way in which Christians can fulfil their missionary task. *Ad Gentes* remains an authoritative missionary document in the Roman Catholic Church but the need to go beyond this document is suggested based on explication of the *inter-gentes* missiological concept of Jonatan Y. Tan. Further detailed research of his work can be beneficial for both theoreticians and practitioners of Christian mission. One of the central outcomes of this article is that reflection on the missionary activity of the Church and its different concepts or projects may be relevant for researchers beyond the area of theology too, because they can study how it supports human freedom and social engagement, showing the strong potential of the Church to support functioning democratic society.

Introduction

In his outstanding reflection on missiology, published at the beginning of the final decade of the 20th Century, David Bosh splendidly described the emergence of Christendom in Europe and its implications Church mission:

"Emperor Theodosius's decrees of 380 (which demanded that all citizens of the Roman Empire be Christians) and 391 (which proscribed all non-Christian cults) inexorably paved the way for Pope Boniface's bull, Unam Sanctam (1302), which proclaimed that the Catho-

lic Church was the only institution guaranteeing salvation; for the Council of Florence (1442), which assigned to the everlasting fire of Hell everyone not attached to the Catholic Church.⁵²"

In line with such development of the Church's self-understanding,⁵³ mission was seen as the task of the Church to conquer souls for Christ and to establish His Church wherever it was possible. Thus, Bosh rightly observed two major problems for the Church to deal with when entering the era of modernity. These were⁵⁴: 1. The Church's relationship with "world views which offer this-worldly salvation", and 2. The Church's relationship to "other faiths". Even though a lot was done in this field during the last two centuries (in terms of theological reflection as well as praxis), these problems still call for the attention of theologians and practitioners of the mission of the Roman Catholic Church today as well as other Christian churches.

However, in recent times we have been able to see and reflect just how far from the unshakable certitudes of the past the Roman Catholic Church has progressed, when it put its own missionary task under scrutiny during Vatican II (1962-1965) once again. While some spoke about Vatican II being a council about the Church (*ad intra* as well as *ad extra*)⁵⁵, others emphasized its pastoral concern⁵⁶, and some declare that "mission or evangelization was really at the heart of everything that the Council was about⁵⁷." All three perspectives are certainly valid and mutually related but, for the purpose of this article, we will turn our focus on mission. This option, however, leaves space open for further research, which would bring under scrutiny all three aspects experts on Vatican II claim as being central for the Council (Church, Pastoral, Mission).

The Council's *Decree on Missionary Activity of the Church (Ad Gentes* – further abbreviated as AG) left behind most of the exclusivist positions, but clearly stated that mission and evangelization remain an essential part of the Church's own identity. Its intention was to set up a new direction for the future understanding of the mission of the Church. As John Mansford Prior rightly observed, AG "introduced a clear rupture with much of the Western mission theology and practice of colonial times⁵⁸", but, at the same time, the theological vision of the AG

52 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991). 474.

53 "Christianity was understood to be unique, exclusive, superior, definite, normative and absolute, the only religion which had the divine right to exist and extend itself." (Bosch, "Transforming Mission," 475).

54 Bosch, "Transforming Mission," 476-477.

55 It was Cardinal Léon-Josef Suenens, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels, who introduced these two famous plans for the Council (Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 33)

56 The pastoral concern of Vatican II was declared by Pope John XXIII himself, but that does not mean the Council was not doctrinal at all. (Thomas Hoebel, *Laity and Participation: A Theology of Being the Church* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006).70.)

57 Bevans, "Mission," 7.

58 John Mansford Prior, "New Daybreak in Mission: From Ad Gentes to Inter Gentes," in *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal (Vol. I)*, ed. Shaji George Kochuthara, 396. (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014).

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“was in continuity with Patristic theology and much of the mission outreach of the first millennium. Nonetheless, tension between “direct proclamation of the Good News” and “inter-faith dialogue” was not resolved on the council floor nor in the decree AG⁵⁹”

Even though AG was clearly a milestone in Roman Catholic understanding of mission, many questions still remained unresolved and that resulted in the dynamic development of mission and mission theology in the five and a half decades that have followed. The way of practising mission changed considerably but mission as such remains an ever-important topic for the Church and thus it is always worth reflecting upon (especially in terms of evangelization and/or new evangelization). For instance, Stephen Bevans reflects on the post-conciliar development thusly:

“Many things have changed in the fifty years since the end of the Council, perhaps most radically the fact that mission is performed much more as short-term commitments, more by laity, and more by women and men from traditional “mission lands” in the majority world. Mission looks very different today than it did in 1965 when Ad Gentes was formally promulgated. And yet there is continuity, all of which has its origin in the amazing event that was the Second Vatican Council.⁶⁰”

What developments took place in the mission and missionary efforts of the Roman Catholic Church in the decades after promulgating the AG decree? Is this document still inspirational and relevant for the Church’s mission today if contemporary mission looks very different than during the time of Vatican II, as we are informed by different missiologists from whom we used Stephen Bevans as an example above? Should we depart from AG already? And, if yes, in which direction should we go? These, and similar questions set up the agenda also for this text which aims to reflect on AG with the benefit of more than half a century’s hindsight, and also from the specific perspective of the largely post-secular context of Central/Eastern Europe.

Firstly, this article will briefly inform about the AG decree itself. The history of its creation, its contents, and theological highlights will be mentioned. In the second part, we will identify some of the most significant changes and developments that happened during the decades after Vatican II. The most recent project of “mission *inter gentes*”, as suggested for instance by Jonatan Y. Tan⁶¹, will be introduced in the third section. And, finally, the concluding section will

59 Prior, “New Daybreak in Mission,” 396.

60 Stephen B. Bevans, “Mission at the Second Vatican Council,” *New Theology Review* 25, no. 2, (2013):15.

61 As Malaysian theologian Jonathan Y. Tan notes, this term was used for the first time by “William R. Burrows in his response to Michael Amaladoss’ presentation entitled “Pluralism of Religions and the Proclamation of Jesus Christ in the Context of Asia” which he delivered at the 56th Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America (Jonathan Y. Tan, “Missio Inter Gentes; Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC),” *Mission Studies* 21, no. 1, (2004): 83).” Since then, the concept of mission as mission among nations seems to be already at home in diverse missiological debates both inside and outside Asia. To which, for instance, the International Theological Colloquium held in December 2014 in Münster (Germany) entitled “*Missio inter gentes. The Future of Christian Mission in Asia*” bears witness. See: https://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/fb2/d-praktischetheologie/missionswissenschaft/studienwoche/flyer_entwurf.pdf. Moreover, when Cardinal Fernando Filoni ended his mandate at the helm of the Dicastery of “Propaganda Fide” in January 2020, he gave an interview to Agenzia Fides – an information service of the Pontifical Mission Societies, where he said: “Today there is a need for a renewed proclamation of the Gospel around the world, not only in the traditional ‘mission territories’ but also in the continents of ancient evangelization. From the mission *ad gentes*, today is the time for the *inter gentes* mission. Every baptized person is a missionary. And if in the past the proclamation of the Gospel was the prerogative of priests and the reli-

attempt to answer the question of whether (or to what extent) the concept of mission among nations (*inter gentes*) is a consequence and creative continuation of how Vatican II understood mission to the nations (*ad gentes*).

Ad Gentes – revitalization of the Roman Catholic mission and missiology

It may be surprising that AG was the first document issued by an ecumenical council in history which was specifically dedicated to the notion of mission (BEVANS 2013: 9).⁶² It was also the last document approved by the Council fathers of Vatican II, and it garnered extraordinary support. The final version of AG gained 2394 votes, which were in favour (*placet*) of this document and only 5 were against (*non-placet*). The road to such a success for the final draft was not easy, though.

The first draft of the missionary agenda for the Council was prepared for the Ante-preparatory Commission (chaired by Cardinal Tardini) by the study group formed under the “*Propaganda Fide*” congregation led by its prefect Cardinal Agagianian, in the form of twenty-three propositions. All of them (except for only one) were found to be too legalistic and juridical⁶³ and received wide opposition. The main points of criticism were similar to those that resonated during the first session of the Council in 1962; it was predominantly about legalism and the triumphalist tone in most of the Council document’s drafts. In the case of the “document on mission” propositions, the weak theological background and little space given to Asian and African bishop’s suggestions and comments were also strongly criticized. Based on these disagreements, there were deep and fundamental tensions between those who were involved in preparation of the “drafts on mission”. These tensions were significant throughout the whole process of its preparation. A large group (mostly canon lawyers from the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith)

“was in favour only of an approach to mission that basically preserved the traditional territorial understanding of “missions”. The other, of a more theological bent, argued for a more inclusive understanding of mission as being of God’s overflowing, triune nature. The first group was also in favour of maintaining the status quo of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith (Propaganda Fide); the second group pushed strongly for the Congregation’s reform⁶⁴”

Different opinions, perspective tensions, as well as other external obstacles were collectively the reason why the first draft of the schema on mission remained at the level of the preparatory commission. The second draft (*De Missionibus*) was more successful but did not go through the Central preparatory commission. Thus, it was only a reworked second draft, reduced to a few propositions, that reached the actual council meeting but was rejected by

gious, today we note an extraordinary participation of the laity, both individually and as members of ecclesial movements and groups: among them - novelty aroused by the Holy Spirit - there are also married couples and families with children who fervently participate in the work of evangelization; this is a great reason for hope.” See: http://www.fides.org/en/news/67235-VATICAN_Cardinal_Filoni_s_farewell_from_Propaganda_Fide_It_is_time_for_inter_gentes_mission.

62 For detailed elaboration of the AG decree’s development and content see: Stephen B. Bevans, and Jeffrey Gros, *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009).

63 Bevans, and Gros, “Evangelization and Religious Freedom,” 10-11.

64 Bevans, and Gros, “Evangelization and Religious Freedom,” 9-10.

the bishops during discussion in the council aula.⁶⁵ The bishops called for a full schema for the document on mission. Meanwhile, the commission preparing this document co-opted new members from North America, Asia and Africa, an excellent missiologist Johannes Schütte was appointed as its vice-president, and outstanding theologians like Yves Congar and Joseph Ratzinger joined the commission too. A more adequate document started to take shape and slowly mature during the period from late 1963 till 1965. The final document was presented to the Council floor on 7th October 1965 as the “*Magna Carta*” for the Church’s missionary activity, according to Fr. Schütte⁶⁶ The schema was debated for a few days and finally it passed through a vote. 2070 council delegates were in favour of it and only 15 were against (Ibid). In just a few weeks, several comments and suggestions from numerous council fathers, made by way of discussion upon this last schema, were incorporated and the whole process was crowned by final promulgation of the AG decree on the missionary activity of the Church.

Let us now discuss briefly the content which came out like a gemstone from the diamond-cutting works of the Council. The AG “diamond” consists of six facets (chapters), except for its introduction and conclusion. It is not possible to discuss in detail the contents of such a complex document as AG but let us highlight a few major theological points. However, prior to that, there are three things which have to be noted before we approach the content of AG itself.

1. First, the final document (as compared to the schemas and propositions) shows clear evidence of a deep theological background.
2. Second, AG has to be read and interpreted in the context of other conciliar documents,⁶⁷ especially all dogmatic constitutions (LG, GS, SC and DV), since it applies their theology in the context of Christian mission.
3. Third, we must see AG in light of the knowledge of missiology developments of that time.

Missiology as an independent theological discipline originated only at the beginning of the 20th Century and soon it went on two different tracks, each represented by one of the major theological schools of that time – Münster in Germany and Leuven in Belgium. The German approach towards mission held the traditional conviction that the purpose of mission is salvation of souls. Therefore, people must be converted before they can be saved. *Conversio animarum* thus meant winning souls for Christ – winning the souls of people for the possibility of their salvation. Through conversion people become eligible for salvation.⁶⁸ Contrary to the “*Christocentric*” theology (represented by the Münster school), the Belgian school, with its centre in Leuven, held a different position. Their approach was based rather on “*ecclesiocentric*” theology. They insisted on the need to plant the Church (*plantatio ecclesiae*) in missionary countries and areas. In praxis it meant establishing ecclesial structures like dioceses and

65 Bevens, and Gros, “Evangelization and Religious Freedom,” 10.

66 Bevens, “Mission,” 10.

67 An inter-link between *Ad Gentes* and *Nostra Aetate* is obvious, for instance.

68 Here I recall the question which was placed in the movie “*Black Robe*” (1991) which tells the story of a Jesuit mission to indigenous tribes in the area of the Great Lakes in North America in the 17th Century. In one of the scenes, the main figure, French Jesuit missionary Father Laforge, asks his older and respectful missionary colleague: “*Father Jerome, don’t they have to understand our faith first, before they can accept the baptism?*” And his older brother in Christ responds: “*Understand? The lives of these savages are at stake and we are surely offering them a place in Heaven!*”

parishes; they were in favour of building schools and hospitals. Both models, obviously, have their strengths and weaknesses.

Asserting that “*missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root* (AG 6),” Vatican II’s fathers brought pre-conciliar theological schools into the higher theological synthesis. This pronouncement practically cleared the disagreement between the Münster and Leuven missiology schools concerning missionary strategies. Since then, it is no longer *either – or*, but both together in mutually fruitful synthesis. Ecclesiological concerns about planting the Church must be accompanied by soteriological concerns about sharing the good news of the Gospel with all nations, because mission in the perspective of AG appears theocentric above all. Thus, the mission of the Church is understood neither in a Christocentric, nor ecclesiocentric way, but in a theocentric perspective as primarily a “*missio Dei*”. This was most probably one of the greatest theological achievements of Vatican II with regards to the idea of mission.

It could be argued, however, that the notion of mission permeates throughout both the whole Old and New Testaments. The Prophets (e.g., Jeremiah 7, 25; Isaiah 6, 8) and Moses himself (Exodus 3, 15) knew that it was God who had sent them. Isaiah foresees events of the New Covenant when he says that God sends His “*anointed*” to

“bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn” (Isaiah 61, 1-2).

Much later, during his synagogue preaching, Jesus identified himself with this “*Yahweh’s anointed*” from the Prophet Isaiah (Luke 4, 16-30).⁶⁹ And, precisely in this sense, he also spoke to his disciples, when sending them out into the world (Mark 16, 15), into “*the midst of wolves*” (Matthew 10, 16; Luke 10, 3), and where “*he himself intended to go*” (Luke 10, 1). It is now apparent that Jesus’ mission in the world was the basis for the mission of the Apostles (and actually also of each of his disciples throughout the ages) into the world (John 17, 18). This is precisely what AG means by *Missio Ecclesiae* (mission of the Church), and this notion opens up the whole document.

The church is seen as a universal sacrament of salvation divinely given to all people and all nations (LG 48). This vocation is related to the Church’s catholicity and is rooted in obedience to her Founder’s mandate (AG 1), as for instance Cardinal Dulles points out very well:

*“The decree Ad Gentes teaches that missionary activity is an intrinsic demand of the Church’s own catholicity. Tending by her very nature to express her catholicity, she realizes herself by proclaiming God’s word to the nations and thereby contributes to the establishment of God’s kingdom everywhere”*⁷⁰

Based on this, the Church appears as missionary in principle, because it has Trinitarian roots (AG 2, LG 2). The mission of the Church is based on (and rooted in) the plan of the Father, who sent His Son (AG 3) and through Him also the Holy Spirit (AG 4), in order to work

69 See AG 3 for instance.

70 Avery Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), 6.

within history towards the completion of salvation for everyone – towards eschatological reality, when He “*himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all*” (1 Corinthians 15, 28). Therefore, the very source of mission theology according to AG is “*missio Dei*” – mission of God. In other words, it is not a particular missionary or missionaries, nor the church, but God Himself who carries out the primary task of mission. The command of Jesus from Matthew 28, 19, known as the “*great commission*”, is no longer taken as the very root for mission. This call is rather seen in light of creation, which was recognized by the Council as “*God’s first act of mission*”⁷¹, mission that springs directly from the “*fountain of love*” (AG 2).

Such a theological approach had a large, undisputable impact on missionary praxis and practices. Mission was no longer to be understood in territorial terms, but it was placed in the history of salvation, which was identified with the history of the world.

“Missionary activity is nothing other and nothing less than an epiphany, or a manifesting of God’s decree, and its in the world and in world history, during the course of which God, by means of mission, manifestly works out the history of salvation (AG 9).”

According to AG, mission may be also described as the movement of the whole of creation towards its creator and also as closely connected not only with God’s very nature, but with the nature of humanity at the same time, pointing towards Christ, who is both – the truth about deity and humanity. Christ as the origin of renewed humankind stands above all races and nations (AG 8). Further, AG uses the term “*Seeds of the word*” (lat. *semina Verbi*) (AG 11) derived from Justin Martyr’s concept of “*logoi spermatikoi*”⁷² in order to explain that Christ is somehow present, and the Holy Spirit works (in mysterious ways) in nations and cultures, even before the first missionaries came. Therefore, missionaries are called to adopt the spirit of humility, partnership and dialogue with indigenous people in particular cultures. In other words, they are called to live in full participation with the culture and particular community of people they live in. Or by the words of Ad Gentes:

“In order that they may be able to bear more fruitful witness to Christ, let them be joined to those men by esteem and love; let them acknowledge themselves to be members of the group of men among whom they live; let them share in cultural and social life by the various undertakings and enterprises of human living; let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows (AG 11).”

Since AG, mission is no longer seen as paternalistic heroism focused on conquering souls for Christ and the Church, nor as establishing Church structures and institutions visible and “*triumphant*”, but rather as spirit guided, Trinitarian-rooted participation of the Church in “*missio*

71 This aspect of revitalization in Christian mission is widely cited after the Council. For instance, Michael Amaladoss says: “*Mission is derived from the very nature of God’s self. God the Father sends the Son, and the Father and Son send the Spirit on mission. Further, God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - send the Church on mission into the world. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity replaces soteriology and ecclesiology as the source of reflection on mission (Michael Amaladoss, “The Trinity on Mission,” in Mission is a Must (ed. Frans Wijzen and Peter Nissen, 101. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002.).*”

72 Jonathan Y. Tan, “Mission as Witness and Proclamation,” *A Century of Catholic Mission. Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, (ed. Stephen B. Bevans, 175-182. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013). 177.

Dei”. Consequently, mission is no longer seen as a task for professionals among the clergy, but as a task for all people of God (AG 21). AG gives especially high credit to the “*lay apostolate*”, who is able to “*permeate the whole of society with the spirit of the Gospel (AG 15).*” Recognizing lay people as active agents of mission is linked to the wide recognition of local churches. The Universal Church left its Eurocentric exclusivity and paternalism and opted for a kind of modest decentralization.⁷³

These theological developments mirrored and encapsulated in AG led toward revitalization of mission and missiology within the context of the Roman Catholic Christian tradition. They opened the way to the new reflections on mission and caused a considerable shake-up of older missionary paradigms. In this light we may call AG a true milestone in understanding and practising mission of the (Roman Catholic) Church in history. But, as we indicated before, that was not the end of the story.

Post-conciliar developments

Today, it is widely agreed that Vatican II abounded with great optimism, which was, to a certain extent, in harmony with the social changes of the 1960s that had sparked such optimism. That period was marked with public (political) activism, the downfall of colonialism, the sexual revolution, technological advances, etc. Internationally, it seems, people looked on the bright side of life. It was a fresh breeze after the dark ages of World War II, the tough era of post-war reconstruction and the new division of the world. But, as is usually the case, after an optimistic era, there comes a time of crisis and disillusion again.

The Bishop of Portsmouth, Philip Egan, during his address at the symposium entitled “*A Sure Compass: The Documents of the Council*” held in September 2013 at St. John’s Seminary in Wonerh (England), diagnosed well the critical questions the theology of mission had to face immediately after the Council, and what impact it had on the theology of mission present in AG. Bishop Egan said:

*“Why be a missionary if God can save people of good will without explicit faith in Christ or the Church? Is Christianity one way or the one and only way to God? Has anyone the right to disturb another person’s belief-system? Should dialogue replace proclamation? How might the core Gospel be proposed without imposing Western forms? How far should indigenous elements be adopted to express and celebrate Christian faith? Subjected to profound questions in a rapidly evolving context, the shortcomings of Ad Gentes became apparent. Its vision of mission appeared cloudy and limited; it said little about justice and peace, economic development, the role of women or environmental concerns. Its grasp of the theological meaning and value of culture seemed naïve.”*⁷⁴

In line with bishop Egan’s words, we may assert that immediately after the Council ended, the Roman Catholic understanding of mission had to embark on a road from AG towards the future. Developing new concepts and searching for new paradigms became apparent. It is cer-

73 “*Particular traditions, together with the peculiar patrimony of each family of nations, illumined by the light of the Gospel, can then be taken up into Catholic unity. Finally, the young particular churches, adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion, saving always the primacy of Peter’s See, which presides over the entire assembly of charity*” (AG 22). The modest decentralization is perhaps most clearly seen in the teaching of Lumen Gentium on bishops’ collegiality (LG 22 and 23).

74 Philip Egan, “Ad Gentes and the New Evangelisation,” (2013), accessed May 23 2020, <http://www.wonerh.org/>

tain that the Church became aware of the variety of new aspects on mission, but at the same time other ambiguities and uncertainties occurred in some of the particular aspects of Christian mission. In other words: on the one hand, the Council debates were over, but on the other fresh debates (inspired by the Council) began. One of the most important issues was clarification of the Council's proclamation that the Church stands not outside, but rather inside the modern world. Thus, the central question with clear missiological implications was this: What does it mean to be present in the midst of the (modern) world? In the post-Conciliar development, the Church constantly pursued to maintain balance between being from this world and at the same time bearing witness to God's kingdom (not present but yet to come), which is *"not from this world, (...) it is not from here* (John 18, 36)." This is also a major paradigm for AG. In order to meet their mission, Jesus' disciples shall announce the good news of the Gospel everywhere in this world – they are called to evangelization. That requires full participation within the world and its structures, within particular cultures and local communities. But as AG holds, each missionary activity of the Church is nothing more and nothing less than participation in the great (historical) movement of *"missio Dei"*. This was perhaps the major reason why the Church abandoned its largely triumphalist and juridical approach to its missionary activities.

Another important theological achievement of the council was the fact that the Church started to understand its missionary task as a core principle of its own functioning. This involves bearing witness about the Triune One, who is the source and origin of everything – always and to everyone. Because, in Him all people who convulse in often difficult and furious currents of life can find refuge and hope. In the light of the Council's concept of mission, the missionary paradigm moved from mission having the task of implanting Christianity into "pagan" culture towards mission discovering Christ's presence everywhere, even in non-Christian cultures. Christians shall act as Jesus' disciples, always giving an account of the hope they draw from Christ, in whom they find assurance about the possibility of salvation for the whole of humankind (1. Peter 3, 15). And, perhaps thanks to this new self-understanding of the Church, the notion of evangelization came forward in the post-conciliar period. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975),⁷⁵ Pope Paul VI gives priority to this term over the term "mission". Henceforth, the term evangelization

*"would be used in the Church to encapsulate the new thinking, and the entire scope and purpose of all her missionary activities: to proclaim the Good News of Christ, to introduce people into discipleship, to unite all peoples in the communion of the Church, and through Christ and his Church to draw them into the life of the Trinity"*⁷⁶

Soon, evangelization became the key term. The Roman Catholic Church realized and newly perceived its "world-wideness", as well as notions like "unity in plurality" and "inclusion", which started to mark most of the post-conciliar missiological debates. Further evolution in understanding evangelization was accelerated by Pope John Paul II, who declared the last decade of the 20th Century to be the decade of evangelization and spiritual renewal. In 1990 he published the encyclical letter *"Redemptoris Missio"* (further abbreviated as RM), in which he asserted the permanent validity of mission to nations (RM 2) and offered a new Christocentric missiological focus based on the regno-centrism of EN (with focus on *"regnum Dei"* – mission as a matter of proclaiming God's kingdom) as well as on the Theo-centrism of AG (*missio Dei*). John Paul

75 Further abbreviated as EN.

76 Philip Egan, "Ad Gentes and the New Evangelisation," (2013), accessed May 23 2020, <http://www.wonersh.org/>

II wanted to emphasize the need to go beyond mere dialogue to actual proclamation of the gospel – evangelization. To evangelize means in the New Testament:

*"to proclaim with authority and power the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. The evangelist is one sent by Christ and endowed with corresponding charisma from the Holy Spirit. The preached word comes from God and arouses saving faith in those who believe it."*⁷⁷

According to Avery Dulles, we can speak about evangelization in two ways. In a narrow sense, it means simply the announcement, the message of Christianity to those who do not believe it yet. In a broad sense, evangelization means *"everything that brings human life and the world under the sway of God's word"*⁷⁸ For Cardinal Dulles, Vatican II (including AG) generally understands evangelization in the narrow sense (Ibid), but surely it opened up the way for its further interpretation, because AG clearly states that everyone in this world shall be evangelized. Among those who evangelize, AG gives primary responsibility for evangelization to Bishops (AG 29), sets up the task for priests (AG 39), touches upon the prominent role of church orders (AG 18) and, finally, based on the teachings of the Lumen Gentium⁷⁹ (especially LG 17 and LG 33), emphasizes also the importance of the laity in the complex process of evangelization and mission (AG 23 and AG 36). Thus, Church mission is chiefly a collaborative task for all its members – *"the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God* (AG 35)". This theological conviction surely helped to restore and re-discover the concept of the Church seen as a community of disciples in the post-conciliar decades.

One of the basic traits of evangelization is its personal character (AG 35). According to the late Popes (Paul VI, John Paul II), Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and current Pope Francis alike, all Christians are bearers of evangelization. It means an example of one's own life devoted to Christ in one way or another. Each truly Christian life should be a way of personal evangelization, a personal mission, a personal witness.⁸⁰ In relation to evangelization, some Christians have a special vocation. They are evangelists – announcers of the Word of God. But these are not only priests or catechists, but also theologians, writers, composers and other Christian artists, because they all through their work bear witness to the Christian message for the world. The concept of evangelization presented in AG, EN and in RM is always linked with verbal proclamation of the Gospel, which is coherently seen as its indispensable component and permanent priority of mission (RM 44). "Personal and individual faith in Jesus Christ naturally seeks its communal expression. This could be found within the believing community. By its very nature, Christianity always creates community – a community of disciples.

77 Dulles, "Evangelization," 1.

78 Dulles, "Evangelization," 5.

79 Further abbreviated as LG.

80 For instance, EN says on that matter: *"Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. (...) this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization. (...) All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way, they can be real evangelizers* (EN 21)." The same conviction is present also in RM: *"People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and most irreplaceable form of mission (...)* (RM 42)."

However, Jesus' message was given not only to the closed circle of initiated disciples, but since the very beginning it has been a transparent sign of salvation with universal dimensions. The community of disciples is always in close relation to the visible sign of God's universal offer of salvation. As such, it is referred to as announcing the eschatological kingdom of God, but at the same time it has to retain its visible mark through actual service to the whole of human society, so that people can see God's kingdom already present in this world. Such a twofold task for the Church understood as a community of disciples translates and materialises the foretaste of the Christian eschatological vision in the particular historic-geographical context. It shows by example how God and people can cooperate towards constant improvement of humanity through (and in) Jesus Christ, led by the Holy Spirit on the way to full communion with God. That is a clear sign, an example and message for all nations and people amongst whom, and with whom, Christians live and work. In this case we may speak about mission *inter gentes*. Such an account of mission presupposes ecclesiology based on the model of the Church as a community of disciples who have realized that it has never been closer to the gentiles than it is in contemporary times, thus their mission *ad gentes* takes the shape of mission *inter gentes*. This implies the paradigm shift in the Church's self-understanding from the Church which has the mission (*ad gentes*) towards the Church which is (or represents) the mission itself (*inter gentes*). But this suggestion requires a broader commentary.

Ad gentes or inter gentes?

Even though the development of Roman Catholic theological understanding of mission before, during and after Vatican II was intensive and marked by lots of achievements, the principal idea of mission was still "*missio ad gentes*" – mission to nations, to people. For instance, AG starts with the declaration that the Church "*strives ever to proclaim the Gospel to all men* (AG 1)." Ten years later, the apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI EN repeats the same sentence (EN 2), and Pope John Paul II (in line with AG 6, 23 and 27, and EN 18-20) says in RM:

"Missionary activity proper, namely the mission ad gentes, is directed to "peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ," "who are far from Christ," in whom the Church "has not yet taken root" and whose culture has not yet been influenced by the Gospel (RM 34)."

In this perspective, mission is about sending out missionaries to go among the gentiles. But who are these missionaries? And who are these gentiles today? After Vatican II, Catholic missionaries went once again to people, but they realized that they had already reached them. There is no longer anywhere else to go. The Church has reached all territories, all cultures and all nations, so it was never closer to gentiles than today, in a situation when Christians live among them. They live among people in a world marked by enormous plurality, including a religious one.

Approximately during the last two or three decades some theologians started to question the validity of the "*ad gentes*" approach to Christian mission and asked for a perspective more apt for the contemporary situation. As, for instance, Jonathan Y. Tan critiques this approach chiefly for its inability to handle religious pluralism and unduly Eurocentrism. His critique may be summarized as follows:

"Generally speaking, the missio ad gentes approach is uncomfortable with religious pluralism, viewing it as a significant challenge to the distinctiveness of the Christian gospel. This is because the missio ad gentes approach is rooted in a perspective of Christianity that is (or has for a long time been) dominant in the European socio-cultural and political scene, although it now faces stiff competition from secularism and postmodernism⁸¹."

Another criticism of the mission "ad gentes" approach comes from the Jesuit theologian Donal Dorr, who claims that mission to nations

"suggests that mission is a one-way activity, taking little or no account of the prior presence and activity of God in the world – in the great world religions, in the primal religions and in the secular world⁸²."

Following this critique, an alternative perspective (or perhaps better a concept) expressed by a neologistic label "*missio inter gentes*" was suggested. It originated in Asia, a continent presumably marked more than others by enormous diversity and (religious) pluralism. To this end, Asian theologians wanted to break free from discredited missionary concepts of the past⁸³. A concept of mission adopting the perspective of being among nations comes with a radically holistic paradigm giving priority to notions like life-witness and dialogue over the explicit proclamation of the Gospel⁸⁴. Solidarity, partnership and companionship with people are emphasized merits of the "*missio inter gentes*" approach to the missionary activity of the Church. Instead of confrontation or exclusivist triumphalism, notions such as integrity, dignity, compassion, solidarity and sensitivity are offered. Tan speaks of the Asian reverential sense of mystery and transcendence which is the ground soil for planting the Christian gospel message. He quotes the final statement of the 7th FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) Plenary Assembly in Sam Phran (Thailand) in 2000, which, according to him, is the clearest articulation of what *missio inter gentes* means in the Asian context: "*the Church has to be the embodiment of the Asian vision and values of life, especially interiority, harmony, a holistic and inclusive approach to every area of life⁸⁵."*

Consequently, we may say that if we replace the word Asian with European, African, etc., we can see the concept could be valid everywhere. "*Missio inter gentes*" may be easily generalized and stretched to the situation of the entire world including Europe and North America. It is not just Asia which is marked by the situation of an enormous pluralism of religions, cultures and worldviews, as well as norms and values. In the (postmodern) time of globalization the whole world may take Asia's approach to mission as inspiration. While some

"may consider the diversity and plurality of postmodern Europe and North America as challenges that the Church has to confront and overcome, for Asian bishops, the question is rather how the Asian local churches could find themselves at home with such diversity and plurality⁸⁶."

81 Tan, "Missio Inter Gentes," 88.

82 Donal Dorr, *Mission in Today's World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000). 189.

83 Tan, "Missio Inter Gentes," 83.

84 Tan, "Missio Inter Gentes," 89.

85 Tan, "Missio Inter Gentes," 87.

86 Tan, "Missio Inter Gentes," 70.

And this is precisely where we in the context of Central and Eastern Europe may get inspired by our brothers and sisters in Asia. Therefore, the important question comes afore: How to perform missionary work in the context of intensive pluralism? First of all, mission among people (*inter gentes*) requires quite a radical focus on contextualization of all missionary activities. For that matter, it is necessary to reject any exclusivist interpretation of God's presence within the history of salvation. According to this model, if missionaries practised Christian mission among people, they would leave behind the idea of bringing God where he was not present before, but rather focus on finding his traces in whichever context they appear. Consequently, this vision of mission puts aside the sake of the Church's growth in terms of numbers (number of converts) and brings a qualitative approach to the fore – seeking transformation and healing of everything that is broken.

It is also characteristic to the concept of mission among nations that it does not begin from above, but rather from below, or even better from within. It does not start from abstract, universalistic theological concepts and categories (TAN 2004: 91), but it is very attentive to the life experiences of particular people. *Missio inter gentes* understands itself in terms of "building the Kingdom of God" (*regnum Dei*), and thus all Christians are called by God to bear witness to it, while living among the nations within this world. They are called to become the salt of the Earth (Matthew 5, 13) and the light of the world (Matthew 5, 14) in order to give glory to their Father in Heaven (Matthew 5, 16). Only then may they become relatively fearless towards differentness, to strangers and to all the dangers of life in this world. For it is Jesus who says (to Jairus, the leader of the synagogue): "Do not fear; only believe (Mark 5, 36)." And it is also Isaiah who pronounces the word of God: "do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand" (Isaiah 41, 10). These are the words we should recall when we try to revitalize our missionary efforts. All Christians including Church leaders should be reminded that today, as it was at that time in the Country of Gerasenes, Jesus says to all those who fear about the Church, its future and mission, exactly what he said to Jairus who feared for the life of his daughter: "Do not fear; only believe." And even when sometimes we think the Church is dying or perhaps has died already⁸⁷, it is Jesus again who says: "Little girl, get up (Mark 5, 41)!" The *missio inter gentes* is a journey of giving back the gift of the Gospel. Giving it to all among whom and with whom we live and work, not only by direct proclamation but also and according to this missionary perspective even primarily by our personal life witness.

Conclusion

Now we need to come back to the central question of this article. Is it possible to understand the concept of mission *inter gentes* as a consequence of mission *ad gentes*? The answer this article attempts to argue for is twofold: yes and no. If we look at the first possibility to answer our question, we can see that the concept of mission among nations (*inter gentes*) emerged in the Asian context of religious diversity and plurality of approaches to reality and rightly found some weaknesses of the mission *ad gentes* concept. It was developed as a contextual reaction to a situation, where the latter missionary concept appeared problematic, outdated and partly also inappropriate. In that sense, mission *inter gentes* may be perceived as a consequence of mission *ad gentes* as a concrete attempt to overcome its problematic moments towards a more contextual and up-to-date mode of Christian mission. However, it would be a mistake to claim

87 John P. Bradbury, "Towards a theology of the death of the Church," *Theology* 117, no. 4, (2014): 249-255.

that an *inter gentes* aspect was missing in older concepts of mission. As, for instance, AG 36 provides evidence for such a claim:

"(...) all sons of the Church should have a lively awareness of their responsibility to the world; they should foster in themselves a truly catholic spirit; they should spend their forces in the work of evangelization. And yet, let everyone know that their first and most important obligation for the spreading of the Faith is this: to lead a profoundly Christian life. For their fervour in the service of God and their charity toward others will cause a new spiritual wind to blow for the whole Church, which will then appear as a sign lifted up among the nations (cf. Is. 11:12), "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14) and "the salt of the Earth" (Matt. 5:13) (AG 36)."

That truly sounds like a clear emphasis on mission among nations. But, as Tan reminds us, even though we may find an *inter gentes* aspect in AG, the overall concept of this document still maintains that proclaiming the Gospel has priority over life-witness in the missionary activity of the Church.

"For proponents of mission *ad gentes*, although life-witness and dialogue are important dimensions of the task of mission, these cannot take precedence over verbal, explicit proclamation as the primary task of mission."⁸⁸

It seems that by emphasizing dialogue and life-witness over explicit proclamation, the mission *inter gentes* concept established an alternative to the mission *ad gentes* and as such appears as a consequence of the "earlier approach". This aspect, however, deserves further investigation and calls for appropriate academic debate which is beyond the possibilities of this text.

But there is still the second possible answer to the pivotal question of this article. And that is no. The mission *inter gentes* concept is not a direct consequence of the "earlier" concept of mission *ad gentes* because both concepts are rather interlinked and differ from one another only in emphasising central aspects over others. Now, let's formulate an argument for such a claim. In one of his essays on mission, Michael Amaladoss holds that, in the perspective of AG, the mission of individual disciples as well as the whole community of disciples (mission of the Church) is "at the service of the mission of God."⁸⁹ That means, it is rooted in the Trinity and thus it must include a certain plurality of ways, since missions of the Persons in Trinity are different and yet they are the same. And it may well be right here, in understanding mission as *missio Dei* in a Trinitarian way, that the theological solution to the problem of prioritizing proclamation over life-witness in the missionary task of the Church (and vice versa) is to be found.

The *missio Dei* concept interpreted through a Trinitarian approach says that it is God the Father who is the very source of each mission, because He sends his Son and, furthermore, they both together send the Holy Spirit on mission, and, at the end, the whole Trinity sends the Church, which then sends all Christians on mission to the entire world. Thus, it is not a single, personal Christian who is coming to others to bring them the good news of the Gospel, but

88 Tan, "Missio Inter Gentes," 89.

89 Michael Amaladoss, "The Challenges of Mission Today," *Trends in Mission: Toward the Third Millennium*, (ed. William Jenkinson and Helene O'Sullivan, 359-390. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 364.

through its personal life-witness and proclamation it is the whole Church and through the whole Church also God, the One in Trinity himself, who is on continual mission aiming at establishing his Kingdom, which is, according to the theology of the New Testament, already present in this world, among people and nations (Luke 17, 20-21) but yet to come (Matthew 25, 31-34). And this is the central image. If we accept the fact that the principal goal of mission is building up the Kingdom of God (Regnum Dei), we are to be seen as workers at its construction site.

This theological conviction comes from the interpretation of the paschal mystery, which says that not only was Jesus himself changed during the Easter event of his own death and resurrection, but so was the community of his disciples. Such fundamental (ontological) transformation influenced naturally also the phenomena of announcing the Kingdom of God. The disciples' mission gained its new dimension. Jesus' theocentric proclamation of God's Kingdom was transformed into the Christological proclamation of His disciples, proclamation of the Gospel about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. An absolute identification of God with Jesus, while maintaining the fullness of His humanity at the same time, means that hope in salvation brought by Jesus Christ may be identified with hope in salvation given by God. It is the witness of the fact that, to our human eyes, the Kingdom of God appears paradoxical, because, since the Easter event, proclaiming Jesus Christ (the Gospel about His birth, life, death and resurrection) means announcing His Kingdom.

For mission it means to recognize God already present among nations (*inter gentes*), but at the same time coming to people (*ad gentes*) in order to invite them into His Kingdom which is still to come. Adopting such a Trinitarian/theocentric approach to mission we may see Christians as those who participate in building the Kingdom already present among us, but at the same time they proclaim the Kingdom which has yet to come. In this perspective, proclamation and life-witness are both important for mission and have each their proper place, like systole and diastole in the cardiac cycle. Put simply, the former cannot be without the latter, and therefore we cannot fully agree with the claim that the mission *inter gentes* concept is a consequence of mission *ad gentes*, replacing the older with the new.

By way of conclusion, Christians shall put every effort into liberating themselves from various fears or let Jesus Christ liberate them from their fears as He did for Jairus, because only then will they be able to engage in the public sphere. Because only when being among nations (*inter gentes*) can they fulfil their task of mission *ad gentes*, meaning to bring into broad society a trustful witness about the hope they have in Jesus Christ, the hope in salvation of all. And it does not matter if it is in Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia, America or elsewhere. Christian mission today means to be evangelized (new evangelization) and evangelize (mission). Thus, *missio ad gentes*, pursued by evangelization, which is focused both inside and outside of the Church, is still a valid concept. However, since the Church has never been closer to gentiles than it is today in the full swing of globalization, it certainly is worth listening to the voices of those who call for the concept of mission *inter gentes*, because it may be of great inspiration and benefit for revitalizing Christian mission in the context of the contemporary circumstances of the world and society worldwide. Maybe we can recognize there also the work of the Holy Spirit who is invoked by Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *Evangelii Gaudium*: "(...) *I once more invoke the Holy Spirit. I implore Him to come and renew the Church, to stir and impel her to go forth boldly to evangelize all peoples* (EG 261)." It seems that it is a pneumatological dimension of mission that is being emphasized by the present Pope. And that is also one aspect which today needs the attention of experts in missiology as well as of experienced practition-

ers. They need to ask and debate a crucial question raised by the Pope's conviction proclaimed in his message to Pontifical Mission Societies which he sent in Spring 2020. According to Pope Francis, we need to understand mission today as a free gift of the Spirit and not as a result of successful missionary strategies.⁹⁰

The Decree on Missionary Activity of the Church (AG) as formulated by Vatican II remains an authoritative document on mission in the Roman Catholic Church, but more than 55 years after its promulgation it has become clear that, with the profoundest respect to this document, our reflection on mission can or even should go beyond this particular decree. An inspiration can come, for instance, from the Asian context as exemplified by explication of the mission *inter gentes* concept of Jonatan Y. Tan. It will be the task for academics in cooperation with missionaries to imagine further roads of mission balancing between existing theories and dreaming/thinking about new possibilities.

Speaking from the (Central/Eastern) European perspective, it is certain that the Church in Europe has partially lost its credit during the period of secularization. Various scandals of the Church have not improved her image, either. They weakened and sometimes they still continue to weaken her trustfulness, and consequently harm her mission. It is obviously the task of all Christians to fight against all injustices and perversions within and outside the Church by one's own life example. Christians are meant to live in the Kingdom already present and be on the way to its fullness at the same time. It is necessary to convince European society again that the Church is not dangerous for human freedom, that her nature is the source of the very opposite – the Church offers the way towards full realization of human freedom and has strong potential to support the functioning of democratic society. At least in Europe, the Church must leave the position of subculture, where it was pushed by secularization, and start building a genuine Christian culture. That means to represent the culture of critically reflected religiosity accompanied with deep and healthy spirituality as an alternative to confused religiousness typical for various "*alternative religiosities*" densely present in contemporary post-secular Europe.

In such context, the Church has once again a unique opportunity to become a community of disciples, but for that purpose it must place openness and dialogue at the centre of its complex performance and appearance in the contemporary world. On a scholarly level, it would be interesting to form an interdisciplinary group of academics and practitioners to study different spiritualities with special reference to their potential for dialogue and mutual enrichment. When we return to the specific area of missiology, the Asian concept of mission *inter gentes* may serve as profound inspiration for comparing and correlating the Asian experience with the one from (Central) Europe and study what impulses may come from different cultural experiences to enrich and perhaps transform the way we think about and perform mission in a (Central) European context. As far as I can see, the most important aspect we are reminded of by the mission *inter gentes* concept is that Christians do not possess truth, but – on the contrary – the Truth possesses them; the Truth, which does not want to be imposed but rather experienced, lives, and manifests in veridical human/Christian life. In Tan's words: "(...) *truth does not impose itself, but rather attracts everyone and everything to itself by its beauty, splendour and fascination*"⁹¹ With profound respect to each otherness.

90 See: "Pope Francis: Mission is free gift of the Spirit, not result of strategies," accessed May 23 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-05/pope-francis-pontifical-mission-society-message.html>

91 Tan, "Missio Inter Gentes," 76.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, the author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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EXPERIENCE OF BELIEF FROM KAROL WOJTYŁA'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Background: The study focuses on an analysis of the experience of the belief phenomenon of St. John of the Cross through the perspective of Karol Wojtyła. Seeing faith as an experience phenomenon allows Wojtyła to open up a noetic discourse based on experience. Wojtyła deals with this subject both as a poet in his literary work and as a theoretician in his scholarly work. The phenomenon of the experience of faith is seen here as experiencing the world in immediacy and viscerality, which forms the basis for belief. This phenomenon appears to be an interface where conviction flows into action, modelling its nature as an act and as an individual. The subjective reading of experience determines the path taken by the act and the person on the basis of that experience. In the phenomenon of faith, the relationship between faith and intellect opens up. With intellect, at some point, the activity of reason becomes a passive activity, opening the way for the act of receiving and donating. Inside the relationship of acceptance and donation, there is attachment – love that in turn turns the passivity of reason into activity. This moment opens up the possibility of answering the question of existence in unification. The phenomenon of belief experience is thus at odds with solipsism or egotism and, on the contrary, postulates a dimension of openness to human existence. But, this phenomenon of internal experience seeks symbolic language to express itself. This is where the experience of believing transforms into an experience of artistic expression. The question of artistic inspiration is a question of translating experience that precedes or exceeds artistic inspiration.

Conclusion: The belief phenomenon containing the potential for unification has three fundamental pillars: *communication*, *participation* and *transformation*. It is these aspects of the belief experience that the study seeks to identify. This study also opens up inspiring stimuli for the possibility of further research in this area and interesting scientific discourses and reflections for a wider international scientific and scholarly public.

Keywords: Phenomenon of Faith. Experience of Faith. Mystical Experience. Karol Wojtyła. Fundamental pillars.

Faith and knowing

Although Pope John Paul II is generally well-known, the fact that in his philosophical literary work he strives to find a common ground between phenomenological analysis and traditional metaphysics on the basis of the overlapping of artistic and mystical inspiration has been completely overlooked. And it is precisely this connection and relationship between artistic and mys-

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tical inspiration and actions that was an important tool of Wojtyła's non-ideological missionary actions until an advanced age, with the aim of sharing revealed truth to an increasingly secular world. His first complex work related to this topic was the study of the phenomenon of faith in St. John of the Cross, completed in 1948 under the title *Doctrina de Fide apud S. Joannem a Cruce* (hereinafter referred to as *The Doctrine of Faith in St. John of the Cross*). It was first published in Warsaw in *Collectanea Theologica* 21, fasc. 4, in 1949.

Wojtyła realized that the topic of faith experience cannot be studied as a mere abstraction and faith as a subject of analysis is part of his own experience which was refined during and after the war. Throughout his entire life, he felt an intense need to share his experience of faith with others. To do so, he searched for an adequate language. As an author, he became aware of the boundaries of language and the formal possibilities of expression. Wojtyła's life-long interest in poetry was not an accidental choice or hobby. Poetry allowed him to overcome the limitations of language and formal possibilities of expression. He found a basis and support for his intuition in St. John of the Cross' texts, where the noetic issue was an experiential one. This led him to a phenomenological study of the experience of faith and actions. He outlined his approach in his poem *Rays of Fatherhood*: „faith is also the knowing.”⁹³

The artistic quality of Wojtyła's texts is questionable. His early work was clearly influenced by literary romanticism. He could not stay away from the schemes of the romanticizing epic. Wojtyła's texts showed artistic maturity and deeper potential in the so-called drama trilogy in verse comprising *Our God's Brother*, *The Jeweller's Shop* and *Radiation of Fatherhood*. Between 1944-1949, at a time when he was writing the study on faith phenomenology according to St. John of the Cross, he was also working on the extensive poetic drama *Our God's Brother*.⁹⁴ This dramatic poem shows us how much he tried to include in his literary work the issues of faith in the context of social events. The drama's protagonist was a significant personality of modern Polish history, a mystic with Franciscan traits, Adam Chmielowski.

Our God's Brother highlights the issue of necessity of social transformation through revolution and the phenomenon of faith as a background element. The individual characters like Adam, the Stranger, or Max, represent different images of faith which generate different images of the world. The stranger with whom Adam discusses fair resolution of the social crisis can be identified as the historical figure of V. I. Lenin who lived near Krakow in 1912-1914.⁹⁵ Wojtyła wrote this work at a time when Poland was flooded with leftist revolutionary enthusiasm related to the new post-war world.

We do not want to focus on the artistic value of the poet's texts. However, from our point of view, it is clear that the initial starting point of Wojtyła's work was not so much a sudden inspiration, but rather the author's conviction. Wojtyła was not a poet of major inner inspiration. His writing showed clear signs of intellectualism and at times even didactic and pedagogic intentions, much to the detriment of his poems.⁹⁶ However, this does not change the fact that there are parts of his poetry where his conviction meets inner artistic inspiration and achieves the qualities of a true poet. Wojtyła's early poems show that he was fascinated by an interface where conviction flows into action, modelling the nature of an individual's actions.

93 Karol Wojtyła, *Tutte le opere letterarie. Poesie, Drammi e Scritti sul teatro* (Milano: Bompiani, 2001). 945.

94 It was not until 1979 that the work was published in Poland in the Tygodnik Powszechny journal.

95 Bolesław Taborski, "Introduzione," in: Karol Wojtyła, *Tutte le opere letterarie. Poesie, Drammi e Scritti sul teatro* (Poezje i dramaty, Znak, Krakow 1980), (Bompiani, Milano 2005). 581.

96 "The axis of Wojtyła's poetry coincides with theology and philosophy, this axis lies in a dynamic perception of man... However, such concept opens up the question of whether a poetic work can be based on philosophical and theological concepts." (Giovanni Reale, "Karol Wojtyła pellegrino sulle tre vie che portano alla verità: Arte, Filosofia, Religione," in Karol Wojtyła *Metafisica della Persona* (Milano: Bompiani, 2003). XXIII.

Wojtyła's interest in St. John of the Cross' mysticism was not accidental. It stems from Wojtyła's own experience with the phenomenon of faith and from his efforts to find adequate language which would enable him to generalize a phenomenon which is a purely subjective experience. Since the very beginning, this interest was accompanied by an attempt at rational analysis through the theoretical tools of Thomism and phenomenology. *The Doctrine of Faith in St. John of the Cross* is divided into two parts: a much longer analytical part, and a shorter synthetic part in which the author tries to assess the results of his analyses. In the first part, Wojtyła analyses faith on the basis of St. John of the Cross' fundamental works. Here he focuses on faith as a tool or as a journey towards unification of man and God through similarities of faith and divinity.

Wojtyła then analyses the relationship between faith and intellect, as well as faith as a specific space where God lies. In this context, he studies a double dimension of reason – passive and active. He says that St. John of the Cross indicates that, at a certain point, it is important that the human brain's activity turns into passivity. In such case, an adequate reaction of reason is passive reception or passive activity by submitting itself to God's mercy. In the act of acceptance and donation, love is born. Through love, passivity turns into activity again. What Wojtyła calls the experience of faith is revealed as the fruit of passive activity in phenomenological analysis.

With regards to the fundamental question of the ultimate meaning of human life, which was very topical after the war, Wojtyła responds that the phenomenon of faith reveals the meaning of human existence in unity with God, although not explicitly or directly. Faith is newly discovered as the only appropriate tool to find unity with God. Through faith, man becomes *capax Dei*.⁹⁷ Unity between humankind and God is not an accident of human existence, it plays a crucial role in a person's psychology. When living with faith, the human being is struck and revived by love. Such unity can only be perceived as a free gift. Wojtyła carefully avoids the temptation of psychologization.

He deals with similar issues in his poetic and dramatic works. Artistic language is capable of much better imagery than scientific language. The Stranger in *Our God's Brother* observes increasing social anger. In factories and mines, he sees unfair working conditions: „And this force is increasing. What will it bring?... I appreciate this maturing collective consciousness.”⁹⁸ Wojtyła's Stranger realizes that the centre of the issue of social injustice is the matter of one's identity which inherently forces the individual to act: „...this anger has an objective value. It is impossible to deceive it.”⁹⁹ Wojtyła recognizes the legitimacy of social anger. However, he does not want to solve the issue like the Stranger, he believes in the revolution of love, just like Adam Chmielowski. Based on faith phenomenology as passive reception which awakens active love, he finds the answer in accepting the poor as our brothers.¹⁰⁰ He does not believe that solipsism or egoism are the right way to go, unlike Adam's friend Max, who believes that the social issue would be solved if everyone who wished to fulfil their task hermetically closed themselves off from the world.¹⁰¹ However, Adam chooses openness.¹⁰²

Scientific and poetic analysis of faith

In his scholarly work, Wojtyła focuses on the issue of the faith phenomenon as a philosophical topic on which all his subsequent intellectual efforts are built. Wojtyła is attracted by the need to

97 Karol Wojtyła, *La Dottrina*. (Roma: Pontificia universita S. Tommaso, 1979). 123; 453; 447; 439.

98 Karol Wojtyła, "Tutte le opere letterarie...(2001)," 635.

99 Karol Wojtyła, "Tutte le opere letterarie...(2001)," 637.

100 Karol Wojtyła, "Tutte le opere letterarie...(2001)," 677.

101 Karol Wojtyła, "Tutte le opere letterarie...(2001)," 621.

102 Karol Wojtyła, "Tutte le opere letterarie...(2001)," 619.

express and examine everything that is concentrated in knowingly and unknowingly experienced religiousness and faith. This applies in particular to his doctoral thesis *The Doctrine of Faith in St. John of the Cross*¹⁰³, as well as his work *Zagadnienie wiary w dziełach św. Jana od Krzyża* (Wojtyła 1950) and the study entitled *O humanizmie św. Jana od Krzyża* (Wojtyła 1951).

In the very first lines of *The Doctrine of Faith in St. John of the Cross*, we can notice the inner struggle characterized by two central components. One is mystical, revealing the latest truths about man and based on experiential knowledge of these truths. The second component is scientific and leads to a thorough and detailed analysis, without which the scientific nature of the first component would lose its credibility. The contrast is more than obvious. The author gives space both to the mystic and the scholar. This results in a distinctive literary form. Wojtyła makes a similar switch in his poetic and dramatic work, but this time between the mystic and the poet. The two positions of his work create a single unit.

In the beginning of *The Doctrine of Faith in St. John of the Cross*, he observes the inspirational sources of a Spanish mystic in which the mystic's thoughts are mimetically entangled. John's teaching of bare faith led Wojtyła to Husserl's idea of „bracketing“.¹⁰⁴ St. John of the Cross followed up on St. Augustine's teaching on the experience of the Trinity as a result of its reflection in the structure of the human soul.¹⁰⁵ „St. John of the Cross does not produce a speculative tract on mysticism, instead he describes his own experience. Speculative theology gave him principles. Mystics gave him the right terminology. However, this work was created based on his true experience with supernatural reality and on existential participation in the inner life of the Trinity.“¹⁰⁶

Faith experience phenomenology

It was not Wojtyła's intention to grasp whether – nor to what extent – St. John of the Cross approached or distanced himself from orthodox theology. Wojtyła was convinced that the new light of knowledge revealing the essence of the secret of inner life and the true way of experiencing Christianity stems mainly from examination of the experience of faith.¹⁰⁷ Although John's thoughts were vertical, he relied on the horizontality of human „experience“¹⁰⁸. Wojtyła observed St. John's focus on experience; he himself took up the concept and perceived the reality of a subjective individual as a specific *locus theologicus*. For Karol Wojtyła, St. John of the Cross was mainly an author for whom man was a priority issue. To reveal the humanistic content of John's texts, one must read them not as a doctrine, but rather from the perspective of experience. In this way, any reader can find himself in St. John of the Cross' work in a very surprising manner.¹⁰⁹

Wojtyła's aim is to reveal religious experience as an experience which is characteristic of man. From the perspective of speculative theology, the subjectivity of human experience is partially overlooked, as the inner dynamic of his existence is left aside or completely neglected. Wojtyła sees that „the revealed teaching includes truth about man and truth about his inner being which is part of him.“¹¹⁰ Here we can see an overlapping of the inner and outer images of man.

103 The work was written in Latin and its Latin-Italian edition was used for the purpose of the present study.

104 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 51.

105 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 53.

106 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 55.

107 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 49nn.

108 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 55.

109 Karol Wojtyła, „O humanizmie św. Jana od Krzyża,” *Znak* 6/27, 1 (1951), 8.

110 Wojtyła, „O humanizmie 19.

John's focus on the mystical experience of faith shows that: „Man is the only object with which we have both inner and outer experience. This is how we create an abstract concept of humankind in its full richness.“¹¹¹ This means that the abstract concept of man should correspond to personal existential experience and be aligned with it. „A man who tries to express his essence has the right and duty to discover it as fully as possible.“¹¹²

The entire work of St. John of the Cross shows inner personal experience as a basic starting point of human existence.¹¹³ Wojtyła's faith phenomenology is a description of inner experience and its meanings and it works with symbols. Symbolic language is used to reveal the essence of its content: „Symbols create a common platform where the experiential image meets the theological explanation of this experience.“¹¹⁴ From this point of view, it seems that, from the perspective of sequence, the experience of faith precedes artistic experience, or at least creates it. Artistic inspiration is the answer, translation and form of expressing an experience which surpasses artistic inspiration.

Wojtyła examines the role of faith. St. John's primary focus is not in God but in the experience of the supernatural in man. He believes that faith plays a key role as the basis for human actions, because it leads man towards the supernatural.¹¹⁵ Wojtyła is forced to respond to this discovery. That is why he shifts the direction of his examination. From now on, he will always base matters related to faith and religion on the experience of a human being. Experience shows that faith is what organizes the activity of the human brain.¹¹⁶ Under the influence of faith, the brain becomes part of man's activity as an individual entity, the foundation of his skills, and the strengths which result in completeness.

Faith and mysticism of unification

According to Karol Wojtyła, St. John of the Cross' mystical theology is the theology of one's subjective way of being. From this perspective, he sees it as humanistic theology, as it focuses on a specific man and his experience with faith. In the experience of faith, faith is revealed as a key tool for unification with God's supernatural reality.¹¹⁷

The phenomenon of faith is linked to man's subjective consciousness. This is what ties it to a natural order of facts. Faith is a phenomenon which belongs to the supernatural order of God's reality. Therefore, the dual nature of faith makes it possible for man to be part of both a natural and a supernatural order. Thanks to faith, reason sees the similarity between faith and God's nature. „Faith presents God to the intellect, which cannot be done even by the most noble

111 Wojtyła, „O humanizmie,” 7.

112 Wojtyła, „O humanizmie,” 7.

113 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 59.

114 Wojtyła, „O humanizmie,” 10.

115 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 91.

116 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 91.

117 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 93-97. It should be clarified what *similarity* means to Wojtyła. On the level of being, everything that was created is somewhat similar to God. The more being the entity contains, the more similar it is to God. Wojtyła calls this similarity *proportional similarity*. (Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 83-85); Then there is *essential similarity*. This is what allows intellect to see something as a subject of its knowledge. *Essential similarity* to God is possible only on the supernatural level. Man can grasp divinity only thanks to essential similarity to God which is given to intellect through faith. This similarity is characteristic of faith as a tool for unification with God (Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 511-512). Wojtyła then talks about *mental and vital similarity*. *Mental similarity* is an intentional relationship. It can be recognized as an intentional subject. *Vital similarity* is unification with God through faith. *Vital similarity* means that the entire soul is similar to God in a participative unity with him. This unity has a transformative nature. (Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,” 395).

creature.¹¹⁸ „Man's soul is similar to God, however, this similarity is realized through faith.“¹¹⁹ St. John of the Cross uses an analogy of wood and fire. Only when wood starts burning does its blaze start to resemble flame and fire. „It is fire's nature to transform wood into flame. Similarly, the role of faith is to unite us with God.“¹²⁰ This means that this is not an area of so-called mental similarity, it is an area of vital similarity. Love (generated by faith) creates intentional similarity in intellect, approximating soul to God through participation in a transformative unification.¹²¹

John's teaching on unification has three pillars: communication, participation and transformation. „Participation responds to communication and it leads to transformation in the form of love. However, transformation is limited by the possibilities of participation. That means that this is a participative transformation. All creatures communicate with God based on their essence. Faith is essentially similar to God. It can lead to unification with God. It can overcome the limitations of a natural order, as it uses the divine source and joins the participative transformation of the soul.“¹²² The content of participative communication between soul and God is Christ.¹²³

In the entire process of participative unification in faith, human intellect plays a central role. Wojtyła quotes St. John: „Intellect is a place, it is a candleholder on which the candle of faith is placed.“¹²⁴ Intellect is subordinate to faith, it becomes its feature. In this sense, faith does not bypass intellect. Faith works with intellect and permeates it to separate it from created objects and unify it with God. „Intellect itself is completely insufficient and unable to achieve unification.“¹²⁵ Therefore, intellect needs faith to see the supernatural order of things.

The relationship between faith and intellect and the structure of a human being

Wojtyła realizes that the phenomenon of faith is manifested in two ways. In faith, God can become known. At the same time, „...he hides from intellect through faith.“¹²⁶ The known one hides in the knowing one based on the nature of the „intentional being“ of the knowing one. This is the basis for intentional identification of a subject with an object. However, there is still the fundamental reason for unclarity and darkness, the reason for the unseen, and that is why the issue of faith is opened up again.¹²⁷ Faith is presented as illuminating and overshadowing at the same time. Through faith, divinity is presented to the intellect in an intentional manner: „However, we can also say that it is hiding in the intellect intentionally. Thanks to divinity, which is intentionally hidden in us, we get to know another attribute of faith, which is darkness.“¹²⁸

Intellect is a force which has its own dynamic. And it is opened to the dynamic of transcendence. „Faith tells us about things which we have never before heard or seen, because there is nothing similar to them.“¹²⁹ Thanks to faith, intellect is attracted to supernatural similarity. „Intellect

118 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 91.

119 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 77.

120 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 79.

121 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 395. The words *intentional* and *intentionality* are frequently used by Wojtyła. They are often used interchangeably with the word *recognizable*. Wojtyła uses them in the philosophical and psychological sense. (Wojtyła, „La Dottrina 510).

122 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 107.

123 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 321.

124 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 109.

125 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 119.

126 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 125.

127 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 127.

128 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 129.

129 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 153.

approaches this similarity bare, naked, undressed, without the help of the senses, and, through transcendental light, it approaches and accepts supernatural reality.“¹³⁰ Transcendental light almost extinguishes intellect, which is attracted by the divine object. Intellect does not perceive it intentionally, it approaches it completely stripped.¹³¹ Faith does not provide any knowledge, it is literally free from any knowledge and blinds all types of knowledge and knowing, so that it can exist as the only measure of judgment.“¹³²

For St. John of the Cross, faith is the power of intellect. Intellect opens man up to divinity in a significant way.¹³³ Intellect unifies with reality once it can intentionally adapt to the essence of such reality. Once it accepts it as its own. Once it makes it intelligible. Wojtyła defines intellect as an *intelligible substance*.¹³⁴ However, intellect in faith covers God's essence in an intentional way even without reaching its intentional form and making it intelligible. This means that faith becomes the tool for unification with God, although in an imperfect way.¹³⁵ Intellect finds the ability and longing for the unlimited and infinite form.¹³⁶

In psychological terms, faith is not a traditional knowing, nor is it identical to intelligence (its role does not correspond to the role of intellect), nor can it fully adhere to an intentional form; it is an agreement with revealed truths. „What is essential in intellectual knowing is the intentional form which is like the second nature of the knowing intellect.“¹³⁷ Intellect itself does not have an adequate intentional form for such knowing. For this reason, it can be said that faith has a supernatural character.

Supernatural reality is present in man through his faith. Consequently, the acts of religious experience constitute man as a being whose meaning and aim is to be united with God. However, such a humanistic dimension of religious engagement cannot be articulated purely rationally. „...purely rational explanation diminishes the true meaning of such experience and reduces its value.“¹³⁸

The anthropological meaning of religious experience also has its content and subjective and objective sides. In the structure of a human being, religious experience is a separate dimension. The idea of a person is the basis for many humanisms, where the final integration of a person in the religious sense is usually not required, although the option is left open. For Wojtyła, religious experience has a specific value and autonomy, as it stems from supernatural reality in which it participates. A human being exists in parallel in many dimensions and it is also formed by these dimensions. Therefore, theological thinking automatically becomes humanistic thinking.¹³⁹

Man experiencing faith looks for full self-expression. The lack and loss of meaning of human life leads man to find the meaning hidden inside him. Intellect faces a paradox, as it accepts revealed truths by refusing itself. This is a paradox which allows intellect to be elevated and capable of God. Through self-denial, man has an opportunity to become who he is.¹⁴⁰ Through self-denial, he can achieve his goals which would otherwise not be possible. The potential of the

130 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 155.

131 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 171.

132 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 181.

133 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 444.

134 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 443. *Everything that the human mind can grasp is considered intelligible.*

135 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 444.

136 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 447.

137 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 473n.

138 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 19.

139 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 20.

140 Wojtyła, „La Dottrina,“ 469-471.

soul is also increased. Man surpasses himself through transcendence. Faith reveals man in his potentiality and protects him from the reductions of human systems.¹⁴¹

Faith and the danger of man's reduction

Wojtyła's methodological approach is rooted in phenomenology. Wojtyła manages to establish a dialogue with modern thinking in a unique way and provide tools to overcome perceived dissonance between faith and reason. Wojtyła does not examine St. John of the Cross' faith as an abstract concept, but rather as a living and lived experience from which it then extracts an image of humanism presented by the Spanish mystic: "Man's supernatural sphere expresses itself as supra-subjective experience which is also supra-psychological."¹⁴² A significant constant in Wojtyła's examination is the focus on experience which he sees as the axis and epicentre of man's expression in truth. "It is important for man to be fully immersed in the experience process, together with his knowledge and actions, will, emotions, hope, fears, success and defeat."¹⁴³

A doctrine which does not take into account the complexity of man and experienced manifestations of his inner wealth says almost nothing about man. Such insufficient appreciation of man is typical for two approaches: one is speculative, and the other is positivistic. Wojtyła sees insufficient appreciation of man as a limitation or reduction of active life dimensions.

A speculative model does not reflect the complexity of human perception, the ability of the human spirit, or the complexity of physical reactions. On the other hand, the positivistic model resigns itself to the spiritual dimension of experience and physical expressions. "In short, the more unilateral our perception of man, the more unknown he seems. The speculative model lacks the perspective of the human's inner being, the variety, multifunctionality and non-reducibility of a human being. The positivistic model lacks the spiritual side of human existence."¹⁴⁴ In contrast to speculative and positivistic reductions, Wojtyła looks at man in three dimensions: his nature, his psychology, and his supernaturality.

The loss of contact with man's supernatural dimension, which reveals the perception of man as being in God's image, means that man's value as a person, as someone who cannot be reduced to an object, is being forgotten. Religious man is replaced by *Homo faber*, revolutionary man, nihilist and consumer. What all these types of human existence have in common is confusion of vertical transcendence and horizontal transcendence. Man's full orientation towards the world always has its consequences.¹⁴⁵

According to Karol Wojtyła, faith in the work of St. John of the Cross focuses on a complete, unreduced man. This is not a doctrinally or dogmatically mature faith, but rather an experience of faith as an ontological, epistemological and axiological possibility. If the experience of faith is possible as such, it means that we can find answers to the question of whether man can reveal his face with or without it.¹⁴⁶ These questions are not only theological but also anthropological.

Wojtyła reads St. John of the Cross as a phenomenologist of mystical experience. His mystical experience phenomenology in St. John of the Cross leads him to the unreduced core of man and shows the necessity of transcendence towards God. St. John shows us how faith is sub-

jectivized once it becomes a personal experience. At the same time, he reveals an objective dimension of this subjectivation. In mystical experience, absolute value is perceived in its stripped form free from any intentionality. That is why mystical experience is called the dark night of the intellect. At night, when all emotions are silent, man experiences absolute distance from God, his incomprehensibility, surpassing the powers and possibilities of human intelligence and, at the same time, God's real presence. Positive knowing of God is not possible. In this way, we clearly recognize the knowing related to truth as a constitution of subjective experience: "Through St. John of the Cross, St. Thomas meets experiential and existential dimensions, which facilitates a positive approach to phenomenology."¹⁴⁷

The striking moment and absolute space

Wojtyła does not study faith as a theoretical concept. The content of faith is not his priority. He analyses the phenomenon of faith as an existential experience which strikes human existence. This is clearly visible especially in his interest in examining faith as a phenomenon which can lead to a mystical experience. Through St. John of the Cross' texts, he discovers mystical experience as potential stored in each experience of faith. From the structure of Wojtyła's texts, it is obvious that he realizes the impossibility of separating personal experience from subsequent reflections. At first glance, it might seem that we are getting to an area of pure subjectivity. However, an analysis of the phenomenon of faith shows that, at the moment it strikes, there is an element which surpasses human subjectivity. Faith includes a pathic dimension to the experience of trying, being hurt or mesmerized. The striking moment is also typical for artistic expression. Roland Barthes calls it *punctum*, a sting or deep emotion. He says that this sting provokes a longing for something which is outside and which gives us the ability to see.¹⁴⁸ Although Barthes primarily talks about being struck by a work of art or an image, we see in his texts that he talks about punctum in a spiritual and transcendental sense hidden in an image. Punctum (*trauma* in Greek), the moment of strike or injury, is something like a wound, abscess, or crack, through which we can touch the uncovered core of life. Punctum is also a blow that we suffer and that throws us into a deep chasm of subjectivity. This is a place where he and Wojtyła overlap, as he examines the phenomenon of faith as a phenomenon of inspiration, a strike, which seeks to be expressed by life and by work. The strike comes from the outside and it requires a response. Professor Vojvodík, who studies the phenomenology of the aesthetic effect and finds in it a call for an ethical response, shows us that, in a pathic strike (in *passio*), there is something that is not an object, which seems to be an absolute fact; it is unnameable, and it reveals the trace of man, which he not only seems to be in, but he is also fully present in it.¹⁴⁹ During the strike, man discovers that he does not feel full of infinite power, success, profane grandeur, etc. The moment of being struck is a privileged place where the dignity of man is revealed, a privileged place of hope and "the growth of being."¹⁵⁰ Striking moments uncover the supra-natural nature of hope, which is the true measure of man.¹⁵¹ What strikes man is what touches him, cuts him to the core. It opens up a new perspective of vision.¹⁵² To see means to suffer a striking explosion.

147 Wójtowicz, "Osoba i transcendencja Karola Wojtyły," 63.

148 Roland Barthes, *Světlá komora Poznámka k fotografii* (1. vyd. Bratislava: Archa, 1994). 54.

149 Josef Vojvodík, *Patos v českém umění, poezii a umělecko-estetickém myšlení čtyřicátých let 20. století* (Praha: Argo, 2014). 89.

150 Jindřich Chalupěcký, "O vznešenosti umění," *Volné směry* 36, 1-2, (1940/1941): 59.

151 Gabriel Marcel, *K filosofii naděje* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 1971) 87-132.

152 In Marcel's understanding, hope, unlike a wish, goes beyond the possibilities of human imagination. As such, hope comes to man as a gift, which man can accept or refuse. Man struck by hope does not fall into despair. According to Marcel, hope is mediated in particular in every meeting with the presence of another being.

141 Wojtyła, "La Dottrina," 487.

142 Wojtyła, "La Dottrina," 379.

143 Andrzej Wójtowicz, *Osoba i transcendencja Karola Wojtyły, antropologia wiary i Kosciola*. (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1993.) 75.

144 Wojtyła, "O humanizmie," 10.

145 A. M. Wierzbicki, "La barca interiore, Affinità spirituale del pensiero di Karol Wojtyła con il pensiero di San Giovanni della Croce," in Karol Wojtyła *Metafisica della Persona* (Milano: Bompiani. 2003). 12.

146 Wójtowicz, "Osoba i transcendencja Karola Wojtyły," 53.

Poets and mystics have the best view of this explosion. Artists and mystics are always aware of a steep slope of pathos. Their vision is the work of inspiration or the strike. It is not a result of a purposeful approach led by a manual or recipe; in many cases it is a completely unintentional process. This is the essence of Rimbaud's perception of poetry as a seeing vision, as an attempt to capture fire.¹⁵³ Mystical and artistic expressions are a result of a transcendental strike. Literary theoretician Maurice Blanchot believes that each writing contains a dimension of the experience of meeting absolute transcendence: "To write means to use language and fascination in a fascinating way and to remain in touch with the absolute environment where things become images and where images are transformed from a hint to a certain form, to a hint, to something which has no form."¹⁵⁴ From the perspective of the phenomenology of the striking moment, Wojtyła's double-track creativity which has its starting and vanishing point in his own experience of faith becomes more meaningful and seems like a seamless work.

Conclusion

Wojtyła draws three conclusions from the analysis of faith in St. John of the Cross: first of all, it is not possible for man to know God as a subject in any way. Natural intellect can only realize that God exists, however, it cannot understand what God is. The next conclusion is that not even faith brings us the knowledge of what God is. Knowing in the sense of absolute knowing which would encompass the totality of reality and thus the world in God is not provided by faith. Nevertheless, faith implicitly includes a personal meeting with God, which is phenomenologically real, but it remains covered by the dark night of faith. Non-objectiveness is the form and content of a personal relationship with God. It ultimately seems that a personal meeting with God in a mystical experience, if perceived in its bareness, takes place in sensual emptiness.¹⁵⁵

This logically means that, if there is no positive knowing of God, there cannot be any positive knowing of man, who is in God's image. However, this does not equate to the complete impossibility of knowing. God and man are similar, because they are a person. That is why they cannot be objectivized. Such similarity with God is perceived negatively in an anthropological way as mentioned by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, without creating or formulating it in any way.¹⁵⁶ The authors do not see the term *negative anthropology* as a radically disrupted essence of human nature, unlike Hobbes or Machiavelli. This term in their Hegelian phraseology does not have a derogatory meaning. It denies that man alone can be anything. They do not believe that man's in-seity can be mediated as a subject of specific philosophical or phenomenological analysis. The terms *negative theology* and *negative anthropology* indicate the impossibility of positive identification of human nature. However, there is a certain difference. While Adorn and Horkheimer believe that man cannot be determined on the basis of historical or geographical variability of the forms of his existence, Wojtyła adds the argument of ontological openness.

Wojtyła's analysis of the phenomenon of faith in St. John of the Cross can be linked to a basic personalistic standard which Wojtyła later defined. The standard can be formulated as absolute prohibition of forcing a person's secret in himself and in others. This prohibition

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The presence of another being is like a rising tide which we cannot create ourselves, but we can be open to it. Hope is of a relational nature. Man experiences relationships as transcendence and as something that is realized from within. (Marcel, "K filosofii naděje," 33; 90).

153 Arthur Rimbaud, *Já je někdo jiný* (1. vyd. Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1962). 127.

154 Maurice Blanchot, *Literární prostor* (Praha: Herrmann a synové, 1999). 30.

155 Wojtyła, "La Dottrina," 485nn.

156 Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektika osvícenství* (Praha: Oikoymenth. 2009). 234; Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektika Negativa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970). 26.

is related to a person's transformation into an object. Negative anthropology perceived in this manner is not an empty anthropology. It is an anthropology which has its own content based on one's transcendence.¹⁵⁷ Wojtyła thus joined the society-wide discussion on key values of European civilization. In the era of weakening and blurring the ideas of humanism, in doubts over the possibility of revealing the universal truth about man, in the era of the multi-faceted degradation of man, which are all a result of man's totalitarian and nihilist concepts, his work is a testimony of hope. The phenomenon of non-objectiveness, which in principle requires a faith-awakening, personal existential act is a connecting element of mystical and artistic experience. At the same time, it points out the non-objectiveness of the knowing of man. Mystical and artistic tools thus maintain tension between talking about the object they reveal and its non-objectiveness, which refers to the transcendental secret at the centre of a living experience. It can be said that the results of this study present new inspiration for further research in this area and for intriguing expert discussions for a wider international scientific and scholarly public.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The mentioned author significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, the author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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157 Karol Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* (wyd. 2. Lublin: TN KUL, 2001). 18.

**ESCHATOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF MISSIONARY AND CHARITABLE WORK
(BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS, ACTS AND PETER'S EPISTLES)**Andrej Mátel¹, Mária Hardy²¹ St John Neumann Institute Pribram (CZ)² St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Science, (Bratislava, SK)**Submitted: 14 April 2019****Accepted for publication: 22 January 2020****First published: 31 October © Acta Missiologica |No. 2|Vol. 14|2020|****Abstract**

Background: The aim of the paper is to analyse selected biblical sources of missionary and charitable work from an eschatological perspective. The research question is: „What is the place of eschatology in missionary and charitable work according to the selected biblical scriptures?“ In line with the Gospels, the centre of Jesus mission is the eschatological kingdom of God, which is already among Jesus' followers and at the same time yet to come in full. At the heart of this kingdom is Jesus Messiah, whose rule is already apparent in the life, mission and ministry of the love of His disciples. It is important to distinguish between the goals of the disciples' mission and the goals of their lives, which is to be directed toward the reward of Eternity. It is this focus on the reward of Eternal Life that also helps them in the experience of non-acceptance and persecution.

Conclusion: The eschatological message was an integral part of the early church and therefore belongs to the centre of preaching in today's church. According to the biblical message, we live in the last days, and disciples are expected to actively await the coming of the Jesus Messiah. This message applies to current workers in missionary and charitable work, as well as Christian social workers. All of them cannot be directed to missionary achievements, but to be among the chosen ones whom the Son of Man will gather on his second coming from all sides of the world. Mission and charity will be fundamental proceedings in the Last Judgement, in which the person of Jesus Christ will play a decisive role.

Keywords: Kingdom of God. Eschatology. Charity. Second coming. Mission.

Introduction

The aim of the paper is to analyse selected biblical sources of missionary and charitable work from an eschatological perspective. This part of the paper will present basic terminological and conceptual starting points.

The term **eschatology** comes from the Greek words *eschatos* - the last and *logos* - the word, doctrine, speech, so it is a teaching about the last things. In biblical theology and later also in the dogmatic theology of several churches, eschatology is understood as the doctrine of the last things of human history (*universal eschatology*) and the last things of man (*individual eschatology*). According to Heriban¹⁵⁹, “biblical eschatology is a collection of hopeful

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159 Jozef Heriban, *Príručný lexikón biblických vied* (Rím: Slovenský ústav svätého Cyrila a Metoda, 1992). 361.

expectations marked by the Old and New Testament; they relate to the afterlife of individuals or to the future of Israel, or to the whole humanity in the messianic age. As a literary species describes the last events of history within the cosmic catastrophes and the *ultimate*¹⁶⁰ victory of the Kingdom of God.” An integral part of Christian New Testament eschatology is the Parousia (Greek παρουσία), which is *second coming* of Jesus Christ at the end of the ages.¹⁶¹ The Greek term ἐπιφάνεια *epiphaneia*, translated as appearance, is also used in pastoral letters¹⁶². In a broader sense, the New Testament also uses the Greek word ἀποκάλυψις *apokalypsis* revelation - to denote the second coming of the Messiah.¹⁶³

In accordance with Bučko, **missionary work** is understood, in its Christian sense, as a testimony of the experience of Jesus Christ. According to this author, “from the earliest times of the early church, mission has been understood as discipleship and following Christ. This following means witnessing the kingdom of God in our lives both theoretically and practically”¹⁶⁴. According to the author of the article, this is the surest way to a deeper understanding of the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus and his followers, to return to the biblical message (so-called *reversio ad fontes*). The Bible is a key source of missionary vision, values and strategy. “Biblical models of missions that are understood and interpreted correctly can be a very useful stimulus for the present ministry”.¹⁶⁵ In addition, Scripture is a long-term evaluation tool that must be used to re-evaluate and test mission theories, theologies, and practice.

This paper explains **charitable work** as an integral part of missionary work. The Greek word χάρις *charis* means primarily grace, but also kindness, attraction, charm, goodwill, favour and blessing (especially in greetings). In the biblical understanding, God is its primary source by His actions and actions towards man. However, it is also expressed by doing good deeds of man towards other people. It is an act of man's love based on God's love. Therefore, charitable work (or activity) is known as a practical testimony of love springing from the experience of Jesus Christ. It can be implemented individually or in an organized way.¹⁶⁶ Christian charitable theory and practice undoubtedly has its origin in the life, work and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, in which His followers met the Messiah (Christ) and the Son of God. Testimony of Him, as well as of the original witnesses of charitable work, can be found in the Bible, especially the New Testament. In order for the theory and practice of charitable work to be faithful to its original mission, this should be based on the biblical message and re-examined.

Methods

Here the research question is formulated as follows: “What is the place of eschatology in missionary and charitable work according to the selected biblical scriptures?” The research tool used a content analysis of the original Greek text of the New Testament scriptures and the methods of biblical hermeneutics. The results of historical-critical research were used secondarily; the synchronous approach was preferred, thus the final form of the text. The analysis focused on the *Sitz im Leben* (German “place in life”) of the early church, for which the

160 The italicized text added by the author.

161 Cf. Mat 24:3.27.37.39; 2Pe 1:16; 3:4.12, Jam 5:7.8 etc.

162 Cf. 1Ti 6:14; 2Ti 1:10; 4:1.8; Tit 2:13, 2Th 2:8.

163 Especially 1Pe 1:7; 4:13; 2Th 1:7.

164 Ladislav Bučko, *Misijná a charitatívna činnosť* (Bratislava: VŠZaSP sv. Alžbety, 2011). 7.

165 Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmüller, *Biblické základy misie* (Levice: JPK, 2002). 318.

166 In this understanding, we are different from Rašlová, who represents charity work in two senses, such as *Theory* based on Christian theology and Christian social teaching, which task is to build a foundation for an approach in addressing social issues and as *Practice* – putting these approaches into human assistance in need by using special methods. (Rašlová Katarína, *Teória a metódy charitatívnej práce* (Trnava: FZaSP TU, 2006). 10).

individual scripts were written, who was their addressee. In the synoptic Gospels, the author drew from his own linguistic-syntactic analysis of pericops, which are related to *discipleship*¹⁶⁷ and semantic analysis of texts related to eschatology, mission and charity. Although these texts were the primary subject of content analysis, it was important to take into account the context in which they were communicated.

The research group consisted of New Testament texts. A narrower selection of New Testament scripts was made due to the scope limitation of the journal's contribution. Because of the very close historical relationship of the first three gospels to the person and work of Jesus Christ, these synoptic gospels formed the basic research sample.

Since the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles is the work of one author, the natural choice was to include the Acts in the research sample. Due to the key role of the Apostle Peter in the proclamation of the early Church and the mission of the Twelve, a sample of both epistles that bear his name was also included in the research. In this way, a comprehensive selection of New Testament scripts has been achieved, which represents a degree of closeness while respecting the different theological emphases of the individual scripts. When translating the Greek text into English, we took into account two translations of the New American Bible (NAB), The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) and, in some cases, the New King James Version (NKJV).

The eschatological dimension of missionary and charitable work

The results of the analysis of selected biblical texts will be presented in three parts. The first one will focus on the perspective of the first two synoptic gospels, the second one on Luke's two-part work (gospel of) Luke - Acts, and the third one on both of Peter's epistles.

The Gospel according to Mark and to Matthew

The centre of the Gospels is *Jesus Christ* (Mark 1:1). According to tradition, Mark is the author of the oldest synoptic¹⁶⁸ gospel, and at the same time, this literary species¹⁶⁹ is created by Mark¹⁷⁰ according to the tradition. The question the author of the gospel wanted to answer

167 Andrej Mátel, *Učenie v synoptických evanjeliách. Licenčná práca* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2003); Andrej Mátel, *Učenie v synoptických evanjeliách. Exegetická štúdia s pastoračnými aplikáciami*. (Skalica: Alija, 2009).

168 Synoptic from Greek *synoptikos* transparent. In view of the gospels, it refers to the similarity, the parallel status of paintings, symbols, texts and the literary dependence of the first three Gospels, i.e. Mark, Matthew and Luke. In 1835, when comparing these gospels, the German biblical scholar Karl Lachmann concluded that Mark gospel is the oldest and the other two synoptics already had it at their disposal in their works (cf. Petr Pokorný, *Evangelium podle Marka* (Praha: Česká biblická společnost, 2016). 3-5 ; Petr Pokorný, *Literární a teologický úvod do Nového zákona* (Praha: Kalich, 1993). 51-85. From this, currently widely accepted theory, we are also based in this study.

169 "The Gospel" is a distinctive literary species that combines different traditions in a narrative way to create a complete story about the importance of public action, the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah for the salvation of man. A. Yarbro Collins (*The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context*, 1992) states that "the primary intention of Mark was to write down history... it is a strange kind of history because it talks about the course of eschatological events, rather than about history in a rational, empirical sense as outlined by Thucydides, nor in a modern critical sense, but history in an eschatological and apocalyptic sense." Similarly, Norman Perrin (*The New Testament: An Introduction* 1982) he sees Mark's gospel as an "apocalyptic drama". Cf. John R. Donahue, and Daniel, J. Harrington, *Evangelium podle Marka* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství 2005). 25.

170 The gospel is an anonymous work. The author knows the Jewish Scriptures, especially from their Greek translation, explaining Jewish customs to his listeners. According to the general consensus of exegetes, the gospel was written in the years 60-70 BC. 1Pe 5:13, mentions Papias of Hierapole (2st CE) citing the oral division of

is, „In what sense is Jesus the Messiah, what does that mean?“ Jesus Himself conceals the messianic identity during his ministry. It is a „messianic mystery,¹⁷¹“ a typical feature of Mark's gospel. Jesus is represented by God as *beloved Son* (1:11; 9:7). The devil and unclean spirits recognize and present His identity as the Holy One of God (cf. 1:24; 3:11; 5:7). The stories of the vocation of disciples (1: 16-20) are also based on His unique identity. He does not act as Jewish teachers at the time (who did not call disciples because the *Talmidim* chose their *rabbi*), but rather with prophetic authority in interpreting the Scriptures, close to God Himself.¹⁷² The disciples who accepted His challenge and followed Him gradually became aware of his identity, although they did not fully understand it until after the Easter events. For the disciples, Jesus is *Christ* (8:29), literally „anointed,“ which is the name of the Jewish *Messiah* and descendant of David, literally the *son of David* (12:35; 10:47).¹⁷³ It was not until the mouth of the Roman governor Pilate and the soldiers that was said that He was *king of the Jews* (15: 2-15.26.32). On the cross, Jesus' identity is also revealed to the Roman *centurion*, who said, „*Truly this man was the Son of God!*“ (15:39) and it is precisely for believers from nations (Gentiles) that the Gospel of Mark is primarily intended. The central theme of Jesus' proclamation and teaching was the fact that *the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel!* (1:15, 4:26-31). By the action of Jesus, *the kingdom of God comes with the power* (9:1). Jesus casted out *demons, devils* (cf. 1:34.39; 2:15; 7:24-30) and healed (1:34.40-45; 3:10; 5:1-10). In order for His work to continue, He called and *appointed the Twelve*, (*whom He also named apostles*)¹⁷⁴ *that they might be with him* (3:14a). This communion of life is the basic precondition for *sending them* (gr. ἀποστείλλη *apostellé*) *forth to preach* (3:14b) *and to have the authority to drive out demons* (3:15). During the mission itself, he *sent them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits* (6:7). Their mission was successful. *They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them* (6:13). This mission in Israel was a preparation for an even greater mission *ad gentes*, which began according to the Gospel of Mark after the Passover event of Jesus' death and resurrection¹⁷⁵ (cf. 16:15). This mission is also accompanied by great signs (16:17-18). An important part of the mission, however, is the guarding of one's own soul, as evidenced by Jesus' statement: *What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life* (gr. ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ *psyche autou* literally of his soul)¹⁷⁶ (8:36). The basis of the Master's statement may be the well-known Jewish expression אָבֵד נַפְשׁוֹ *'abed naphsho*, to waste his life. Whoever wants to save his life, that is, to secure himself, to secure his existence, he brings his own demise. The Teacher warns his envoys not to focus on success – despite the importance of

the Presbyter John, quoted by Eusebius, later Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origenes.

171 Cf. Mar 1:34.44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26.30; 9:9.

172 Mátel, „Učenie v synoptických evanjeliách. Licenčná práca,“ 233.

173 However, disciples cannot understand the full identity of Jesus without suffering and Cross. In this context, the text of Mar 8:27-33, showing how Peter, the most important of the disciples, little understood Him. He came to the realization that Jesus is *Messiah*, but his understanding of messianism did not concede Jesus suffering. Harrington states that “no cross-portrait of Jesus as a spectator, and teacher is unbalanced, as if without the guiding principle and skeleton of the gospel” (J.D. Harrington, “The Gospel according to Mark in NJBC,” 1995. 597).

174 Text is missing in several ancient codes.

175 In the Jewish theology of Jesus' time, the resurrection was considered as an eschatological event (Cf. Dan 12:1-3; Donahue, and Harrington, “Evangelium podle Marka,” 46.

176 ψυχή, *psyche* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew נֶפֶשׁ *nephesh*. Most often, it translates with the word *Soul* but its sepia field is much wider. The soul is regarded as part of a body that cannot be separated from it in any way. It is often described as the seat of emotions. In a broader sense, then πνεύμα as the bearer of life denotes *Life* as such, or *Person*.

missionary work, but on the “goal of the missionary’s own journey.” The real reward is *eternal life in the age to come* (10:30b). He who bets everything on Jesus, and according to Mark and also *his gospel* (unlike other *synoptics*), to whom the preservation of his own life is not the last value, he will receive real life and death will not mean his end. Focusing on this goal of the mission is also very important in the suffering and persecution (13:13a) that may be part of the missionary journey, just as it was part of the mission of the Messiah: *But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved* (13:13b). In addition to an individual focus on the latter, the Gospel of Mark records the eschatological message of Jesus, specifically in chapter 13. Jesus speaks of His second coming, using images from the prophecy of Daniel (cf. Mark 13: 24-27; Dan 7:13-14). Jesus comes as the Son of man¹⁷⁷ *in the clouds with great power and glory* (13:26) *and gathers (his) elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky* (13:27). The resurrection from the dead is also a part of the next age (12:18-27).

According to the „two-source theory,¹⁷⁸ the anonymous author of **Matthew’s Gospel**¹⁷⁹ already knew Mark’s gospel, and took it as the basis for his work. In addition, the editor had at his disposal the so-called source of logic - Q source (from German Quelle, meaning „source“) and special own tradition (oral or written). Matthew, unlike Mark, refers the title of Messiah to Jesus with much less hesitation. Apart from the fact that Jesus is the Son of God¹⁸⁰, the Son of David, He is also *Emmanuel, which means „God is with us“* (Matt 1:23) - and this identity is confirmed even after the resurrection, when he says: *And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age* (Matt 28:20). Matthew introduces Jesus as the new Moses, the central figure of the Hebrew Bible. By dividing his book into five sections, according to the main sayings of Jesus, he leads the idea of the Torah (chapters 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25). Jesus’ sermon on the mountain is a parallel to the proclamation of the law in Sinai¹⁸¹. In the Gospel of Matthew, the tension between Jesus and his disciples with the Pharisees can be observed most clearly as well as their scribes, including between the *Jewish Christians* and *Rabbinic Judaism*. The Gospel was written for the ecclesial community, which apparently consisted largely of Jewish believers in Jesus as the Messiah¹⁸², so there is no need, unlike Mark, to explain Jewish customs to his listeners. Matthew closely follows Mark’s understanding of the historical disciples of Jesus. However, they are much more a model for believers in Jesus the Messiah in his church community. The evangelist shows a greater interest in

177 The Son of a Man, Hebrew ‘δᾶ+β̄ ben-’ adam Aramaic ‘נָאָרָא bar-’ anash is an expression that served as a personal outreach to as an individual – therefore, human being. Its meaning changed under the influence of apocalyptic literature, especially the book of Daniel, Enoch and Apocalypse of Ezra (4 Ezra). In biblical 7. Chapter Daniels book is presented by the Son of Man as the caretaker of the Kingdom of God and representative of the saved new people. The exceptionality of the title Son of Man lies in his exclusive gospel use to identify Jesus himself. In the gospel, this title has three main co-extensive meanings: 1. in relation to Jesus’ life on the earth, his “low” state, that is, to indicate the reduction of God; 2. in relation to Jesus’ path of suffering; 3. for the Day of Judgement as a figure of heavenly glory.

178 Cf. Daniel J. Harrington, *Evangelium podle Matouše* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2005). 27.

179 The author of the gospel attributed to Matthew is a believer in Jesus the Messiah of Jewishness, knows perfectly well the Jewish Scriptures and tradition, and is influenced by the Greek translation of Septuagint. According to Papist testimony, he was the author of Matthew, the disciple of Jesus, which was not confirmed by literary criticism, rather the opposite. However, it may be the author of “Matthew’s Act”. It was written around the role 85 - 90 CE (Cf. Pokorný, “Literární a teologický,” 106-107; Daniel J. Harrington, *Evangelium podle Matouše* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2003). 18.

180 Cf. Mat 2:15; 3:17; 16:16; 17:5; 26:63; 27:40.43.54.

181 Josef Hřebík, *Jak se utvářel Nový zákon* (Praha: Pastorační středisko, 1997). 15.

182 Evidenced by often used Semitism, its style is influenced by Septuagint, Jewish customs do not need to be explained, there are the main topics of Jewish theology: Torah, justice, the power of Kingdom, true piety, God’s judgement.

bridging historical stories to his listeners and the ecclesial community directly in the text. Matthew’s Gospel has a catechetical purpose. The central concept of Jesus’ proclamation is the Kingdom of Heaven, which mysteriously acts, advances, and grows (Matt 13). For the respect of God’s name, the author changes the designation „Kingdom of God“. The disciples have an important place in this Kingdom, they belong to it along with Jesus. In the tenth „discipleship“ chapter, the author concentrates material on the Twelve, their elections, assignments, and gives missionary instructions. In it, the current situation in his ecclesial community is very clearly „translucent“, especially the experience of non-acceptance and persecution (10:14-22). A word of salvation is the one that encourages missionaries: *whoever endures to the end will be saved* (10:22b; 24:13). Jesus himself, who sent them, identifies himself with the missionaries and their acceptance. They become not only his representatives, but also the one who sent Jesus, the heavenly Father (10:40-42). The disciples of Matthew cannot be limited to the group of the Twelve, but they played an important role as representatives of the discipleship community and of the eschatological judges of Israel. In Matthew’s individual eschatology, it is embedded in the universal one, which corresponds its Jewish understanding. Towards the Twelve Jesus spoke of their reward: In the restoration of the world, when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory, *I say to you that you who have followed me, in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory, will yourselves sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel* (19:28). The special eschatological part is found in Matthew’s chapters 24-25. In addition, the evangelist uses the image of a wedding and a wedding feast, but he must be prepared for it - dressed in a wedding robe (22:1-14) or having enough oil in lighted lamps (25:1-13). With these images and parables, Matthew complements Jesus’ statements about the need for constant vigilance in view of the unexpected second coming of the Messiah (24:43; 25:13) and the subsequent classification (24:40-41). Regarding his second coming, Jesus uses Daniels image of the Son of Man as judge. *For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory, and then He will repay everyone according to his conduct* (16:27; 25:31). According to the Gospel of Matthew, acts of love are of unique significance. As we stated earlier in mission, so in charity, that is, the practical acts of love for the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned, Jesus identifies with these needy (25:31-46). However, alms should not be given in such a way that everyone can see it, that is, hypocritically, but in secret (6:2-4). Mission and charity are presented by Matthew as the decisive actions of man in the Last Judgement. Elsewhere, the faith in Jesus is mentioned to them, whether they are believers from Jews or nations (8:10-12). However, the mission of Jesus and the Twelve to Israel is most strictly limited by Matthew (10:5-6; 15:24). Therefore, the disciples are also incomprehensible in relation to the healing of the daughter of the pagan Canaanite woman (15:21-28). This mission, aimed at rebuilding Israel, has historically been only partially successful. Only after the Easter experiences, does the turn to expand the mission to the Gentiles, the aim of which will be to „*make new disciples of all nations*“ (gr. μαθητεύσατε *mathéteusate*) (18:19a). These disciples will be initiated into the new community by *baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* (28:19b).

The Gospel according to Luke and Acts of the Apostles

The centre of the gospel message, which according to oral tradition is attributed to Luke¹⁸³, is the *Son of God* (Luk 1:35), *Son of the Most High* (1:32), *The Messiah of God /NAB/* or *The*

183 “The Gospel of Luke” as well as Acts of the Apostles are addressed to Theophilus (Luk 1:3; Acts 1:1), but the title with the author’s name is not included in the text. Both files are anonymous. With doctor Luke from the Paul’s circuit (Psalm 24; 2Ti 4:11) he was identified by the Irenaeus from Lyon at the end of the 2nd century CE. The author speaks the Greek language perfectly. Also, he is well acquainted with Hellenist’s culture, a Jewish

Christ of God /NJB/ (9:20). Unlike the other two synoptic gospels, in Luke's two-part¹⁸⁴ gospel - Acts of the Apostles, the Passover events of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection are not the culmination, but rather the centre of the history of salvation. The fact that Jesus' message must be proclaimed to all nations is not only an Easter vision, but also a reality. According to Simeon's testimony, Jesus brought *the light of revelation for the gentiles and the glory for your (God's) people of Israel* (cf. Luk 2:32). Jesus himself preached and proclaimed the *good news* (gr. εὐαγγελίζω *euangelizó*) of the kingdom of God (8:1; 4:33; 9:11). At the centre of his message was the kingdom of God, which he proclaimed with power. This *power of the Lord was with him for healing* (5:17; 6:19), *by the power over demons and unclean spirits* (4:36; 11:14) and *the authority on earth to forgive sins* (5:24; 7:47). The Gospel of Luke emphasizes the tension that the kingdom of God is already presents by the coming of the Messiah among his followers (17:21)¹⁸⁵, but not yet in full, so the praying „*your kingdom come*“ is part of Jesus' prayer (11:2). Jesus also gave the Twelve *power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. And he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal* (Luke 9:1-2). In addition to the election and mission of the Twelve Apostles, Luke, as the only evangelist, mentions that *the Lord appointed seventy (-two)¹⁸⁶ others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit* (10:1). Not only is the mission in Israel presented by the Twelve Apostles important to Luke, but also the universal mission to the nations presented by the „seventy (two).“ Both missions have their origins in Jesus' work. The initial mission of the ambassadors was successful in terms of expressions of power (9:10; 10:17), but Jesus unexpectedly „cooled“ the joy of seventy (two) by pointing to another reason for joy - *but rejoice because your names are written in heaven* (10:20b). Jesus' words clash with the biblical idea of the heavenly book of the living or the „book of life,“ which records those who belong to God, are his blessed people¹⁸⁷. The Master directs the disciples' attention away from the thoughts of the sensational success of a powerful mission towards the goal of their own life, which is „*reward in heaven*“ (6:23) – that is, eternal life. It

tradition, but does not know well the geography of Israel. The author probably belonged to the god-fearing, who sympathized with the synagogue. The file is back to the 1980s. Years CE. Cf. Petr Pokorný, *Vznešený Teofíle* (Mlín, 1998). 9-11.

- 184 Luke's two-piece work is conceived as a whole, it is a specific literary species. Cf. Pokorný, „Vznešený Teofíle,“ 15.
- 185 For Luke, the Jewish background of understanding of the kingdom of God is most strongly reflected. Hebrew Bible mentions God as a king (Psalm 47; 93; 96-99); the winner over the powers of chaos (Psalm 46; Isa 40:21-26); almighty judge (Zep 1:14-18; Am 5-6). The second meaning of the idea of the kingdom of God extends in its interim to the Maccabean era, when apocalyptic close expectations flared. The kingdom of God is the future of the great end of times, the arrival of which will mark the dramatic transformation of this world. It will be connected to the court of God (Zec 14). In this sense, the kingdom of God was a kind of messiahs' kingdom, which, although it bears some of the features of a new age, is, in principle, conceivable as a kingdom of this world. Even with Jesus, as in Jewishness, the kingdom of God is a future greatness (Luk 11:2b-4; 6:20-23), and yet the announcement of the Kingdom of Jesus differs deeply from the Jewish premise. That kingdom is close (Luk 10:9.11) and can be accessed (Luk 11:52). Jesus follows the apocalyptic speech of close expectation. However, according to Jesus, a community can be experienced as the presence of incoming joy. Kingdom can be experienced presently for believers in Jesus. His sermon is aimed more prophetic-eschatologically than apocalyptically.
- 186 There are significant differences in the number of other disciples posted in the text variants. Part of the important text codes indicates the number 70; the part is the number 72. It is not possible to determine exactly which reading is more original according to the criteria of the text criticism, so both variants are mentioned in the text. Number seventy can reflect the number of nations from descendants *Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth* (Gen 10:1-31).
- 187 Cf. Andrej Mátel, *Učenie v synoptických evanjeliách. Licenčná práca* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2003) ; Andrej Mátel, *Učenie v synoptických evanjeliách. Exegetická štúdia s pastoračnými aplikáciami*. (Skalica: Alíja, 2009).

is the reward of *eternal life in the age to come* (18:30) that Jesus speaks of in connection with a radical decision for the kingdom of God. Similarly, to the Twelve during the Last Supper, Jesus speaks of the reward He has prepared - *I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel* (22:29-30). In this case, individual eschatology intertwines with the universal one, similarly to Matthew. Despite Luke's strong missionary emphasis, the eschatological royal dimension of Jesus' reign is already prophetically emphasized in the introduction to the Gospel: „*The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end*“ (1,32b-33). In this context, the apostles' question was „when will these events take place?“ - which, unlike Matthew (24:3) - Luke moves to the Acts of the Apostles, before the event of the Ascension: „Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?“ (Acts 1:6). Jesus' answers, „*It is not for you to know times or dates*“ (gr. χρόνους η' καιρούς *chronous é kairous*) that *the Father has decided by his own authority* (Acts 1:7) corresponds to the words in the Gospel of the coming of the Son of man. The certainty is that He will come in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels (Luk 9:26). He comes unexpectedly like *lightning flashing* (Luk 17:24), *like a trap* (Luk 21:35) *at an hour you do not expect* (Luk 12:40b). Disciples *must be prepared* (Luk 12: 40a), as *faithful and prudent stewards* (Luk 12:42) so *that day will come upon you unexpectedly* (21:34). In addition to guarding your heart and behaving with dignity (Luk 21:34), it is important to *be vigilant at all times and pray* (Luk 21:36, cf. 18:1-7). An example of a prepared follower of Jesus is the deacon Stephen (Acts 6:6-7.70), who publicly confessed to Him as the Messiah. At the hour of death he *looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God* (Acts 7:55-56). The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luk 16:19-31) points out that eternal life is decided by life on the earth. In his focus on individual eschatology, Luke emphasizes radicalism and shows two paths in this world leading to treasures in heaven. The first we have mentioned so far is mission and the second is charity. In a radical form, the path of charity Luke records in the form of Jesus' statement about alms and treasure in heaven (12: 32-34) and his conversation with a rich leading man (Luk 18:18-27) - *sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor* (Luk 18:22). At the same time, the charity starts at home, while dining. *When you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous* (Luk 14:13-14). The human heart is important. People can be deceived by great charitable works, but God sees into the heart of man and also sees where his treasure really is (Luk 12:34, 16:15). In the Acts of the Apostles, the tragic story and death of *Ananias and his wife Sapphira* testify to this (Acts 5:1-11). According to the author of the Acts of the Apostles, the ideal community of Jesus' followers is the Jerusalem community, in which *there was no needy person among them* (cf. Acts 4:32-37).

After Jesus' ascension, during the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, which in Greek was called πεντηκοστή (literally 'Pentecost'), the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples. The Post-Eastern Mission and the Kerygmatic Proclamation of the Apostles began. Peter's first proclamation (Acts 2: 14-36) was addressed to the *Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem* (2:14). Peter, quoting the Hebrew Bible, proclaimed that the *εσχάτος ἡμέρα* (*eschatos héméra*) *last days (times)* announced by the prophet Isaiah (Hebrew *אַחֲרֵי תְּשׁוּבָתוֹ 'acharit hajjamim*¹⁸⁸) had been fulfilled. The proclamation continues with the fulfilment of the prophecy of the prophet Joel

- 188 The Hebrew text Isa 2:2 speaks literally of the 'future days' that occur after the current ones (cf. τῶν ἡμερῶν in Gen 49:1; Psalm 139:9). However, the text is understood and interpreted eschatologically, which is also the Greek translation of Septuagint, from which the author of the Acts of the Apostles drew.

(3:1-5). The attention of Scripture readers and interpreters is usually focused on the message of the "pouring out of the Spirit upon every flesh" associated with prophecy (Acts 2:1-3:17-18). However, prophecy and Peter's proclamation also include other verses that speak of signs in heaven and on earth and proclaim the coming of the Lord's Day (gr. ἡμέρα κυρίου *héméra kyriou*). This day of the Lord will be *great and splendid* (gr. ἐπιφανή *epiphané*) (Acts 2:20), as foretold by the prophet Malachi (Mal 3:22). Peter understands the last days as a messianic age. Peter's speech continues with a messianic proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection, witnessed by the testimonies of the Scriptures, a call to repentance, baptism, and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Peter, while visiting the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius in Caesarea, returns in his Messianic language to the subject of the (last) judgement, *He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead* (Acts 10:42).

The eschatological message became an integral part of Paul's proclamation, as many of his epistles testify. In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's speech in front of Areopagus in Athens is key in this theme (Acts 17:22-34). *(God) has established a day on which he will 'judge the world with justice' through a man he has appointed, and he has provided confirmation for all by raising him from the dead* (Acts 17:31). It was the *resurrection* of the dead (cf. Acts 24:15), the first of which was Christ, as an integral part of the apostles' proclamation, was one of the key events in deciding to reject (Acts 17:32) or accept the Messiah (Acts 17:34). And it is this decision that is crucial whether the recipients of the Lord's and God's words are (un)worthy of *eternal life* (Acts 13:46).

Peter's Epistles

According to **First Epistle of Peter** to the Story of Jesus, the last time (καιρός ἔσχατος *kairos eschatos*) was the *final time revealed to us* (gr. ἀποκαλυφθῆναι *apokalypthénai*) as a *salvation* (cf. 1Pe 1:5). As with the proclamation in Jerusalem, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, also here, eschatological events are integral parts of Peter's proclamation. The author of this letter¹⁸⁹, addressed to the churches in the diaspora, draws attention to the goal of the life of believers, which is *an inheritance kept in heaven for you* (1:4) and *salvation of your souls* (1:9). These are closely connected not only with the finished work of Jesus Christ, but also with his final *revelation* (1:7). The Greek term ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ *apokalypsej Iesou Christou* is used. This goal is so important for the author of the First Peter's Letter that believers should direct to him all the *living hope* (1:3) *during the time of exile here in reverent awe* (1:17). It is manifested outwardly *by the holiness in all your activity* (v. 15, cf. Lv 19:2), *by mutual love of brothers* (v. 22; 4:8), *by life on the will of God* (4:2), *humble* (5:6) and testimony, *Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that if they speak of you as evildoers, they may observe your good works and glorify God on the day of visitation* (2:12). The *day of visitation* (gr. ἡμέρα ἐπισκοπή, *héméra episkopé*) again refers to the perspective of the goal, in this case it is a "visit" denoting the day of judgement (cf. Isa 10:3). According to 1 Peter, the testimony of (holy) life and *good works* during wandering on this earth is the essence of "charity and mission". On earth, Christians are understood as *aliens*

189 Literary criticism considers this work to be a *pseudepigrapha*, which was a fairly common form of writing in the Hellenist period. The letter was written around 90 CE by the author who controlled good and stylish Greek. Cf. Paula-Angelika Seethaler, *První a druhý list Petřův. List Judův* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2001). With respect for the results of biblical literary criticism, it is also important to take into account the editorial aspect and oral tradition of the Church. In any case, we can talk about 'Peter's School' and 'Peter's tradition'. I agree with Mánek (1997) that Peter's authority could be used by someone (of his disciples) who was at one with him and assumed the role entrusted to Peter by Christ to be the shepherd of his sheep.

and sojourners (NAB), *strangers and nomads* (NJB) (cf. 2:11). Only in this place is the Greek word παρεπίδημος *parepidémos* used in the New Testament, denoting in Greek persons who stay in a given place for a (limited) temporary period (NKJV refers to pilgrims). With regard to Christians, it is a matter of emphasizing the fact that their home is not this earth, but heaven, and a reunion with Jesus Christ. At this point, it is recalled that the addressees of 1 Peter were the Asia Minor communities located in the provinces of the Roman Empire that faced persecution.

The author¹⁹⁰ of the **Second Epistle of Peter** based on a situation of conflict with the *false prophets* (literally ψευδο *pseudo*) and the *false (pseudo) teachers* (2:1), the *scoffers* (3:3). The author of the letter distinguishes between the subject of ridicule and the consequences. The subject is the promise of the second coming of the Lord (3:4) and the consequence is that their *lives are ruled by their passions* (3:3), i.e. their untied, immoral way of life of *unprincipled people* (3:17). Despite the literary difference between the two Peter's epistles, both continuously teach about the goals of Christian life. Vocabulary 2 Pe - following the message of the prophets¹⁹¹ - is the *eternal kingdom* (αἰώνιος βασιλεία *aiónios basileia*) of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ (1:11). So this goal is not on this earth. Part of the apostolic teaching - referring to the authority of the Apostle Peter - is the message of the (second) *coming* (gr. παρουσίαν) of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is not devised myths (1:16) and is part of events of *last days* / NAB / or *final days* / NJB / (gr. ἐσχάτων ἡμερῶν *eschatón hémérón*, 3:3). As for the time of the Lord's coming, there is a letter from the Gospel tradition that refuses to set a precise date and calls for constant vigilance. According to 2 Pe, God's time is different from human counting (3:8), the *Lord does not delay his promise, but he is patient with you*. The reason is that the *Lord does not want anyone to perish, but for everyone to repent* (3:9). On the other hand, constant readiness is needed, for the *Day of the Lord* (ἡμέρα κυρίου *héméra kyriou*) *will come like a thief* (3:10). The judgment that will take place on this day requires - already now - a proper way of life worthy of Jesus' followers. Like 1 Pe and 2 Pe, the letter emphasizes *holiness* and adds *devotion* (2 Pe 3:11, cf. 1:3.6.7). However, the original Greek word εὐσεβεία (*eusebeia*) does not refer primarily to ritual piety, but manifests a *good life*, by doing *good deeds*, the NKJV mentions *godliness*. It is no coincidence that Cornelius is also described in the Acts of the Apostles as a man who was εὐσεβής (*eusebés*) *devout and God-fearing*, because he *gave alms generously to the Jewish people and prayed to God constantly* (Act 10:2). The connection of such an action directly with God, or fear of him, expresses the fact that the Septuagint translates in it the Hebrew יְהוָה יָרֵא which *Jirat JHVH* in the prophet *Isaiah* (Isa 11:2) denoting one of the gifts of the Spirit of the Lord רוּחַ יְהוָה (*ruach JHVH*). If 1 Peter pointed out the pilgrimage dimension of the Christian life, 2 Peter emphasizes the attitude of *actively waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God* (3:12), as well as *new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells* (2 Pe 3:13). This expectation should be an urgent *hastening* (3:12) - which expresses the expression (σπεύδοντας from the verb σπεύδω). For believers it is good news, any fear - beyond the fear of God - is useless *because the Lord is well able to rescue the good* (again εὐσεβεία *eusebeis* is used) *from their trials* (2 Pe 2:9).

190 This is also the case with the pseudepigraph work, as evidenced by the letter itself (3:2.4) and the use of Jude's letter. Pokorný states that 'the name of the consignor, of disciple Simon Peter, is an expression of the spiritual programme rather than the designation of the historical consignor' (Pokorný, "Literární a teologický," 252). Although it refers in the text to the 1 Peter, in terms of literary criticism, it is about another author, because both letters are different in terms of content and literary style. The letter dates from between 120 and 140 BC. Cf. Seethaler, "První a druhý list," 65-66.

191 Cf. Oz 3:5, Mich 4:1, Jer 37:24, Ez 38:16, Dan 2:28.29.45; 10:14.

Discussion

From the point of view of the international professional community which deals with missionary and charitable work, the paper points to the importance of an in-depth analysis of the Bible, which is one of the most important sources of missionary work and charitable work as its integral part. The paper has an interdisciplinary character. Although primarily focused on missionary and charitable work, it uses the scientific knowledge of biblical theology. In addition, it can contribute to social work in its historical context or in its Christian perspective.

The eschatological dimension of missionary work is not a completely new topic. In Slovakia, Bučko devoted himself to the sketch of biblical eschatology in the context of the mission¹⁹². As it was a complex work focused on the basics of missiology, the author focused on the eschatology of the New Testament from an overall point of view, i.e. not on the analysis of individual biblical books. The author's Senior and Stuhlmüller proceeded to discuss the biblical theology of the mission through the analysis of individual books, but did not pay deeper attention to eschatology¹⁹³. An important finding of our analysis of selected biblical texts, it has been shown that the eschatological message is not on the margins, but right at the centre of the life and proclamation of Jesus and his followers. The authors emphasize in the paper the important message for early Christian and contemporary missionary and charitable work - the eager anticipation of the Lord's coming as an integral part of the Christian life and witness. Summarizing of the findings of the following points will be include in a discussion.

1. The centre of the synoptic gospels is Jesus and His messianic identity, which is fully revealed by the Easter events of His suffering, death and resurrection. The centre of Jesus' preaching was the kingdom of God (in Matthew, the kingdom of heaven), proclaimed with great power. Jesus' the Twelve and other disciples continue to proclaim this Kingdom, with Jesus Christ at the centre of their proclamation. According to Luke's Gospel, the kingdom of God is already present among the disciples, but not in its fullness, so they not only expect the coming of God's kingdom internally, but also pray for it (*Your Kingdom come!*). In this finding, I agree with Gnilka¹⁹⁴ that "the kingdom of God is the centre and inner essence of Jesus' proclamation. It itself qualifies time in a certain way: it is not just in relation to the future, it is the future. And this cannot be left without consequences for determining the presence ... The kingdom of God as a world filled with the royal government of God is the desired goal for which man is intended. Bučko¹⁹⁵ emphasizes that "the kingdom of God was not an apocalyptic concept according to Jesus." The gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles to Israel and gradually to the other nations of the world. Historical and contemporary listeners of the Gospel are called to be disciples and apostles, that is, ambassadors and missionaries of the Messiah Jesus and his Kingdom. Flusser¹⁹⁶ pointing to the Hebrew dimension of the proclamation of the Kingdom of God states that God's rule for the Jews meant that only God

192 Cf. Ladislav Bučko, *Na ceste k oslobodeniu. Základy misiológie* (Nitra: Spoločnosť Božieho Slova, 2003). 168-180. The author in the next work cites eschatology as an implicit part of the Christological basis of the missionary and charitable activity, in the section on the kingdom of God as a definitive goal: "The kingdom of God is present in its beginning here on earth, but its fullness and completion will only be achieved in the definitive future". (Bučko, "Misijná a charitatívna činnosť," 46).

193 Cf. Donald Senior, "Teológia misie u Marka," in Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmüller, *Biblické základy misie*, (Levice: JPK, 2002). 206.

194 Joachim Gnilka, *Ježíš Nazaretský – poselství a historie* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2001).123; 126.

195 Bučko, "Na ceste k oslobodeniu," 169.

196 Cf. David Flusser and R. Stevan Notley, *Jesus. Jerusalem*. (The Magnet Press, The Hebrew University, 1998).

ruled *de iure*, but only in the eschatological future would God's kingdom be revealed to all the inhabitants of the world *de facto*. According to Jesus, the kingdom of heaven proceeds from the power of God, but it is performed by people on earth. Thus, one can and should work to realize this Kingdom.

2. By analysing Mark's Gospel and other synoptics, we have found that it is important to distinguish between the goal of the disciples' mission and the goal of their lives. It is important to guard one's own soul and therefore one's own spiritual life. This is also confirmed by 1 Peter with an emphasis on the witness of holy life and good deeds. Believers in the Messiah are understood as pilgrims. Its author calls on all hope of our sojourn on earth to focus on the goal of life, which is the inheritance prepared in heaven. According to 2 Peter, it is the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. According to the Synoptic Gospels, the disciples of Jesus, and with them the current disciples and missionaries (envoys), cannot be directed to missionary achievements, but to be among the chosen ones whom the Son of Man will gather on his second coming from all sides of the world. The evangelist Luke similarly states the entry in the book of life, the reward of eternal life in the coming age.

3. Persecution was part of the Messiah's journey, so it will be part of the life and mission of his disciples and missionaries. Focusing on the true purpose of discipleship and missionary life is especially urgent and important in experiences of non-acceptance and persecution. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus identifies himself with the missionaries, who sent them and whom they represent. Luke cites in the Acts of the Apostles the example of Stephen, who saw God's glory during his persecution and impending death. For today's disciples and missionaries, he is a model for the fulfilment of Jesus' words in life practice.

4. Mark's perspective is complemented and extended by the Gospel of Matthew, which uses the Hebrew image of the world. The disciples of Jesus and his missionaries should pay close attention to the planned wedding feast and the coming of the Bridegroom. Their attitude to life should be constant vigilance, anticipation and practical acts of love. In addition to constant vigilance, Luke's Gospel emphasizes praying as a life attitude for disciples and missionaries. They are to be faithful and wise stewards. The ideal is a radical following of Jesus, which is manifested in the community by the fact that there is no person in need between them. I agree with Messina that love of neighbour was not just charity. It was born of the common breaking of bread (the Eucharist) and manifested itself in a communion of hearts, which was expressed by common property. The idea of "Christian Communism" was not thought of. The Church wanted to teach that property was given to us in order to administer it for the benefit of the poor¹⁹⁷.

5. The eschatological message and the *Parousia* (*second coming*) were an integral part of the preaching of the early church. I agree with Ratzinger¹⁹⁸ that "there is no doubt that the New Testament contains unmissable traces of the near expectation of the end of the world." The decisive event was the coming of the Messiah Jesus, the Easter events of his death and resurrection, his ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, the anticipation of the second coming of the Messiah, the Last Judgement, and the resurrection of the dead are an integral part of the proclamation. These events were part of the core message of the early Church, which biblical theology calls *kerygma*. Heriban¹⁹⁹ summed up the kerygma in six points²⁰⁰: 1. Jesus is the fulfilment of all the Old Testament promises. 2. His mission (*and*

197 Rosario Messina, *Dějiny charitativní činnosti* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2005). 28.

198 Ratzinger, Joseph. *Eschatologie, smrt a věčný život* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 1997). 26.

199 Heriban, "Průručný lexikón biblických vied," 577.

200 Italics are given additions and modifications by the author of the post.

the proclamation of the Kingdom of God) was confirmed by extraordinary deeds in which He manifested His divine power. 3. The saving meaning of his crucifixion (*suffering and death*). 4. His resurrection as proof that God is with Him. 5. His ascension and the promise of the Second Coming in Glory (*Parousia*), *the Last Judgement, and the resurrection of the dead*. 6. A call to repentance, which is a condition for the remission of sins and for the reception of the Holy Spirit. The news of the Parousia of the Lord Jesus is confirmed by 2 Peter as part of the last days and an authentic message based on the apostolic tradition. So this is not a fictional myth. Therefore, this message should once again be part of the testimony and proclamation of Jesus' current disciples and missionaries. We should not understand it as a "fashion", but as a lost pearl that is now being found again.

6. According to the biblical understanding presented in the Gospel of Luke, the Acts of the Apostles or Peter's epistles, we live in the last times or recent days and messianic age. These will culminate in the second glorious coming of the Messiah Jesus and the judgement of God. I agree with Flusser and his analysis of the distinction between the history of salvation of the Essenes²⁰¹ and Jesus. This Israeli professor of philology and the history of early Christianity states that Jesus divided the history of salvation into three parts. The first one was the "biblical" period, which culminated in John the Baptist. The second period began with His own performance, in which the kingdom of heaven was broken. The third period will be mentioned by the coming of the Son of man and the last judgement in the next age, which is not exactly known to anyone. According to this scheme, we still live in the "middle age". For Essenes, an additional period "in court" was not conceivable. According to Flusser, Jesus was the only one who incorporated the kingdom of heaven into the three-part eschatology as its second stage. I want to add to this that part of this stage of history - that is, part of the last days - is the anticipation of the glorious coming of the Messiah Jesus. He comes as the Son of Man unexpectedly. He is not late with his arrival, but he is patient, forgiving, he does not want anyone to perish - as stated in 2 Peter, and because the *gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a witness to all nations* - as the Gospel of Matthew states. According to 2Pe, disciples and missionaries are required to have an attitude of active anticipation of the coming of God's day.

7. In the Gospel of Matthew, mission and charity are presented as the decisive actions of man in a righteous judgement. The key of the judge will be Jesus Christ as the righteous judge of the living and the dead, whom God has appointed and witnessed by resurrecting Him from the dead. Fellowship with Jesus and faith in him is therefore not only a prerequisite and basic starting point for discipleship at this time, but also for life in the age to come. Eternal life is decided by life and witness here on earth.

Conclusion

The authors throughout the paper work with the theory that if Scripture of the New Testament is an accepted key source of missionary and charitable work, it should be read and reflected again and again as an evaluation tool for their theory and practice. In this paper, we analysed the missionary and charitable work in the perspective of eschatology. The examined biblical texts were the Synoptic Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and Peter's letters. Other New Testament scripts may be the subject of ongoing analysis. In perspective, we can talk about the Johannine tradition (represented by the Gospel of John, 3 Epistles and, with reservations Revelation) and Paul's tradition, which represent the epistles of which he is the author or refers to this apostle.

According to the synoptic Gospels, the centre of Jesus' mission is the eschatological kingdom of God, which is already among Jesus' followers and at the same time yet to come in full. At the heart of this kingdom is the person of the Messiah Jesus, whose rule is already apparent in the life, mission and ministry of the love of his disciples. It is important to distinguish between the goals of the disciples' mission and the goal of their lives, which is to be directed toward the reward in heaven. It is this focus on the reward of eternal life that also helps them in the experience of non-acceptance and persecution. This message also applies to current workers in missionary and charitable work, as well as Christian social workers. All of them cannot be directed to missionary achievements, but to be among the chosen ones whom the Son of Man will gather on his second coming from all sides of the world. The eschatological message was an integral part of the early church and therefore belongs to the centre of preaching in today's Church. According to the biblical message, we live in the last days and times, and disciples are expected to actively expect the coming of the Messiah Jesus, just as bridesmaids and wedding guests expect the bride to come to the wedding. Mission and charity will be fundamental proceedings in the Last Judgement, in which the person of Jesus Christ will play a decisive role.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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201 Flusser analysed the cobs of the Qumran sect found in caves near the Dead Sea: he included John the Baptist among the Essenes so his conclusions also apply to him. Cf. David Flusser and R. Stevan Notley, *Jesus. Jerusalem*. (The Magnet Press, The Hebrew University, 1998).

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THE CHANGE OF SYSTEM IN 1989 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SLOVAKIA. CHALLENGES AND CHANCES OF EUROPEAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY*Miloš Lichner^{1,2}, Milan Urbančok^{✉1}, Silvia Brečková¹, Tomáš Jelluš¹¹ Faculty of Theology, Trnava university in Trnava (SK)² Collegium Bobolanum, Pontifical Faculty of Theology Warsaw (PL)**Submitted: 13 March 2020****Accepted for publication: 3 October 2020****First published: 31 October © Acta Missiologica |No. 2|Vol. 14|2020|****Abstract**

Background: Religion represents an adamant part of the life of society, where fast changes influence the activity of the Church. Situation, activities, contribution and development ability of the Slovak Catholic Church should be scientifically explored in a long-term horizon. The submitted study offers a fundamental realia in this regard, followed by theological and analytic perception of the situation in various areas like science and research, religiosity of the youth, Church-state relations, ecumenical and interreligious facts or the system of education. The study focuses on the perception of a system change in 1989 within the Catholic Church in Slovakia and the challenges emerging from this transformation with the impact on the European Catholic theology. Historical-theological understanding of the situation enables the development of open theology in Europe face to face with ongoing changes.

Conclusion: The most important knowledge emerging from the inquiry of Church's activity in the society is the necessity of a dialogue and critical thinking at all levels. The implications on the level of theoretical research and their further application in the area relevant for this study should be implemented in pastoral plans on both diocesan and parish levels.

Keywords: Catholic Church, theology, Slovakia, post-modernism, dialogue.

Introduction

The following brief analysis presents the Catholic Church thirty years after the change of the social system, as well as the challenges and chances that this transformation has brought to the Catholic Church in Europe. The emphasis is put on the situation of Slovakia. First of all, it provides some fundamental information that might help readers understand the particularities of local Slovak Church. The analysis should be apprehended in the light of the presented facts. Relevant attention is paid to the situation of the Church in Europe influenced by Covid-19 pandemics as well as its impact on mutual relations among local religious communities with special focus on the Slovak context.

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The position and organisation of the Slovak Church

There are 5,5 millions of inhabitants in Slovakia today. Its contemporary territory had been a part of Hungary for several centuries before first becoming independent in 1918, with pre-vailling Christian belief of the nation. Significant changes were caused by the Reformation and later Counter-Reformation. It is estimated that around 90% of the inhabitants of today's Slovakia were influenced by the Reformation. The Catholic Church tried to regain its lost position back through the Counter-Reformation, which led to redistribution of power. By the end of the 18th century, around three quarters of Upper Hungary were recatholized, while protestantism persisted in around one fifth of the population. This ecclesiastical map lasted until the half of the 19th century.

Central-European countries including Slovakia historically represent a crossroads of various cultures and nations. The efforts to create "national states" witnessed in this region from the middle of the 19th century, gradually led to formation of several smaller national states, but none of them was based on purely ethnical principles. For example, inhabitants of Bratislava spoke five different languages in 1918. Succession states inherited this multi-ethnicity; the current Slovak state has strong ethnic minorities that represent almost 20% of the population.²⁰³ However, political calculation based on this phenomenon leads into a blind alley when it comes to economic, security and social spheres. Small countries in modern world cannot be absolutely self-sufficient. That is why, the states of Central Europe are inevitably bound to seek mutual respect and cooperation in pursuing their existence, safety and prosperity.²⁰⁴ Hence, the European Union appears to be an ideal project for Central Europe with its ambition to preserve diversity of cultures in unity of freedom, security, economic development and prosperity for all in mutual solidarity.²⁰⁵

According to the last Census from 2011, 62% of inhabitants of Slovakia claim to be of Roman Catholic faith. In 1991 it was 60.4% and in 2001 it was 68.9%. Seemingly there is no significant shift in numbers if we compare them to the end of the 18th century. But between these two points there was a deeper story. The share of Roman Catholics within the population of Slovakia actually kept growing till the middle of the 20th century. In 1900 it exceeded 68%, in 1921 it reached 71% and by 1930 it had increased to 72%. In 1950, not long after communists took control of the state, 76% of inhabitants claimed to be Roman Catholics. During the following years of totalitarian oppression, however, the number gradually decreased to 60.4% in 1991.²⁰⁶

There is another thing we should consider. Although the figures mentioned above are rather high, they include so-called "cultural" Christians. Number of "self-avowed" faithful is surprisingly lower than it might seem. According to the results of eight-year research of the Faculty of Theology of Trnava University conducted in collaboration with the Institute of Sociology, it

203 Daniel Gurnák, *Vývoj politickej mapy stredovýchodnej a juhovýchodnej Európy – historickogeografická analýza* (Bratislava: Kartprint, 2007).

204 See also: Irena Borowik and Miklós Tomka (eds.) *Religion and Social Change in Post-Communist Europe* (Kraków: Nomos, 2001).

205 Stanislav Kirschbaum, *Central European History and the European Union: The Meaning of Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

206 Also: Jozef Žuffa, "Religiozita Slovákov. Pohľad cez čísla," *Nové Horizonty. Časopis pre teológiu, kultúru a spoločnosť* V., 4, (2011): 197-201; Tatiana Zachar Podolinská, "Religiozita v dobe neskorej modernity: Prípady Slovensko," *Sociální studia* 5, (3-4), (2008): 53-88.

revolves around 30%.²⁰⁷ Along with the increase of the number of members of monotheistic religions, statistical data also testify to the increase of the number of members of alternative religious communities and there is a frequent selection of the content of personal faith from various religious traditions and practices.²⁰⁸ Two generations of society were stigmatized by forced atheization, strong anti-religious propaganda, almost total abandonment of religious education in schools, and limited access to sacraments and church services under the threat of personal, social and economical sanctions. These two generations gave birth to children with mostly poor religious and ecclesiastical consciousness. In Slovakia, there is a strong presence of the phenomenon described by Flemish theologian and former president of ESCT Lieven Boeve as *detraditionalization*, i. e. the disability to hand inherited cultural and religious traditions down to new generations or to migrants.²⁰⁹

Church wedding is often considered from cultural and aesthetical point of view and sometimes it is a result of a certain kind of pressure from the environment. In some cases, the sacramental nature of such matrimony is questionable due to the fact that the couples do not understand it in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church. It seems necessary to guide young people not only after the initiatory sacraments but also during their married life.

The Catholic Church in Slovakia consists of two Roman Catholic ecclesiastical provinces with three bishoprics established in 2008 as a result of reorganization. The Greek Catholic Church is represented by three eparchies, two of which were also established in 2008. In Slovakia there are 27 men's religious orders and associations, 47 women's religious orders and associations, 9 secular institutes and 37 movements and communities.

Each diocese tried to keep its own seminary and theological institute. Currently, there are four faculties of theology in Slovakia – three diocesan (two Roman Catholic and one Greek Catholic) and one which is run by the Society of Jesus.

However, recently we have witnessed a rapid decrease in the number of vocations to a priestly and religious life compared to the first years after the fall of the totalitarian regime; there are also many of those who have decided to leave their priestly or religious life.²¹⁰ Thus, the number of those who are interested in priestly or religious vocations is about the same as in western countries.

Several sexual scandals have been documented in the past few years though it seems that the number of such cases could be lower than in western countries because the Church was not allowed to run educational institutions for minors during the period of communism and all its activities were closely monitored by the police and political apparatus.²¹¹ Most resignations of clergy and men/women of religious profession have been caused by internal burnout and disappointment. The Slovak Church must be careful, however, not to lower the standard of admission of new candidates for the priesthood and consecrated life.

207 Jozef Matulník, *Analýza religiozity katolíkov na Slovensku. Poznatzky zo sociologického výskumu* (Trnava: Teologická fakulta Trnavskej univerzity v Trnave, 2008); Jozef Matulník et al, *Analýza religiozity mladých katolíkov na Slovensku. Poznatzky zo sociologického výskumu* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2014); Jozef Matulník et al, "Vybrané poznatzky z výskumu religiozity katolíkov na Slovensku," *Teologický časopis* VII, no. 1, (2009): 11-26.

208 Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion. Christian faith and practice in a consumer culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Jozef Žuffa, "Výskum názorov," in *Radosť evanjelia na Slovensku II. Fakty a názory*, eds. Karol Moravčík and Jozef Žuffa, (Bratislava: Petrus Publisher, 2019).

209 Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition. An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context* (Leuven: Peeters Press - Eerdmans; MI: Grand Rapids, 2003).

210 Cf. Štefan Turanský, *Krehkosť duchovného povolania. Skúmanie príčin a hľadanie odpovedí* (Bratislava: Don Bosco, 2005).

211 G. Lloyd Rediger, *A guide to Healthy Sexuality for Clergy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

Representatives of the Church have not always listened to warnings of western institutions regarding the increase and subsequent decrease of the number of vocations and have kept building large educational buildings²¹². Therefore, economical difficulties will inevitably lead to merging or cancellation of some seminaries and theological institutes of faculties, though so far this has only happened to the seminary in Badín. All university institutions in Slovakia are funded by the state. 49% of their budget is based on their number of students and 51% on the results of science and research, which may lead to a temptation to keep students at school artificially.

New circumstances of the Slovak society

The idea of Central-Eastern Europe experienced its renaissance after the fall of communism. Thirty years later it is clear that the social, religious and cultural differences among countries of Central and Eastern Europe are visibly bigger than those among countries of Western Europe. When it comes to the position of religion in society, the question is what unites post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe today.

The fatal fellowship of these countries under Soviet hegemony and their shared experience of persecution of the Church is usually seen as a common denominator of the Central European region. Communism meant violent domination over nations, traditions and people's individuality. The affected countries experienced forced transformation of social conditions and the whole process was implemented and strictly controlled by state with one ruling party. The impact of this change in religious area was demonstrated through marginalization of Christians and oppression of their religious faith.

The communist state planned to destroy the Catholic Church and it was obvious that under such circumstances it could not become a significant player in the development of the society in Slovakia or other satellite states of the Soviet Union. The strategy of the communist state was to transform the Church into „museal reality“. Communists wanted to erase its presence among people and reduce its impact on the formation of society. Churches had to adapt to this situation and they started to pay more attention to liturgy and clergy. A positive role was played by underground ecclesiastical structures and lay communities. The face of the Church started to change as it slowly became a certain kind of ghetto distant from crucial things happening in society – and unofficial lay structures were not happy about it. This situation gave birth to a strong Christian dissent, which organized events like mass pilgrimage to Velehrad in 1985²¹³ and finally the famous candle demonstration for human rights and religious freedom in 1988.²¹⁴

After the fall of communism in 1989, post-communist countries got a chance and a task to rebuild their society. The history interrupted by communism and the phenomenon of globalization brought a challenge associated with creation of new social order. The fall of communism did not open the road to some concrete social order. Rather, it brought the countries face to face with the necessity to establish their own, specific social order.

212 The problem was addressed also by Benedict XVI in his speech in 2007. „We thank the Lord for this wealth of priests, and especially of young priests. However, as was foreseeable, this springtime could not last long, so today every Christian community is encouraged to give priority to a careful pastoral vocations promotion.“ See: „BENEDICT XVI.: ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE BISHOPS OF SLOVAKIA ON THEIR „AD LIMINA“ VISIT,“ (15 June 2007). http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070615_ad-limina-slovakia.html

213 Jaroslav Šebek, „Mezi lojalitou Církvi a mocí. Cyrilometodějská tradice v období komunismu,“ in *Cyrilometodějská tradice v novodobých Československých dějinách* (Peter Ivanič ed. Brno, 2018). 95-112.

214 Peter Jašek, František Neupauer, Ondrej Podolec, Pavol Jakubčín eds. *Sviečková manifestácia I. Štúdie a sve-dectvá* (Ústav pamäti národa, 2015).

In thirty years, Slovakia moved from the phase full of hope and belief in freedom to the feeling of scepticism and disappointment.

Resenment that marks contemporary social and political life in the Slovak Republic and behind its borders represents a great challenge. Creation of a functioning democratic system remains a great ambition, which, however, cannot be fulfilled overnight. Transformation of political and economical life of one of the vassal states of the Soviet empire requires time and apparently it takes several generations to succeed. The inheritance of collectivization of real socialism and so-called *homo sovieticus*²¹⁵ still belongs to the culture of contemporary Slovakia. Thirty years of life without the communist oppression have brought many positive changes in the Slovak republic that might seem natural today, like freedom of expression, trade, travelling etc.²¹⁶ But freedom also means more responsibility, which still represents a challenge for individuals and social structures with sentimental feelings towards former socialist under the mask of a guardian. Citizens had no responsibility and there was someone to take care of them without much of their initiative and effort. There was a strong resentment regarding social security that included 100% employment rate, gratuitous healthcare and education or cheap food. But people forget that all this was a part of deformed economics which produced merchandise that nobody actually wanted to buy. In 1989, the dead stock consisted of a year-long volume of production that could not be sold, while national market was short of many demanded goods. There was a production attributed to parallel economics without taxation amounting to around 20%, which resulted in later tax speculations and civil frauds. It is a fact that the society became full of consumism and wasting. All this represents a challenge for Christian commitment in the area of responsibility for public matters on local, national and European level. Understanding and implementation of a principle of subsidiarity should stimulate the awareness of people that now their fate is in their own hands. Many believers did not want to accept the fact that freedom is the greatest gift of God and they are willing to renounce it in favour of the fake impression of social security.

Slovakia keeps changing rapidly and after the phase of post-modernism²¹⁷ it has entered the phase of *post-truth society* where Christian symbology is misused in political battle.

Impatience in the process of establishment of the new social system and obstacles on the way to democracy have led to birth of radical political ideologies, non-Christian attitude towards refugees and nationalism that is very close to totalitarian ideologies. Young people are inclined to believe in radical and definite solutions that are not real. Every attempt to establish egalitarianism fails and new elites or privileged layers of society are formed. The level of importance of control mechanisms like independent tribunals and media rises. The murder of investigative journalist and his fiancée in Slovakia has gradually unveiled the interconnection among representatives of justice, oligarchs and criminal groups. It is a challenge for the Church to learn how to be transparent, how live in a house made of glass and how to defeat corruption. Christians should be realists and educate others in this virtue. In personal life it means to accept one's sinfulness and try to improve. This is the core of Christian faith in the progress of humanity.

There is a strong tendency to reject institutions among young people in modern society.²¹⁸ It reflects in growing number of independent members of parliament and mayors in municipal

215 Alexander Zinoviev, *Homo Sovieticus* (Grove/Atlantic, Incorporated, 1981).

216 Jiri Musil, „Czechoslovakia in the Middle of Transition,“ *Czechoslovak Sociological Review* 28, (1992): 5–21.

217 See: Jozef Jurina, *Postmodernizmus a jeho civilizačno-kultúrne konzekvencie* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2004).

218 For more information see: Martin Šebo, *Nihilism in tension. A theology of Kenosis as a Response to Some Nihilistic Inclinations in the Context of Contemporary Slovakia USA*, Boca Raton, Irvine, 2017.

politics, as well as in the support of radical anti-system political parties that reject democracy and the idea of European integration. In regard to culture we can see a strong diversion from rationality towards emotionality. Culture of images and stories prevails. All this reflects in the way young people understand the Catholic Church. They see it as an institution and even those who have been baptized do not feel that they can identify with it. They refuse moral teaching of the Church in the area of reproduction and marriage, preferring informal cohabitation. All of this happens due to insufficient preparation and lack of evangelization. Many people from the last three generations have not experienced faith in their families and they do not feel that they should pass it onto future generations. Their life of faith has been reduced to sacraments of Christian initiation without any reference to further development within some Christian community.²¹⁹ This is the biggest challenge regarding new evangelization and formation of communities within the Church.²²⁰

In the past thirty years, massive meetings of believers were seen as a great demonstration of religious belief. We cannot deny their value, however, they cannot be understood as a proof of living faith.²²¹ The seed of forty years of communism sprouts like weedy, changing the face of our Church. The development in this sphere is different from western countries. We face the danger of overleaping the phases of natural development, which provides space for various pathological phenomenons. People who were not allowed to think critically and express their opinion suddenly become hypercritical. Personality crushed by the interests of totalitarian regime wants to break free and shake off any „burden“ including ethics, responsibility and all kinds of duty.²²²

The quality of theological research

We mentioned the existence and quantity of faculties of theology in Slovakia. In September 2005, all of them accepted the conclusions of the Bologna Process, i. e. the requirements concerning the sphere of university education. However, the area of research at these educational institutions has been developing rather slowly. Not all clergymen were sent to study abroad because they were counted on in scientific and educational process at home. Many of them abandoned priesthood after their return, some of them speak critically against the Church in media and others have been sent to serve in remote parishes with no access to personal scientific development. We can say that Church authorities prefer the image of pastorally obedient priest.²²³

As a result of persisting influence of totalitarianism, the development of individual theological approach in systematic theology is seen as rather unimportant. More emphasis is put on the necessity to adopt inherited faith and tradition. Another problem is that many lecturers and teachers at faculties of theology are busy dividing their time between their academic and pastoral duties, which influences the quality of their scientific work.

219 Ladislav Csontos, „Pastorálno-teologické glosy k analýze religiozity katolíkov na Slovensku,“ *Teologický časopis* VII, no. 1, (2009): 27-38.

220 Ladislav Csontos, *Stratégia na podporu stabilnej rodiny a jej faktory* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2020).

221 After leaving the tunnel of persecution, the Slovak Church faces the task of undertaking the path of renewal indicated by the Second Vatican Council and modernize the tradition. Cf. „BENEDICT XVI: ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE BISHOPS OF SLOVAKIA ON THEIR „AD LIMINA“ VISIT“ (15 June 2007). http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070615_ad-limina-slovakia_en.html

222 Jozef Kyselica, *Odovzdávať vieru v súčasnej spoločnosti* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2006). 20.

223 Jozef Žuffa, „Kňazi v zmenenej životnej situácii,“ in *Radosť evanjelia na Slovensku II. Fakty a názory*, eds. Karol Moravčík and Jozef Žuffa, 115-144. (Bratislava: Petrus Publisher, 2019).

Totalitarianism caused that the ideas of the 2nd Vatican Council were accepted in a positive spirit and very quickly (thanks to the existence of work with laity, movements, preparation of new liturgical texts...). As a result of aversion to communism, the acceptance of these documents was understood as a necessary element for preservation of faith and loyalty with Rome. The Church was understood as a source of freedom. After the fall of communism, the credit of the Catholic Church among people was rather high. Afterwards it started to diminish gradually, mainly due to several wrong decisions of Church authorities. It seems that the value of freedom hasn't found a sufficient response within the Church amid the open society and to many people it appears to be closed. A strong desire and need to adopt new attitude towards the transformed world is also present in the Church, but its dynamic situation seems to be too complicated or even misleading to some believers. There is a question if contribution of the Church to the world is sufficiently detectable and liberating or if it is one of the attempts to regain its former influence. It appears that the above difficulties could arise from a complicated discernment between the change and the transformation.²²⁴ A deeper analysis should also be done in regard to the question if public expression of certain attitudes for the benefit of the Church were a sign of personal maturity of individuals or a proof of maturity on the level of the community of the Church and its structures.

Lately, certain retrograde movements appeared on the religious scene. Some of them are of Lefebvrist origin, other are inspired by sedevacantism. Both streams reject modern culture and knowledge of contemporary theological approaches, criticize the 2nd Vatican Council and the language they use is aggressive and distant from faith that seeks understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*).

The suspension of archbishop Bezák from the position of archbishop of Trnava in 2012 caused that seemingly innocent cause resulted in a crisis that can be seen as a litmus paper of the situation of Christianity in Slovakia. Believers were not satisfied with the explanation that the suspension has been decided upon by Rome and it should be accepted obediently without any questions. Also, the way the case was handled testifies about the wrong model of communication with outer world. Many voices in favour of archbishop Bezák were raised in the Czech Republic and the situation was so tense that the local Church hierarchy even tried to intervene and forbid Slovak and foreign theologians to express their attitude regarding the case publicly. Several years after the cause we can say that believers are still divided into two groups – those who support Bezák and those who are against him. This cause demonstrates that the institutional power of the Church has weakened significantly for both believers and non-believers.

We also need to mention emerging critical reactions to several decisions of Pope Francis and his attitude towards migration, ecology and divorced people²²⁵. All this reveals that St. Augustine's traditional *Roma locuta causa finita*, which the Slovak Church used to be so proud of, has vanished for good.

The absence of quality theological preparation and the fact that many lay people are educated in theology has caused that many clergymen inappropriately focus on liturgical expressions. They behave in a way that is similar to former communist oppression of the

224 Changes can be seen as the events that happen under the pressure of various „external“ influences and powers, e.g. the change of political system and legislation or the pressure of public opinion. Transformation means values that co-create the aspect of voluntary acceptance of this reality „from the inside“, on the basis of the internal approval of individuals or social groups. The first meaning would be related to institutional level while the latter to individual level. In reality, they both influence each other and their content cannot be separated, however it might be important to distinguish them in the process of interpretation.

225 Andrea Tornielli and Gianni Valente, *Vatikán a boj o moc* (Bratislava: Fortuna Libri, 2020).

Church, ordering it to stay behind the walls of churches without possibility to speak publicly about serious questions that arise in the society.

The situation with Covid-19 has unveiled several examples of serious misbehaviour of some believers in Slovakia, the analysis of which seems inevitable. It mainly concerns the rejection of healthcare recommendations by the Bishops' conference of Slovakia, rejection of vaccination in general, uncritical adoption of conspirative theories²²⁶, insufficient theological education resulting in the rejection of the teaching of the Church in favour of pseudo-religious movements spreading hoaxes and conspirations.

Church-state relations

The Constitution of the Slovak Republic describes the state as religiously neutral with no official bond to any ideology or religion. Currently, the mutual relationship between the state and the Church is seen as a certain form of partnership. The document says that Christianity and Christian value system based on cyrilo-methodian tradition represents an integral part of Slovak national identity.²²⁷

Ratification of the international agreement between Slovakia and the Holy See presupposed signing of four separate international agreements concerning financial settlement of the Catholic Church, school system and religious education, spiritual service in armed forces and implementation of the objection of conscience. So far, the government approved only the agreement on the service of clergy in armed forces. The Ministry of Culture is in charge of preparation of international agreement about funding of the Catholic Church, which should be preceded by a complex settlement of financing of all Churches and religious associations through particular legal measures. Mutual interconnection between the state and the Church still persists, mainly in financial sphere. In accordance with valid law, the state provides Churches and religious associations with money for the wages of clergy, for the maintenance of bishoprics and for certain charitable activities.²²⁸

The state must not interfere with internal affairs of Churches and limit the number of priests (*numerus clausus* known from the communist era). On the other hand, it may actively enter the process of university accreditations of faculties of theology to guarantee that they meet the universal requirements of university education. After the fall of communism, most of the Church property was restituted, but many estates were in technically desolate state that required investments of such a financial extent that the Churches could not afford it. Another problem is the absence of managers with appropriate quality preparation and skills who could manage and develop the estates belonging to the Catholic Church.²²⁹

We have to confess that many believers observe certain streams within western society with mistrust, believing that they are in contradiction with Christian faith. Currently we witness massive media campaign aiming at separation of the Church from the state, not to mention the efforts to reduce the influence of the Church in Slovak society. Pointing at true or imaginary problems of Churches and the question of their self-financing often slips into the use of arguments *ad hominem*, which lower the quality of argumentation.

226 Steve Clarke, "Conspiracy Theories and the Internet: Controlled Demolition and Arrested Development," *Episteme* 4, no. 2, (2007):167-180. <https://doi.org/10.3366/epi.2007.4.2.167>

227 For more information see: Irena Borowik, *Church-State Relations in Central and Eastern Europe* (Kraków: Nomos, 1999).

228 Michaela Moravčíková, "State and Religion in the Slovak Republic," in *State and Church in the European Union* Hrsg. Gerhard Robbers, 563 – 612. (Baden Baden: Nomos, 3. Aufl. 2019).

229 Michaela Moravčíková, "Staat und Kirche in der Slowakischen republik," in *Staat und Kirche in der Europäischen Union* Hrsg. Gerhard Robbers, 533-563. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2. Aufl. 2005).

Recently, we have observed an intense interconnection of politics and Christianity, which raises a few questions.²³⁰ Several politicians discovered the power of Christian electorate and adjust their political language to influence it. Viewing of Christian identity has been narrowed to topics of sexual ethics, traditional family, rejection of immigrants (mostly those with non-Christian background) and antisemitism, while important areas of life like social justice are mentioned rather scarcely. Religious traditionalism is partly associated with permissivity in the sphere of moral norms concerning economical and social life. It is obvious that we do not pay enough theological attention to the fact that moral decay is not the only cause of persisting problems in families. We also need to consider new economical and social conditions (parents working abroad, indebtedness, absence of rental flats).²³¹

School, healthcare and judicial system are in bad condition and this fact is very alarming in the country that used to be proud of its prevailing Catholicism a few years ago. Weeks and days before parliamentary elections, politicians strive to demonstrate how deep is their sense of Christianity and their language is very often marked by Lefebvism, which under current circumstances means the rejection of Pope Francis who said that the Church could not reduce its attention to the questions regarding sexuality and ethics, and that even those must be discussed in the correct context.²³²

Many young people are disturbed by the fact that the Church does not raise its voice against problems like corruption and some of them openly sympathize with parties that have hidden anti-democratic undertone.

I would like to point out that Slovak society had been ethnically oppressed within the borders of Austria-Hungary and suffered from the delayed industrialization for a long time. Priests were seen as humanists and advocates of poor people. In the first half of the 20th century, social question became crucial for the agenda of political Catholicism in Slovakia. Nowadays, we do not have any cases of extreme poverty that are witnessed so often in other parts of the world and people do not see priests as their advocates and humanists anymore.

Slovakia is getting old and the care for seniors seems to be a burning issue, as their families cannot attend to them at home (costly healthcare and mortgages) and the fees in retirement homes are two or three times higher than average monthly wages. Many religious persons spend several years outside their community to look after their aging parents and provide them with "cheaper and more decent care", which, obviously, causes problems within their religious congregations.²³³

Relations with other Churches and religions

In the area of interreligious dialogue we praise a long-term dialogue with Central Association of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia fostered by the Faculty of Theology of Trnava University.²³⁴

230 Cf. *Ježiš Kristus, ktorý žije vo svojej Cirkvi, prameň nádeje pre Európu. Instrumentum laboris* biskupskej synody. (Trnava: Spolok Svätého Vojtecha, 1999). 51-52.

231 Rastislav Bednárík and Jozef Žuffa, *Rodiny s deťmi. Empirický pohľad na Slovensku* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2019).

232 Florian Michel and Bernard Sesboué, *De Mgr Lefebvre à Mgr Williamson, Anatomie d'un schisme* (Lethielleux, Desclée de Brouwer, 2009); Miloš Lichner, "The Nature and Risks of Fundamentalism," *Studia Theologica* 15, no. 1, (2013): 135-156.; Lichner, "The Nature and Risks of Fundamentalism," 137.

233 See also: Rastislav Bednárík, *Prieskum socioeconomickej situácie seniorov na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny, 2019); Ladislav Csontos, "Opportunities and dangers for present Christian family in Slovakia," *Studia Bobolanum* no. 4, (2012):127-143.

234 Cf. *Od Seelisbergu po Jeruzalem a Rím. Dokumenty židovsko-kresťanského dialógu* (Trnava: Spolok Svätého Vojtecha, 2018).

When it comes to ecumenical relations, the contacts between the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches are kept on a very active level, although the process of reconciliation has not been completed yet. Thirty years after the fall of communism we have to admit that we still do not have enough experts in this area.

The presence of Islam was not problematic until a few years ago because there was only a small number of Muslims in Slovakia. But as the discussion about the phenomenon of migration became more emotional, the attitude of inhabitants has changed dramatically. People fail to understand the complexity of relations with Islam because Christian Churches do not have any expert who could shed more light on them from professional point of view, which opens the gate to the influence of groundless apocalyptic scenarios of migration crisis presented by social media.

It is necessary to realize that while western countries have always been in dominant position towards countries with the highest rate of emigration and after the World War II they welcomed immigrants as a source of cheap labour force, the countries of former eastern block (mainly Balkan) had been a certain kind of buffer zones for foreign states or had been even occupied by them.²³⁵

For the Catholic Church in Slovakia it is difficult to accept that some negative reactions against the Church are not born only in old and new anticlerical circles, but may equally be the fruit of failed inculturation or even resignation to effective and comprehensible mission in the middle of secular society.²³⁶ Thus, we can only confirm the words of Yves Congar according to whom the fear to speak openly about negative phenomena in the Church still prevails.²³⁷

Life of believers in parishes

Small communities of believers that used to meet in households were crucial for preservation of faith during the reign of communism. There were communities of students at universities and high schools, communities of families and children, illegal activities of lay branches of religious communities were renewed.²³⁸ The local Church also benefited from the arrival of religious movements from abroad: *Focolare*, *Communione e liberazione*, *Neocatechumenal Way* etc. After the fall of communism, the core of pastoral care moved to parish structures and the crucial role of small communities started to be neglected.

When it comes to relation between believers and their parish, the situation has not changed much. There is still a certain kind of mistrust of representatives of the Church towards the involvement of lay people. Even today in Slovakia prevail parishes where all religious activities are conducted by priests. Whole religious life is directed by clergyman who stands at the top of local parish hierarchy and there is very little space left for the initiative of lay communities. Therefore, one of the greatest challenges for the Catholic Church is to allow more intense involvement of believers in religious life. Another problem is that most parish activities are performed for the benefit of local Church (catechesis, liturgy...) and very often there is absence of openness towards outer world behind the borders of the parish, which leads to lack of the help to people in difficult situations.²³⁹

235 Jacques D. Waardenburg, "Politics and Religion in the Balkans," *Islamic Studies* 36, no. 2/3 (1997): 383-402. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23076202>; Paul Mojzes, "Orthodoxy and Islam in the Balkans: Conflict or Cooperation?," *Religion, State and Society* 36, no. 4, (2008): 407-421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637490802451075>

236 Cf. Andrea Milano, "Secolarizzazione," in *Nuovo dizionario di teologia* (Roma, 1982). 1456 – 1457.

237 Cf. Yves Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Eglise*. Unam Sanctam 72, Les éditions du Cerf, 1969.

238 Cf. Gloria Braunsteiner, Krzysztof Trębski and Ladislav Csontos, *Obnovená teológia manželstva a rodiny* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2019). 5-123.

239 Cf. Jozef Kyselica, Proposals of Evangelization for Parishes in Slovakia *Studia Aloisiana* 4, no. 3, (2013): 33-44.

The Church in the Slovak Republic should focus on strengthening of the existence of small lay communities, as they may become a crucial element for spreading of Christian faith in public and social space. Nowadays, young people pay more attention to nature and ecology, which is encouraging, along with their interest to gather in informal groups and communities with rather benevolent rules of attendance. This can be seen as an opportunity for their spiritual growth and preparation for the acceptance of a stable bond of family, priestly or consecrated life. The interest of youth in volunteering and protection of cultural heritage including sacral monuments is also a positive signal.²⁴⁰

Slovak believers start to realize that after decades of receiving help from abroad it is their turn to help other people in need and participate in the process of support to other countries. The Movement of Christian Children's Communities (eRko) represents a significant example in this regard.

The number one priority is to change the self-perception and the perception of the image of the Church among people. The element of community represents the very core of the Church and it is necessary that this definition is transformed into practice. It is necessary that believers live this community and young people see the Church as something attractive. This means to transform the model of parish from solely juridical into something lively, the community of all communities with family as its very essence. It requires the inspiration by the Holy Spirit and we are not talking only about priests. It concerns all the members of parish communities. It is necessary to add more ecclesiality to families and more familiarity to parishes²⁴¹, so that they can become a living family of human families, not some sort of anonymous structure. All this is not possible without the engagement of laity and without establishing a new type of relations between priests and faithful, because they are jointly responsible for evangelization.²⁴² Lay people cannot be seen only as a „prolonged hand“ of priests and this journey will require pastoral conversion of both clergy and laity.

The Church and education

Between years 1948 – 1989, there was a clear tendency of the state to push Churches aside and limit their presence in public and social life to church services. After the change of social and political system Churches started to renew their position and activity within the framework of cultural life of our society.²⁴³

The Catholic Church in Slovakia in collaboration with religious communities runs many kindergartens, basic and high schools, institutions of special education, conservatories, academies and grammar schools (some of them providing education in one of the languages spoken by ethnic minorities). The Church also enters regular educational process in schools where parents can choose between two optional subjects: religious education and ethics.²⁴⁴ However, there we can see a fundamental mistake of many believers who are convinced that to give their children sufficient religious formation means to register them for the lessons of

240 Cf. Jozef Kyselica, "Evanjelizačné ponuky pre mládež vo farskej pastorácii," *Warszawskie studia pastoralne* no. 17, (2012): 51-67.

241 Carlo Rocchetta, *Una Chiesa della Tenerezza. Le coordinate teologiche dell'Amoris laetitia* (Bologna: EDB, 2018). 272; Andrej Rajský, "Ethics of Three Persons and Transcendence," *Spirituality Studies* 5, no. 2, (2019): 12-23.

242 Severino Dianich, *La Chiesa cattolica verso la sua riforma* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2014): 52-54.

243 Juraj Dolinský, *Cirkev a štát na Slovensku v rokoch 1918-1945* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 1999).

244 Michaela Moravčíková, "Religious education and denominational schools in the Slovak Republic," *Islamische erziehung in Europa* (Wien: Böhlau, 2009). 457-473; Marek Šmid, "Religion in public education – Slovakia," in *Religion in public education: Proceedings of the conference*, ed. Gerhard Robbers, 443-454. (European consortium for Church and state research, 2011).

religious education in schools. The Church in Slovakia has a well elaborated and organized net of holy masses for children and youth, university students and seniors. However, there is absence of methodical work with the generation aged 25 (after leaving university) to 35 (time to return to the church because of the sacrament of matrimony or baptism of their children). The ideal priest is seen as someone who is devoted to pastoral care for children, youth and elderly people.

Conclusion

The submitted study draws the attention to fundamental informative points of life of the Slovak Catholic Church and presents the results of the first inquiry on the situation of the Catholic Church 30 years after the fall of the communist regime and the challenges she needs to face. It is quite clear that even thirty years after regaining freedom the Slovak Church keeps striving to renew its face in quickly transforming society and thorough analysis seems inevitable in this regard.

If we look at the situation from this perspective, we learn to discover the challenge addressed to all believers: We should be prepared to read signs of the times that invite us to explore our past and make use of everything that the Lord has left for us with courage and creativity. Thus, the crisis of ecclesiastical institution may transform into something providential, something that will encourage us to overcome the temptation of ecclesiocentrism. Decreasing number of vocations may be seen as a call to overcome clericalism. Religious indifference as a result of pastoral methods using fear as motivation, as well as spreading of atheism invite us to explore the way we introduced God to the world and pose the request to purify this image. The study in question paves the way for the possibility of scientific reflections as well as further theoretical research, the effects of which should be implemented in pastoral plans at the diocesan and parish levels.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN SLOVAKIA IN ITS EUROPEAN CONTEXT



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Abstract

Background: This contribution presents a brief analysis of the development of relations between Christians and Jews which were for most of the time extremely difficult, painful and especially for Jews connected with oppression, persecution and tragedy. The relation was characterised by hostility and alienation. However, it also points out at important possibilities of mutual dialogue which creates a chance for healing wounds in these relations.

Conclusion: The final part of the article presents common challenges which could serve as basis for new and interesting research on an international scientific and expert level and bring efficient solutions in practice for both religions.

Keywords: Jewish-Christian Relations. Dialogue. Jewish-Christian Cooperation. Common Challenges.

Introduction

For nearly two millennia relations between Christians and Jews were for most of the time extremely difficult, painful and especially for Jews connected with oppression, persecution and tragedy. The relation was characterised by hostility and alienation. The Churches played part in this. Theological anti-Judaism and an irrational ethnic hatred towards Jews, such as demonizing the *Talmud*, accusations of host desecration, allegations of ritual murder, and alleged well poisonings, were used by the Churches whenever opportune for them. Together, these formed the basis for modern racial anti-Semitism.²⁴⁶

Therefore, the aim of this contribution is to use a brief analysis to discuss diverse relevant elements of the development of Jewish-Christian Cooperation.

Various relevant aspects of the development of Jewish-Christian cooperation

At the time of the Enlightenment and emancipation, there was a glimmer of hope on the Jewish side that Jews and Christians could approach each other not only as citizens but also religiously, and could someday be equal partners. As examples, I would like to point to three rabbis:

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246 Johannes Heil, "Die Bürde der Geschichte: Stationen der langlebigen 'Lehre der Verachtung'", in Ahrens et. al. (ed.), *Hin zu einer Partnerschaft zwischen Juden und Christen: Die Erklärung orthodoxer Rabbiner zum Christentum* (Metropol Verlag, Berlin, 2017).

- Rabbi Jacob Emden, *the* rabbinic authority in Germany and Europe in the 18th century, who halakhically, ie. based on Jewish religious law, valued Christianity very positively and described Christians as brothers: "Jesus brought a double goodness to the world. On the one hand he strengthened the Torah of Moses majestically... and not one of our Sages spoke out more emphatically concerning the immutability of the Torah. On the other hand he removed idols from the nations and obligated them in the seven commandments of Noah so that they would not behave like animals of the field, and instilled them firmly with moral traits.... Christians are congregations that work for the sake of heaven who are destined to endure, whose intent is for the sake of heaven and whose reward will not be denied."²⁴⁷
- Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann, who in the 19th century promoted unity between Jewish and "Christian fellow citizens" and sharply rejected the allegation that Christians were idol worshippers.²⁴⁸
- Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who also in the 19th century envisioned a symbiosis of German culture and Judaism, and said the Talmud placed Christians "with regard to the duties between man and man on exactly the same level as Jews. They have a claim to the benefit of all the duties not only of justice but also of active human brotherly love."²⁴⁹

Hopes for a religious approach were disappointed, however. The Churches never positively responded to Jewish initiatives. On the contrary, Liberal-Protestant circles within the Churches for example even intensified their rejection of Judaism in the 19th and early 20th centuries.²⁵⁰ There were pioneers, however, Jewish and Christians, who started initiatives and organizations. Before and during World War II Britain and Switzerland became the two centers of positive Christian-Jewish relations in Europe, grown out of cooperation in refugee work and the common struggle against antisemitism.²⁵¹ On 1st October 1942 the British *Council of Christians and Jews* was founded under the patronage of the highest Protestant, Catholic and Jewish authorities. The founding declaration names the common threat of Nazism and antisemitism and speaks about a future, which can only be established on common values: "In the forefront of their efforts to create division within every community, the Nazis have always placed anti-semitism, which is repugnant to the moral principles common to Christianity and Judaism alike. We cannot afford to ignore the effects of the steady propagation of this evil throughout the world. It is not only a message to the unity of every community in which it takes root, but it is the very negation of those values on which alone we believe that a new and better world can be established."²⁵² In 1945, or rather 1946 officially, a Christians-Jewish organization was also established in Switzerland.²⁵³

247 Cf. Seder Olam Rabba and Sefer HaShimush; in TDW.

248 Rabbi Dr. David Zvi Hoffmann, *Der Schulchan Aruch und die Rabbinen über das Verhältnis zu Andersgläubigen*.

249 Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, "Beziehungen des Talmud zum Judentum und zu der sozialen Stellung seiner Bekenner; Matthias Morgenstern, "Rabbi. S. R. Hirsch and his Perception of Germany and German Jewry," in Aschheim/Liska (eds.), *The German-Jewish Experience Revisited* (de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2015).

250 Hans Martin Kirn, "Schleiermachers Stellungnahme zur Judenemanzipation" in Barth et.al (Ed.) *Christentum und Judentum: Akten des Internationalen Kongresses der Schleiermacher-Gesellschaft in Halle, März 2009* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), 204-205; Tal Uriel, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, politics and ideology in the Second Reich 1870-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press 1975) 163f.

251 Jehoschua Ahrens, *Gemeinsam gegen Antisemitismus - Die Konferenz von Seelisberg (1947) revisited: Die Entstehung des institutionellen jüdisch-christlichen Dialogs in der Schweiz und in Kontinentaleuropa* (Münster/Wien/Zürich: LIT-Verlag, 2020), 266ff.

252 Marcus Braybrooke, *Children of One God: A History of the Council of Christians and Jews* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1991). 18-19.

253 Ahrens, "Gemeinsam gegen Antisemitismus," 63ff.

The American *National Conference of Christians and Jews* called already during the war for a gathering of representatives from the various international Christian-Jewish councils. It was not until August 1946 that this conference could take place in Oxford, England. This Oxford Conference had as its aim the definition of the fundamental rights and obligations of every human being, regardless of religion and race. Peace, justice and responsibility were the three key words that summed up its main focus.²⁵⁴

In the summer of 1947, the *International Emergency Conference on Anti-Semitism* took place in Seelisberg Switzerland. Its aim was directed at fighting the roots of the anti-Semitism still rampant in many countries, even after the war. Within this context, its objective was also to address Christian anti-Judaism and to seek to achieve a new relationship between Christianity and Judaism. The final statement of the conference, including the now famous *Ten Points of Seelisberg*, which focused on Christianity's roots in Judaism, became one of the most important cornerstones of the Jewish-Christian dialogue.²⁵⁵ The Ten Points declared for example that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother of the seed of David and the people of Israel, that the first disciples, the apostles and the first martyrs were Jews and that the fundamental commandment of Christianity, to love God and one's neighbour, was already proclaimed in the Old Testament and is therefore also fundamental for Jews. The statement urged Christians to avoid distorting or misrepresenting biblical or post-biblical Judaism with the object of extolling Christianity, to avoid using the word Jews in the exclusive sense of the enemies of Jesus and to avoid presenting the Passion in such a way as to bring the odium of the killing of Jesus upon all Jews or upon Jews alone.²⁵⁶ A tremendous change of Christian theology, but unfortunately not adapted by the Churches at the time.

The Czechoslovak foreign minister Jan Masaryk was invited to the Seelisberg Conference, as well as František Fuchs, Chairman of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities, Erik Kolár, Jiří Hromada, Prof. František Bednář and a Jewish representative from Bratislava, whose name was not mentioned. We don't know why these invitees did not attend. There were, however, some Czech delegates. Dr. Thomas Berman, President of the Jewish Community of Prague, was a member of the important commission 1. Miroslav Novák, Bishop of the Prague Diocese of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, was vice chairman of the third commission, the commission that drafted the Ten Points of Seelisberg. Another member of this commission from Prague was Rev. Robert Smith, chaplain for the Church of Scotland Mission in Prague, and hence no Czech native. Jiřina Tůmová, secretary of the Czech PEN Club, was a member of commission 5.²⁵⁷

In 1948 a third international Christian-Jewish conference focused primarily on education. The conference did, however, reconfirm the resolutions of Seelisberg 1947 and adopted a resolution to the Amsterdam Conference of the World Council of Churches. Also the newly established State of Israel was a topic. The Christian delegates welcomed the State of Israel and remarked:

254 Christian Rutishauser, "The 1947 Seelisberg Conference: The Foundation of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2, 2, (2007): 36.

255 Rutishauser, "The 1947 Seelisberg Conference," 35.

256 International Council of Christians and Jews, *Reports and Recommendations of the Emergency Conference on Anti-Semitism* (Geneva, 1947). 14-16.

257 Internationaler Rat von Christen und Juden, *Antisemitismus*, 43.

"From a purely religious standpoint we hope that in taking root, afresh in the land of the Bible, Israel will experience new spiritual strength, and will realise to the full its Vocation."²⁵⁸

In the second half of the 1940s, the *International Council of Christians and Jews* and local or national Christian-Jewish associations or councils in many European countries were founded, including also Central and Eastern European countries, such as Romania, Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia. In Czechoslovakia a Christian-Jewish organisation was founded in 1947. Following the Communist takeover in February 1948, however, the work was restricted and finally came to an end in 1950. Nevertheless, the groundwork for the dialogue as we know today was laid.²⁵⁹

The Orthodox rabbis and many Jews hoped that the catastrophe of the Holocaust would lead to fast and enduring changes in the theology of the Churches concerning Judaism and Jews. But even though there were several successes, like the theses adopted at the Seelisberg Conference in 1947, and in spite of several engaged individuals or circles within the Churches, nothing much changed. The Churches had difficulties to come to terms with their responsibility regarding the Holocaust and both Protestant and Catholic Churches did not make an essential change in their attitudes towards Jews and Judaism until the 1960s.²⁶⁰ Directly after World War II the German Protestant Church for example remained highly influenced by its anti-Jewish and antisemitic legacy. The mainstream was not willing to take any responsibility for the destruction of Jewry under the Nazis, it still believed in supersessionism, Church triumphalism and in the mission to Jews. Only a few clergymen called for a new relationship with the Jewish People.²⁶¹ These reformers however – although specifically speaking about the responsibility of the Church for antisemitism and condemning it – also believed that Christianity superseded the Jewish People as God's chosen people for their rejection of Jesus. They held the opinion that the suffering of the Jews was primarily their own fault, too. Only a small group within the reformers rejected these opinions totally and regarded the Jewish People as God's chosen people.²⁶² Understandably, the Jewish side was very wary about dialogue, until long after World War II. Rabbi Mosche Feinstein even explicitly forbade dialogue in a *responsum*.²⁶³ For him, even positive developments in the Churches were nothing other than new variations on old strategies. His colleague Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in his famous 1960s article *Confrontation*, also advised to limit dialogue with Christians, although halakhically speaking, ie under religious law, he did not forbid it.²⁶⁴ On the contrary, he permitted very learned rabbis, whom he trusted to be able to represent Judaism in a dignified manner, to start theological dialogue with Christians. Rabbi Soloveitchik did not want dialogue as "public policy," particularly because he feared the so-called mission to the Jews. At that time, he was absolutely right. So soon after World War II and the Shoah, Judaism was weak and vulnerable, and the missionary efforts of the churches were viral. There was indeed a spe-

258 SWHA, SW282, Everett R. Clinchy papers 5317, Box 5, Fribourg Conference, Declaration of the Christian Members of the Religious Commission.

259 Ahrens, "Gemeinsam gegen Antisemitismus," 206-208.

260 Fredrick C. Holmgren, "Jews and Christians in Germany: A New but Still Troubled Relationship," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38, 2-3 (2001): 298-299.

261 Matthew D. Hockenos, "The German Protestant Church and Its Judenmission, 1945-1950," in *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, ed. Kevin P. Spicer, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). 174-176.

262 Hockenos, "The German Protestant," 174-176; See also: Gerard S. Sloyan, "Christian Persecution of Jews over the Centuries," <https://www.usmmm.org/m/pdfs/20070119-persecution.pdf>

263 Moshe Feinstein, *Iggrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah* 3:43.

264 Joseph Baer Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition*. 6, 2 (1964):5-28.

cific danger of being missionized, which was often an ulterior motive of Christian organizations. Rabbi Soloveitchik, however, supported socio-political dialogue. Accordingly, the Modern Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) stated in their often forgotten 1964 *Policy Statement On Ecumenicism and Interreligious Dialogue*: “We are pleased to note that in recent years there has evolved in our country as well as throughout the world a desire to seek better understanding and a mutual respect among the world’s major faiths. The current threat of secularism and materialism and the modern atheistic negation of religion and religious values makes even more imperative a harmonious relationship among the faiths...”²⁶⁵

Still, there was very limited dialogue from the Jewish side. All this changed dramatically with *Nostra Aetate*. *Nostra Aetate*, published in 1965, began a new dimension in dialogue from the Christian side. It was a milestone in the development of dialogue and had an effect far beyond the Catholic Church, extending also to other Christian Churches.²⁶⁶ At the Second Vatican Council, the Christian teaching referring to Judaism was corrected in a way that was downright revolutionary. It declared that Jews were not guilty of murdering Christ and they still remained chosen by God. Later Pope John Paul II condemned antisemitism a sin and recognised the State of Israel. Unfortunately neither Vatican II nor the Pope mentioned any responsibility for involvement of the Church in the Holocaust.²⁶⁷ Parallel Christian scholars turned towards an understanding of the Jewish roots of Christianity and a self-critical approach of the past. Bible commentaries were published with contributions of both Christians and Jews. New Testament scholarship corrected anti-Jewish interpretations. Jews received honorary doctorates by Christian theological faculties and gave lectures there. Numerous societies for Christian-Jewish cooperation were founded with thousands of active Christians, who worked on new Christian-Jewish relations, fought antisemitism and opposed mission to Jews.²⁶⁸ This opened up entirely new opportunities.

The Vatican confirmed its position once again in *Nostra Aetate*’s 50th anniversary year with the document *The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable*.²⁶⁹ From the Jewish point of view, the clear rejection of the so-called mission to the Jews was particularly important. “In concrete terms, this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews.”²⁷⁰ This created trust, new possibilities and new perspectives. Encounters and interaction led to new initiatives.

265 Baer Soloveitchik, „Confrontation,” *Tradition*, 6, 2 (1964):28-29.

266 See, among others, Reinhold Boschki; Josef Wohlmuth (ed.): *Nostra Aetate 4: Wendepunkt im Verhältnis von Kirche und Judentum – bleibende Herausforderung für die Theologie*, Paderborn 2015; Hans Hermann Henrix (ed.), *Nostra Aetate – ein zukunftsweisender Konzilstext. Die Haltung der Kirche zum Judentum 40 Jahre danach*, (Aachen 2006).

267 Holmgren, “Jews and Christians in Germany,” 299.

268 Holmgren, “Jews and Christians in Germany,” 300-302; See also: Vatican Commission for Religions Relations with the Jews (2015), “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable” (Rom 11:29) - A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of “Nostra Aetate” (No.4). am1.org.au/Portals/66/documents/The%20Gifts%20and%20the%20Calling%20of%20God%20are%20Irrevocable.pdf ; Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations: “The Conference Of European Rabbis, The Rabbinical Council Of America, And The Chief Rabbinate Of Israel (August 31, 2017): “Between Jerusalem and Rome. Reflections on 50 Years of Nostra aetate,” <https://www.cjcr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/jewish/cer-cri-rca-2017>; CJCUC: Orthodox Rabbinic Statement on Christianity (December 3, 2015), “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians,” <https://www.cjuc.org/2015/12/03/orthodox-rabbinic-statement-on-christianity/>

269 See: Vatican Commission for Religions Relations with the Jews (2015), “The Gifts and the Calling of God,”

270 Vatican Commission for Religions Relations with the Jews (2015), “The Gifts and the Calling of God,” am1.org.au/Portals/66/documents/The%20Gifts%20and%20the%20Calling%20of%20God%20are%20Irrevocable.pdf

This is the backdrop of two important Orthodox Rabbinic Statements to Christianity: “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians” (2015) and “Between Jerusalem and Rome” (2017). The idea of a first international Orthodox Jewish declaration came up in Israel in May 2015, at a Catholic-Jewish conference. A group of rabbis (I was one of them) wrote the draft of “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians”. After all had accepted the wording, the text was published on December 3, 2015. It was not by chance that this was one week before *The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable* was published by the pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Although we did not know the details of this Vatican paper, we had a rough idea of some of its theses. The most important of these was the passage concerning the so-called mission to the Jews that I mentioned already before. As of now, over 100 rabbis have signed the Statement, nine of whom are current or former chief rabbis of European countries. The signatories cover the entire spectrum of Orthodox Judaism. On August 31, 2017, a delegation from the CER (Conference of European Rabbis), the RCA (Rabbinical Council of America), and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, handed over the declaration *Between Jerusalem and Rome* to Pope Francis. Although it had taken a long time to be delivered, some two years after the anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, this declaration represents a quantum leap, since for the first time the most important rabbinical councils and institutions of Jewish Orthodoxy officially and formally commented on Christianity.

Without going into details of the respective statements, both have in common a few major propositions, please let me name two of them:

- 1) After the difficult past and notwithstanding all the differences, Jews and Christians are “partners, close allies, friends and brothers in our mutual quest for a better world”.²⁷¹
- 2) “Jews and Christians must work together as partners to address the moral challenges of our era”²⁷² and we have to deepen this cooperation.

This deepening of the Jewish-Christian dialogue during the last decade is also noticeable in Slovakia. Only after communism Jewish-Christians relations re-emerged again in Slovakia. Everything started very small. I can remember that I gave a lecture in 2013 about Jerusalem and the Temple to a Christian audience in the synagogue in Bratislava. Out of these sporadic lectures emerged in 2015 a small lecture series of Jewish and Jewish-Christian topics at the Theological faculty of the Trnava university. Eventually from autumn 2017 the “Opening the Doors” programme was established, with the help of Prof. Dr. Miloš Lichner of the Trnava University, and Dr. Maroš Borsky of the Jewish Cultural Institute.

We were able to develop official relations between the Bishop’s Conference of Slovakia and the Central Union of Jewish Communities in Slovakia. This included a joint visit to Israel in 2016 and to the Vatican and Rome in April 2017, where a joint Catholic-Jewish delegation, rabbis and bishops, had an audience with Pope Francis. These two visits were the groundwork of the establishment of an official common Catholic-Jewish dialogue commission by ÚZŽNO and the Slovak Bishops’ Conference.

271 Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations: “The Conference Of European Rabbis, The Rabbinical Council Of America, And The Chief Rabbinate Of Israel (August 31, 2017): “Between Jerusalem and Rome. Reflections on 50 Years of Nostra aetate,” <https://www.cjcr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/jewish/cer-cri-rca-2017>

272 “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians,” <https://www.cjuc.org/2015/12/03/orthodox-rabbinic-statement-on-christianity/>

The joint commission published a book in 2018, edited by Lucia Hidveghyova, with all major Catholic and Jewish documents of dialogue translated into Slovak, with comments and a Catholic and Jewish introduction. A major milestone, particularly in view of a better education and a better understanding of the own and the other faith tradition, concerning dialogue.

Upon publication the commission organised a huge conference on history and perspectives of Christian-Jewish relations. The major speaker was Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

In summer 2019 the European Society for Catholic Theology held a major conference in Bratislava with a substantial side programme on Christian-Jewish dialogue.

And finally we have this online conference as part of "Opening the Doors" today.

I think we experience an incredible development in Jewish-Christian cooperation here in Slovakia. As a Post Scriptum: The Jewish community gladly took note of a statement in a pastoral letter from December 2017: "We [...] are all created in the image of God [...]. Under no circumstances may we offend, disparage or physically attack people for their skin color, nationality or religion. Racism and anti-Semitism have nothing in common with the Catholic faith."

Conclusion

We face many challenges: even though we Jews and Christians are getting closer, the societies we live in here in Europe, are getting more and more characterised by fragmentation, secularism, moral relativism and – as a kind of answer to that - religious extremism. The successful deepening and broadening of our relation, however, is bearing fruits and I am thankful to be part of this important and holy work of Christian-Jewish reconciliation here in Slovakia. It gives me personally tremendous hope for the future and for our common service for the heritage and dignity of humankind.

In the final part of this analysis, it is important to sum up common challenges which can create space for new and interesting research on a global scientific and expert level and to bring efficient practical solutions for both religions:

- to increasingly move a larger part of the Jewish-Christian dialogue into a wider society-wide context;
- to focus on positive topics and experience from a shared history of mutual relations;
- to become familiar with attitudes and practices of the other religion;
- to exercise joint efforts to contribute to efficient solutions of society-wide problems (including healthcare, education, social security, etc.);
- for Jews and Christians to apply theoretical topics in the area of theology and religion on practical lives of individuals within a religious community and to point out at the connection of the community's life with a wider society.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The mentioned author significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, the author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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THEOLOGICAL AND KERYGMATIC MEANING OF THE „I AM“ PHRASE IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN



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Abstract

Background: This scientific study examines the theological meaning of the phrase „I am“ in the context of the Gospel of John. In this gospel, Jesus reveals himself by emphasizing his relationship and connection with the Father. The analysis has shown that the examined phrase „I am“ clearly refers to the fact that Jesus and the Father are one (cf. Jn 10:30). Through the revelation of himself in relation to the Father and through the words of the action of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ reveals to man the mystery of the life of the Holy Trinity.

Conclusion: This life of God and the opportunity for man to participate in it is a key message of the whole gospel. The phrase „I am“ thus acquires its kerygmatic meaning. In this way, this scientific study becomes a new impetus for the realization of the mission of the Church in today's world.

Keywords: Jesus Christ. Gospel of John. „I am“. Christology. Life.

Introduction

The basis for any efficient mission is the authority with which the missionary is being sent away and his inner identification with this authority. In the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ repeatedly stresses that he was sent by the Father (Jn 5:24.30; 6:38,44,57 and others) and even that „the Father and I are one“ (Jn 10:30). The aim of this scientific study is to point out at a deep unity between Jesus Christ and the Heavenly Father by taking the example of the phrase „I am“ which God uses to reveal himself to Moses in the Old Testament (Ex 3) and which Jesus Christ uses to refer to himself in the Gospel of John.

In the Old Testament tradition of the Pentateuch, chapter 3 of the Book of Exodus contains a well-known story of a burning bush from which God talks to Moses and when Moses asks God to tell him his name and introduce himself, God responds by saying „I am“ (cf. Ex 3).

As the phrase „I am“ is the subject of this study, we would mainly like to examine in detail and, by using biblical exegesis method, to explain chapter three of the Book of Exodus. We will try to enrich this exegesis with several available patristic commentaries to draw up a more detailed interpretation of the text, and thus enable a deeper understanding of the text's theological essence. The first chapter will focus on the so-called Christological interpretation of the text in chapter three of the Book of Exodus. Then we will move chronologically to the New Testament and the Gospel of John which contains the subject of our study – the phrase „I am“.

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In the second part, we will try to work analogically with the first part, i.e. we will present biblical exegesis of the most well-known „I am“ texts in the Gospel of John, and we will also use enriching patristic commentaries and other valuable theological insights related to the subject of our study. Christology in our work with „I am“ texts will be our main priority and we will try to point out at immediate importance and great significance of the phrase „I am“ in relation to the gospel's theology. In the final part of our scientific paper, we will try to gradually get to questions related to the meaning and message of the Gospel of John, and the gospel and God's Word as such. In our reflections on kerygmatic and catechetical dimensions of the gospel through the knowing and acceptance of Jesus Christ in our lives, we will deal with the issue of gospel's meaning and contribution to man's life. Through these reflections on the very nature of gospel and its essence, we will look for answers to questions on gospel's meaning in one's life. We will focus on the essence of gospel – its redemptive dimension, as through gospel, God wishes to reveal redemption, i.e. his son Jesus Christ who ultimately completed God's great act of redemption. Our introductory thoughts will then be summarized and confirmed by the Catechism of the Catholic Church, as the Church instructs us on this truth: „In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.“ (Heb 1:1-2) Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father's one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one. St. John of the Cross, among others, commented strikingly on Hebrews 1:1-2: In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word - and he has no more to say. Because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son. Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behaviour but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty.“ (CCC 65)

Biblical and patristic commentaries on the phrase „I am“ in the revelation of God's name in the Book of Exodus

The link between the use of the phrase „I am“ in the Gospel of John and chapter three of the Book of Exodus in the well-known story of a burning bush cannot be questioned, quite the opposite, it is good to examine this link and look for similarities. In this part of our paper, we will make an attempt to provide brief theological reflection of the text on the burning bush in chapter three of the Book of Exodus. We will focus on the term „I am“, as it is the subject of our research. Chapter three of the Book of Exodus says: „But,“ said Moses to God, „if I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what do I tell them?“ God replied to Moses: I am who I am. Then he added: This is what you will tell the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you. God spoke further to Moses: This is what you will say to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations.“ (Ex 3:13-15)²⁷⁴

The Jerusalem Bible comments on verses 13-15, chapter three of the Book of Exodus in the sense that the Yahweh tradition connects Yahweh's cult with the beginnings of mankind²⁷⁵ and uses God's name in the entire history of patriarchs. This section is part of the Elohim tra-

274 The story of the burning bush can of course be found in the entire chapter three of the Book of Exodus and partially in chapter four – cf. Ex 3:1-4:17.

275 To make our explanation more complete, let us say that this commentary includes a reference to the Book of Genesis, namely chapter four, verse 26: „To Seth, in turn, a son was born, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to invoke the Lord by name.“ (Gn 4:26)

dition according to which the name Yahweh was revealed to Moses as the name of the God of the ancestors. The priest tradition agrees with the Elohim tradition and even specifies that the name of the God of the ancestors was אֱלֹהֵי שָׁדַי (El Shaddai).²⁷⁶ Undoubtedly, this story is one of the most significant ones in the entire Old Testament. However, two main problems arise: the first is a philological one, when etymology of the name Yahweh is explained, and the second problem is an exegetic and theological one, which is related to the general meaning of this story and the content of its revelation. First of all, many attempts have been made to explain God's name through other languages, such as Hebrew or some of its roots. It is important to look at the verb *be* in its archaic form. Some exegetics believe that this verb means „creates living“ or „leads to existence“. In the form used in the text itself, it means „he is“. The second problem is related to discussions on the meaning of its explanation. If God talks about himself, he can only use the first person „I am“. However, the Hebrew text can also be literally translated as „I am what I am“. In that case, it would mean that God does not want to reveal his name, but this is precisely how God presents and reveals his name, which according to Semitic understanding should define him in some way. When we look at literal translation of the Hebrew version and rules of Hebrew syntax, the phrase reads „I am the one who is“, „I am the existing one“ and this is exactly how the Septuagint translators understood it.²⁷⁷ „Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν“, „I am (the one) who is“. (Ex 3, 14)

That is why God is the only one who actually exists, he is transcendent and remains a mystery to man and he acts in the history of mankind, leading it to a single goal. This part of God's revelation is related to the text of Revelation to John: „I am the Alpha and the Omega,“ says the Lord God, „the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty.“ (Rev 1:8)²⁷⁸

Moses was afraid that after all this, he will remain misunderstood and refused not just by the pharaoh, but also by his own people, the Israelites. For Moses, it is not easy to present a „nameless“ God of the ancestors to the Israelites. Despite the fact that his listeners have in their minds the image of mighty Egyptian gods with clear and concrete names, they wish to know what Moses calls the God who revealed himself to him. Moses uses the name אֱלֹהִים (Elohim) for God – the name אֱלֹהִים (Elohim) is most probably known to the surrounding Madians, or at least the syllable „El“ evokes deity or God's name – whose true name יהוה Lord

276 The commentary also refers to the Book of Genesis: „When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said: I am God the Almighty. Walk in my presence and be blameless.“ (Gn 17:1)

277 The Old Testament was translated from Old Hebrew to Greek in ca. 250 BC. It is difficult to determine the exact time. Most Biblicists have agreed on the period between 285 and 247 BC. In the history of mankind, this was the very first translation of the Scripture into another language. At that time, Alexandria was the cradle of Jewish Greek literature with a large Jewish community of approximately one million Jews. The oldest and most important translation was produced for the Library of Alexandria that is why this translation is often called Alexandrine translation. It was ordered by Pharaoh Ptolemy II and his son Philadelphus who wanted to have this important work in his library and apparently wished to familiarize himself with all holy books of the chosen people. This difficult task was given to Demetrios of Phaleron, director of the royal Library of Alexandria, who sent Aristeas and Andrew to Jerusalem to lead a complicated „diplomatic mission“. Aristeas was from Athens and he was a clerk at the Egyptian royal court. A letter he sent to his brother is the only direct source telling us about the reasons, background and production of this exquisite Bible translation. The translation was completed by 72 scholars of the Old Testament invited from Jerusalem to produce this valuable translation in Egypt. That is why this translation is often abbreviated to LXX (70) and called the translation of „the Seventy“ and this is where the term *Septuagint* comes from. Contemporary Biblicists' general opinion is interesting because in general they agree that without this valuable and important translation of the Old Testament, it would not be possible to sufficiently understand the texts of the Old Testament. (Cf. Alexander Cap, *Stručný úvod do Starého Zákona IV*. Prešov: Prešov University in Prešov, 2016). 49 – 54.

278 Cf. Ulrich Schütz, *Kommentar der Jerusalemer Bibel* (Stuttgart: Verlag Herder Freiburg im Breisgau, 1985). 80 – 81.

(Yahweh) would not mean anything to the Israelites, that is why Moses „operates“ only with the verb אֶהְיֶה (ehyeh) which means *to be*, *to exist*. He uses the word intentionally in the first person, describing God's existence in the sentence „I am who I am“. ²⁷⁹ From the very beginning, the Jewish and the Christian tradition has always understood this in the sense: „I am the one who (since the beginning of time) is/exists“, i.e. „I am an (eternal) being“, which means God. However, the Hebrew word אֶהְיֶה (ehyeh) rather describes a single dynamic „existence“, which is better translated as: „I am the one who exists (for you)“. That is why Moses' listeners should be satisfied, as God who revealed himself to Moses so early said „I am/exist (for you)“. A close connection with the reference to the God of the ancestors is also related to the following explanation: „I am the one who was (always here for the ancestors)“. That is why by proclaiming Lord's name אֱלֹהִים (Elohim), Moses' calling is completed and can be followed by Moses' visit to his brothers, the Israelites in Egypt. (cf. Ex 3:18)²⁸⁰

The second Moses' question in Ex 3:13 results in God's complex answer (cf. Ex 3:14-22). Just like any other text, this text strives to clarify the identity and recognize the complexity, mysteriousness and unpredictability of the name to whom „every knee shall bend“ (Is 45:23). Moses received two replies related to the name and identity of God's name יהוה Lord (Yahweh). This name is a „mysterious wordplay“ when the Book of Exodus says: „God replied to Moses: I am who I am. Then he added: This is what you will tell the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.“ (Ex 3:14) This phrasing is generally perceived as a very complicated one. However, Frank Cross²⁸¹ stresses that such presentation of God's name יהוה Lord (Yahweh) might hide another one of his names or identities, namely the Creator, based on a wordplay with the word אֶהְיֶה (ehyeh), which means *to be* – as explained above – in relation to the so-called causality, God „is who he is“, i.e. „he is the reason of being“. Regardless of explanations and arguments used for this difficult phrase that presented God's name, it always remains inexplicable to us just like it was inexplicable to Moses and the Israelites.²⁸²

Similarly, another Biblical commentary says that God's reply to Moses is very complex. „I am who I am“ is a very well-known expression, however, also a mysterious one. Even without looking at critical opinions about its origin, one can clearly see that it expresses power, loyalty and presence. This God is called „the power to create“, the one who causes existence. This God is the one who will be loyally present and he will do what otherwise cannot be done. This God is very strong and able to create new life for Israel along with Egypt's mortality. Such understanding of the phrase „I am who I am“ is purely a theological interpretation, not

279 It is interesting to note that according to the author of the German Biblical commentary, the German version modified the above-mentioned sentence with the wording: „I am he who is“. (Cf. Josef Schabert, *Die Neue Echter Bibel. Kommentar zum Alten testament mit der Einheitsübersetzung* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1989). 23.

280 Schabert, „Die Neue Echter Bibel,“ 22 – 23.

281 Frank Moore Cross, Jr. (1921-2012) was one of the most important Biblical scientists of the 20th century. He received his PhD in theology at John Hopkins University in 1950 under W. F. Albright and spent most of his career teaching at Harvard (1957 – 1992). Just like his teacher, Frank Cross raised a whole generation of new biblical scientists, during his years at Harvard, he supervised more than 100 doctoral theses. Cross published many biblical studies related to Northwest Semitic epigraphy, text critiques, Dead Sea scrolls, Deuteronomistic history editing, Ugaritic and Hebrew poetry and Israelite religious history. He was very well-known for his ability to synthesize many different types of data. This is especially visible in his books *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* which provide a diachronic overview of the religious history of Israel with an excursion on the editing process of Deuteronomistic history and tribal structure of early Israel. Among palaeographers, Cross is known as the dean of the Northwest Semite epigraphy. Many of his epigraphic reviews are still valid today. Cf. J.-A. Hackett, „Frank Moore Cross, Jr.“ in John H. Hayes *Dictionary of Biblical Interpreters Vol. I.*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999). 233 – 234.

282 Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament theology: an introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008). 29.

a philosophical analysis. Whether this is intentional or not, this phrase says almost nothing new about Moses.²⁸³

In relation to this, it needs to be stressed that the fact that the Septuagint translates the term „I am who I am” as „I am (the one) who is”, „Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν”, and the later Greek versions of Aquila and Theodotus have rendered the phrase in future tense, i.e. „I will be who I will be” ἔσομαι ὃς ἔσομαι.²⁸⁴ This is why some contemporary commentators interpret this phrase in such manner that by *idem per idem*, which means defining something by the very thing that is to be defined, God clearly expresses the fact that there are no adequate tools or expressions in any language that could fully capture God’s essence. Others believe that God was not explaining his name, quite the opposite, he tried to avoid answering Moses’ question, similarly to other Biblical stories (Gn 32:23-33, Sdc 13:8-18).²⁸⁵

The second translation of the term „I am who I am” translated in future tense „I will be who I will be”²⁸⁶ is very interesting. If we look at this phrase from an eschatological perspective, we can say that this is mainly an allusion to God’s final intervention for the benefit of the Israelites. The term יהוה Lord (Yahweh) itself is the only interpretation of God’s name in the Old Testament. And it is very unique. To some extent, it gives a hint of an indescribable secret of God’s existence, however, it does not explain or reveal it fully. Nor does it give an idea of God. However, it is undeniable that it presents God as dynamically and currently existing, acting at a specific time on a specific place, in the past and in the future, and as God who is always present among his people. This is the only way man can get to know the living and true God, Lord of the Lords and God of the Gods.²⁸⁷

Let us now focus on some patristic commentaries to complete and enrich our theological reflections and commentaries related to the issue of God’s name in the Book of Exodus. According to Origen, all living things originate in the one who truly exists and he describes himself to Moses as: „I am who I am” (MT). This participation in God the Father extends to everyone, the honest ones and the sinners, to all creatures, reasonable and unreasonable, and to absolutely everything that exists. (Origenes, *De principiis* 1,3,6: GCS 22, 56). Hilarius,

283 *The New Interpreter’s Bible: volume I.* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1994). 714.

284 As God has many different names and Israelites knew several of them, the question of God’s name cannot be interpreted literally. Each of God’s names represents a way of God’s revelation to the world. That is why there is an issue with the translation of the name Lord יהוה (Yahweh), which designates mercy and eternity and the fact that God is the one who surpasses time. As from a grammatical point of view, the four letters of God’s name יהוה (Lord) in Hebrew can be used to create three other words: he was, he is and he will be. Cf. *Komentáře k Starému zákonu, 3. zvázok: Exodus* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2013). 112.

285 Cf. „Komentáře k Starému zákonu, 3. zvázok: Exodus,” 112.

286 Rabbi’s commentary provides a very interesting interpretation of the two translations of God’s name, as it says that Targum Onkelos considers these words to be God’s name itself as he does not translate them at all. However, the translation that uses future tense, i.e. „I will be who I will be” is also of great and undeniable importance. It means „I will be with them during this suffering, who I will be with them during their future suffering when they are conquered by other kingdoms.” When Moses heard it, he said: „Lord of the World, why should I tell them that there is more suffering to come? The one they are experiencing now is enough.” And God accepted his objection and said: „You are right. You will say this...” This is how Rashi explains the presence of the two claims in the verse. In the first one, Moses asks God a question, in the second one, God responds. At the same time, the Rabbi’s commentary explains why on the second occasion, God refers to himself as יהוה (I am) although he revealed his name as יהוה (I am who I am) the first time. After Moses’ remark, he tells him not to use the longer version of his name in front of the Israelites, as it refers to their future suffering, so Moses should use the shorter version. (Rashi’s interpretation). (Cf. „Komentáře k Starému zákonu, 3. zvázok: Exodus,” 112).

287 Cf. Miloš Bič et al.: *Výklady ke Starému zákonu I., Zákon: Genesis: Exodus: Leviticus: Numeri: Deuteronomium* (Praha: Kalich, 1991). 215.

full of awe, points out at such clear definition of God who talks about his incomprehensible natural character in a language understandable and appropriate for our human understanding. God’s character largely differs in the verb *to be*. „What is” does not belong to things that have a beginning or an ending. What unites eternity with the power of infinite happiness could never be defined as „it was not”, just like it is impossible to describe it with the words „it will no longer be”. The divine is not subjected to interruptions and it has no ending. God’s eternity will never be fake. His name was revealed in an appropriate way so that it ultimately becomes a proof of his eternality. (Hilarius, *De Trinitate* 1,5: CCL 62, 4-5) God’s nature is unique and subsistent in itself, because it does not need to accept existence from anyone to exist. All other creatures, although they seem to exist, do not exist in an absolute sense, because there were times when they did not exist, and if they did not exist once, they can stop existing again. Only God, who is eternal and has no origin, can really use the name Existing (Jerome, *Epistulae* 15,4: CSEL 54, 65) Augustine says that God introduced himself as „the one who is” (LXX) because He remains in eternity and cannot change. Things that change do not exist because they do not remain. Only what is, remains. Anything that changes used to be something and will be something, but it does not exist, as it is changeable. That is why God’s unchangeability was called by the name „I am the one who is”. (Augustine, *Sermones* 6,4: CCL 41, 64) Ambrosius credits theophany to the second divine person (Ambrosius *De fide* 1,13,83: CSEL 78, 36) and applies God’s words to Christ. It is Christ who still is, because Moses talks about Him: „The one who is sent me” (LXX). (Ambrosius *De fide* 5,1,26: CSEL 78, 225-226) According to Severus, through the use of *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*, each of the beings of the Trinity is revealed. According to Antioch, these words reveal the secret of the Holy Trinity in the most perfect manner. They express the common character, the common essence and divinity of the three beings. The words „who is” express the essence of existence and the word *essence* (*essentia*) stems from the word *to be* (*esse*). (Severus of Antioch, *Cat. Ex.* 103: TEG 9, 14).²⁸⁸

Our patristic commentaries, which surely enrich these theological reflections on the big secret of revelation of God’s name in the Book of Exodus, would not be complete without a very valuable commentary by St. Gregory of Nyssa in *Life of Moses or On the Road to Perfection in Virtue*.²⁸⁹

288 „Komentáře k Starému zákonu, 3. zvázok: Exodus,” 113.

289 The composition structure in *Life of Moses* relies mainly on the Biblical story about Exodus, which the author comments on. In this work, there are only two heroes: Moses and the Israelite people. The Biblical author’s narrative focus switches from one hero to the other. And the same structure is followed by Gregory, although the name of the work includes only Moses. In the first part, Moses was the main hero, as this part focuses on Moses’ birth and youth (II, 1 – 18). The following part describes the calling and freeing of Israel (II, 19 – 129), where the story starts with Moses who, after coming to Egypt, becomes a member of the Israelite people, and both – Moses and Israel – create a united group to fight the pharaoh. The third part (II, 130 – 151) shows Israel as the main hero with which the reader is supposed to identify himself. Moses plays only a partial role as an intermediary between God and the people. The fourth part (II, 152 – 255) focuses on events on the Sinai; Moses returns to the foreground. The fifth part (II, 256 – 304), similarly to the third part, focuses on the Israelites and describes their journey from Mount Sinai to the borders of the Promised Land. The final sixth part (II, 305 – 321) describes Moses’ death, so he becomes the main hero again. This division into individual parts based on their narrative characteristics is further stressed by Gregory’s exegesis and focus, which slightly change from one part to another. The first part of *Life of Moses* talks about the activation of human rationality – *conditio sine qua non* of spiritual development. The second part deals with the awakening of free will. These two human qualities – reason and free will – are the “remains” of God’s image in man which resisted the fall. By activating them, man can set off to a journey which can lead him to other divine qualities. Crossing of the Red Sea, i.e. baptism, is the start of this journey. The second part ends with this image. The idea of God’s incarnation and restoration of God’s image in man is seen for the first time in the second chapter (II, 19 – 53). Gregory saw the image of God’s incarnation in the Biblical story of God’s revelation to Moses in the burning bush. It was due to the very nature of this image which links an earthly element and a heavenly ele-

Gregory describes the story of the burning bush as revelation of truth to Moses and says: "It is upon us who continue in this quiet and peaceful course of life that the truth will shine, illuminating the eyes of our soul with its own rays. This truth, which was then manifested by the ineffable and mysterious illumination which came to Moses, is God."²⁹⁰ Gregory continues by saying that the burning bush is the image of Incarnation – bush is the body: "From this we learn also the mystery of the Virgin: The light of divinity which through birth shone from her into human life did not consume the burning bush, even as the flower of her virginity was not withered by giving birth."²⁹¹ Gregory is the first author who compares the image of the burning bush to the virginity of the Mother of God, later repeated by Cyril of Alexandria. In the following part of his commentary entitled *The one who is*, Gregory of Nyssa says: "It seems to me that at the time the great Moses was instructed in the theophany he came to know that none of those things which are apprehended by sense perception and contemplated by the understanding really subsists, but that the transcendent essence and cause of the universe, on which everything depends, alone subsists. For even if the understanding looks upon any other existing things, reason observes in absolutely none of them the self-sufficiency by which they could exist without participating in true Being. On the other hand, that which is always the same, neither increasing nor diminishing, immutable to all change whether to better or to worse (for it is far removed from the inferior and it has no superior), standing in need of nothing else, alone desirable, participated in by all but not lessened by their participation—this is truly real Being. And the apprehension of it is the knowledge of truth."²⁹² These reflections on God and revelation of His name are very similar to the previous commentaries of the Fathers which we have briefly mentioned. The most important thing – which needs to be clearly stressed – is the fact that all Biblical commentaries, even the most recent or contemporary ones, included in the first part of our study, stem from the teaching of old Christian Church Fathers.

Biblical interpretation of the „I am“ texts in the Gospel of John and their Christology

In the central part of our scientific study, we will transfer from reflections on a major secret of God's name in the Old Testament story about a burning bush to reflections on individual parts of the Gospel according to John, in which the phrase „I am“ has a significant theological and Christological meaning. However, it should be said that there are several of the so-called „I am“ texts in the Gospel of John and we will focus only on some of them, namely the following excerpts: on the raising of Lazarus from Bethany (Jn 11), on the vine and the branches (Jn 15) and finally on Jesus' arrest in the garden (Jn 18).²⁹³

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ment – a bush and supernatural fire. This is related to the idea of restoration of God's image in man. Moses was instructed to take off his sandals, and in a way to remove the "skin" which covers God's image in man since the first sin. Then Moses receives a second order, to free God's people. The rest of the second part of *Life of Moses* (II, 54 – 129) describes the fulfilment of this task. In the third part (II, 130 – 151), the author returns to the image of incarnation and in the fourth part (II, 152 – 255), he returns to the challenge to restore God's image in man. As soon as two godly qualities in mankind – reason and free will – are restored, the time will come for man to continue developing God's gifts. (Cf.: Helena Panczová, "God's Incarnation and Restoration of God's Image in Humans (Gregory of Nyssa: *Life of Moses*)", *Studia Theologica* 18, no. 3, (2016): 25 – 27.

290 Sv. Gregor z Nyssy, *Život Mojžiša, alebo, O ceste k dokonalosti v cnosti* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2012). 132.

291 "Sv. Gregor z Nyssy, *Život Mojžiša*," 132 – 133.

292 "Sv. Gregor z Nyssy, *Život Mojžiša*," 134 – 135.

293 In the Gospel of John, there are seven typical "I am" texts: 1. "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35 – 65), 2. "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12 – 19), 3. "I am the gate for the sheep" (Jn 10:7 – 10), 4. "I am a good shepherd" (Jn 10:11 – 18), 5. "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:24 – 27), 6. "I am the way and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6 – 14), 7. "I am the true vine" (Jn 15:1 – 5). These seven metaphors are used by Jesus to introduce himself. The phrase "I am" in this sense immediately evokes God's name in the Book of Exodus where, in the story about

Excerpts from the Gospel of John will always be given in two versions, the accepted Slovak version of the Catholic translation of the Scripture and the most recent Biblical translation of this gospel published in Slovak in 2019 based on contemporary Slovak Biblicists and linguists' initiative. We refer to the most recent translation of the gospel mainly due to short biblical commentaries of certain specific verses prepared by the Biblicists along with the translation.

Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John says: "Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise from the dead." Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live and no one who lives and believes in me will ever die. Do you believe this? She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world" (Jn 11:21 – 27).

The most recent Slovak Biblical translation of the same excerpt reads as follows: "Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise."²⁹⁴ Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live and everyone who lives and believes in me will surely never die. Do you believe this? She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I believe²⁹⁵ that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world" (Jn 11:21 – 27).²⁹⁶

There are two main ideas in this text. First of all, Jesus says: "I am the resurrection". This is a direct reply to Martha's confession in verse 24 and (with the exception of the last resurrection), He tells her about the present realization of what she expects on the last day. This declaration is then commented on and developed in verse 25. Jesus is the resurrection in the sense that when someone believes in him, even if he must go to a grave, he will find eternal life. "Life" in verse 25 is a life from which the Spirit arises and overcomes physical death. The second main idea of this "I am" text is when Jesus says: "I am the life". This declaration is then commented on in verse 26. Whoever receives the gift of life through believing in Jesus will not die and will live an eternal life. In this text, we can see the already casual phrase "I am" preceding the words *resurrection* and *life*, which describes the relationship between Jesus and people and his gift to people. In the Gospel of John, we can see concepts of resurrection and life several chapters earlier: in chapter 6, verses 40 and 54, we can see resurrection in the context of final

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a burning bush, God introduces himself to Moses by saying: "I am who I am" (Ex 3:14). Such use of God's name immediately identifies Jesus Christ with God (Yahweh) from the Old Testament, which ultimately makes Jesus' divinity unquestionable and confirmed. (Cf. Stan K. Evers, *Kristus v knize Exodus* (Chlumec: Občanské sdružení Poutníková četba, 2012). 37 – 38.

294 A brief commentary on verse 23: The word "rise" used by Jesus is ambiguous in this case. It might mean that Lazarus will rise from the dead, just like the Pharisees believed (cf. Acts 23:6 – 9), or that he will soon rise by being saved by Jesus. This verse is an example of John's well-thought-out stylistics and use of expressions to stress the ambiguity of words and phrases. Jesus means the immediate resurrection; however, Mary understands his words in the typically Jewish (Pharisee) intentions of future resurrection. (Cf. Róbert Lapko, Juraj Feník et al. *Jánovo evanjelium. Nový preklad a krátky komentár* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2019). 99.

295 A brief commentary on verse 27: The perfect form of the verb *πεπίστευκα* used in Martha's reply to Jesus does not necessarily mean that she started believing earlier (before meeting Jesus) and that she still believes, it could also express the intensity of her faith. This phrase could also be translated as "I strongly believe" or "I firmly believe". Mary's confession corresponds to the Christological title in the final part of the gospel (20:31), which defines the content of faith of the people to whom this text is dedicated. This is the so-called kerygmatic message. (Cf. Lapko, Feník et al. "Jánovo evanjelium," 99).

296 Lapko, Feník et al. "Jánovo evanjelium," 95.

eschatology, while in chapter 11, verses 24-25, eschatology is clearly and directly realized. As a response to Jesus' own introduction as "resurrection" and "life", Martha admits that she sees Jesus as someone who has the power to give life, just as it is described in the drama of giving life to Lazarus who rises from the grave.²⁹⁷

His reply to Martha, Christ does not only say that He will bring her brother Lazarus back to life, it is also an important statement that He and only He can bring someone back from the dead and that only He can give us (eternal) life. The phrase "I am the resurrection and life" has a similar meaning to phrases "I am the light of the world", "I am the bread of life", and others. The gospel does not describe Jesus' metaphysical being, the gospel's author wishes to explain the importance of Jesus for believers. "Resurrection" and "life" – through them man can be saved in an eschatological sense, which is directly expressed by Jesus Christ himself in the gospel.²⁹⁸

When we look at chapter 14, verse 6 of the Gospel of John, we see that Christ tells his apostles that He is "life". "I am the way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6). That is why we can say that only Jesus has the power over life and death, as well as the power to forgive sins, precisely because He himself is the Creator of life. Only the one who is life itself can bring back life. This clearly shows Christ's authority over life and death and when Jesus introduces himself as the one who brings others back from the dead, He reveals his true divinity to us. He is the Son of the Father.²⁹⁹

The second excerpt that we will focus on in more detail is Jesus' parable of the vine and the branches. Chapter 15 of the Gospel of John starts as follows: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned" (Jn 15:1–6).

Let us now look at the same excerpt in its most recent Slovak biblical translation: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.³⁰⁰ He takes away every sprout in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.³⁰¹ You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a sprout cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.³⁰² I am the vine, you are the sprouts. Whoever remains in me and I in him

297 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 434.

298 Alfred Wikenhauser and Otto Kuss, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1957), 214 – 215.

299 Cf. *Biblia s aplikáciami pre život. Nový zákon* (Bratislava: Medzinárodná biblická spoločnosť – Slovensko, 1999), 248.

300 Commentary on verse 1: This verse contains the last "I am" prediction in the gospel: Jesus identifies himself with the vine. The Father is described as a vine grower and ultimately the owner and protector of the vine. (Cf. Lapko, Feník et al. "Jánovo evanjelium," 132).

301 Commentary on verse 2: The only criterion of quality of the sprouts is their ability to bear fruit. (Cf. Lapko, Feník et al. "Jánovo evanjelium," 132).

302 Commentary on verse 4: The second part of the first sentence is an ellipse, that is why the word "remain" must be added. The conjunction *καί* probably has a comparative and causal meaning of *as well as*. To remain in Jesus means to remain in a relationship with him. Scholars are literally compared to sprouts and, quite intentionally, in a negative way: they cannot bear fruit unless they remain in a relationship with Jesus, just like a sprout cannot bear fruit without remaining on the vine. (Cf. Lapko, Feník et al. "Jánovo evanjelium," 132).

will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a sprout and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned³⁰³" (Jn 15:1–6).³⁰⁴

In the first verse of this story in chapter 15, Jesus insists that He is really the "true" vine and explains that by referring to his Father. We see the same thinking in chapter 6, verse 32 of the same gospel: "So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven." (Jn 6:32). We do not believe that the statement on true vine is a direct polemic against untrue vine, but rather a way of stressing that He is the source and creator of "true" life, a life that comes through the Father and from the Father. Only the Son of God can be the true vine. Jesus is the vine. "True" – this is John's dualist language which he uses to distinguish between what is above and what is below. And yet we could wonder if this could be a secondary reference to untrue vine. The contrast of the word *true* in the sense of John's dualism does not lie between the heavenly and the earthly, but rather between the Old Testament and the New Testament (Christian – Jewish), for example in the case of bread from heaven and manna.³⁰⁵

Fruit which Jesus talks about in this parable applies only to those who remain in a community with Jesus. That is why Jesus calls upon his apostles to remain faithful to the community with him in which they find themselves. This community is characterized by mutuality: apostles must stay in Jesus, which means they must keep on believing in him, and then He will stay in them, which means He will give them life and fruit. The necessity, on which this mutual community is based is analogous to the relationship between the vine and the branches. A branch cannot bear fruit from its own will, it receives life and fertility from the vine; if it separates from the vine, it withers and dies. That is why apostles can bear fruit only if they remain connected to Jesus. As soon as they separate from Jesus, they will die. Verse 6 is described as follows: If someone does not remain in me, he will not bear any fruit and will experience the fate of a barren branch which is thrown out and burnt. While in verse 4, remaining on the vine (connection to Jesus) is a precondition for bearing fruit, in verse 2 this relationship is reversed. However, this is not contradictory – one cannot remain without fruit and one cannot bear fruit without remaining with Jesus.³⁰⁶

Jesus' metaphor on the vine and the fruit of the branches which remain on it means that to remain in Jesus means only one thing: to fulfil his commandments, i.e. to love him with his own love. This is a very clear message for the New Testament people so that they understand the "newness" of life to which Jesus was called and so that they do not succumb to premature conceitedness and unfaithfulness. Jesus' words serve to calm down the apostles, but also to remind them to stay calmly connected to him and fulfil the commandments of love, the root and fruit of all fertility. The word *remain*, which is so dear to Apostle John, evokes relationships, emotions and love. Man remains where his heart is, he lives where his love is, he feels at home with the person he loves. In Jesus, the Son of Man and the Son of God, we all are sons longing for the Father's embrace. A connection with God is not some empty feeling, esoteric speculation or intellectual enlightenment. It is a specific life dedicated to love towards our brothers. Love is expressed in actions much more than in emotions. And it is this connection to Jesus that brings us fruit, the fruit of love, which makes us Christ's friends who participate in his joy. The

303 Commentary on verse 6: The fate of a sprout which does not remain on the vine is described in Jewish apocalyptic imagery – thrown out, gathered and burnt. (Cf. Lapko, Feník et al. "Jánovo evanjelium," 132).

304 Cf. Lapko, Feník et al. "Jánovo evanjelium," 131.

305 Brown, "The Gospel," 674.

306 Wikenhauser and Kuss, "Das Evangelium," 284.

aim is to achieve joy that is a sign of God's revelation and fulfilment of human desires. Jesus' words let us contemplate on our relationship to him and his Father. That is why it is important to remind ourselves frequently to live more and more from him, just like He lives from the Father. Jesus is the true root of the vine which brings the desired true fruit, because He fully lives God's love to man and man's love to God. In Church, we are like branches connected through a single true vine which bears the true fruit. In a specific love, each branch can live God's life, participating in the fullness of his joy.³⁰⁷

The third and final “I am” text is the dramatic scene in the Gethsemane Garden where Jesus was arrested. Chapter 18 of the Gospel of John reads: “When he had said this, Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley. There was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered. Judas his betrayer also knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas got a cohort of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. But Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him, so he came closer and said to them, “Whom are you looking for?” They answered him, “Jesus the Nazorean.” He said to them, “I AM.” Judas his betrayer was also with them. When he said to them, “I AM,” they backed away and fell to the ground. So he again asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” They said, “Jesus the Nazorean.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I AM. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.” This was to fulfil what he had said, “I have not lost any of those you gave me.” Simon Peter had a sword. He drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. But Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?” (Jn 18:1-11)

Let us have a look at the same excerpt from the Gospel of John in its most recent Slovak translation: “When he had said this, Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to where there was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered.³⁰⁸ Judas his betrayer also knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas got a band of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.³⁰⁹ Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and said to them, “Whom are you looking for?”³¹⁰ They answered him, “Jesus the Nazorean.” He said to them, “I AM.” Judas his betrayer was also with them.³¹¹ When he said to them, “I AM,”

307 Cf. Silvano Fausti, *Nad evangeliem podle Jana* (Praha: Nakladatelství Paulínky, 2014). 391.

308 Commentary on 18:1: After dinner and his good-bye, Jesus goes across the Kidron valley which separated the town from the Olive Mountain and the Kidron brook flowed only during winter months. John does not use the word Gethsemane used by synoptics (Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32). He only refers to a garden – he probably wanted to evoke the Garden of Paradise, which expresses the idea that Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection bring paradise to the world. A garden is mentioned several times in the final chapters (18:1.26; 19:41[2x]; 20:15), which strengthens the symbolics of the garden as a paradise. (Cf. Lapko, Fenik et al. “Jánovo evanjelium,” 150).

309 Commentary on 18:3: Judas probably did not bring the entire group of 600 soldiers (cohort), but just a few soldiers. The phrase *group of soldiers* indicates a part of a cohort which was located in the Antonia Fort north of the temple compound. (Cf. Lapko, Fenik et al. “Jánovo evanjelium,” 150).

310 Commentary on 18:4: The verse stresses that Jesus' knew about the events to come as well as his freedom by describing Jesus going out of the garden to meet the group which came to arrest him. The phrase *of the garden* is not used in the original. Instead, the verb *went out* (ἐξῆλθεν) is used. For a better understanding of the scene, it is better to translate Jesus' actions as *went out of the garden* because it clearly indicates that Jesus walks towards Judas' group. The translation also indicates that soldiers and Judas do not enter the garden and the place where Jesus stayed with his disciples. (Cf. Lapko, Fenik et al. “Jánovo evanjelium,” 150–151).

311 Commentary on 18:5: The words *I am* are ambiguous: on one hand they are a form of identification through which Jesus confirms that He is Jesus the Nazorean whom they are looking for, on the other hand, they are Christological self-revelation with the motive of Jesus' unity with God, which is described in the Old Testament, e.g. in Ex 3:14. (Cf. Lapko, Fenik et al. “Jánovo evanjelium,” 151).

they backed away and fell to the ground.³¹² So he again asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” They said, “Jesus the Nazorean.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I AM. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.”³¹³ This was to fulfil what he had said, “I have not lost any of those you gave me.”³¹⁴ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus.³¹⁵ Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?”³¹⁶ (Jn 18:1-11)³¹⁷

Jesus is facing execution and, knowing that Judas will look for him there, He goes to the garden and reveals himself as soon as Judas comes. By doing so, Jesus is fulfilling the words He said about himself, that *He has power to lay down his life* (cf. Jn 10:18) and his death is a sacrifice to which He agrees voluntarily. The fact that Judas comes with the leader of a Roman cohort shows that Jews have already accused Jesus in front of Pilate. The far-from-legal circumstances of Jesus' introduction to the synedrium explain this accusation: Jews lead a trial based on investigation which further supports and strengthens their accusations; Pilate is judging in the true sense of the word. It is easy to understand the confusion of Jews and soldiers following the unexpected arrival of the man they are looking for as a criminal who meets them with perfect calmness. They think they will find a rebel, however, they find serenity, rather than the agitation and rebellion they were expecting (and Jesus stops it immediately when Peter wants to stir it). With Jesus' words: “*I have not lost any of those you gave me*” (Jn 18:9), the evangelist stresses that Jesus takes his people's suffering on his shoulders.³¹⁸

Clearly knowing what is going to happen to him and strongly committed to fulfil the Father's will, Jesus immediately surrenders to his pursuers. Officers of the temple guard lead the

312 Commentary on 18, 6: Backing away and falling to the ground is the group's reaction to Jesus' power, admission of his sovereignty and a narrative example of their powerlessness. Even at the time of arrest, his enemies respect Jesus, by falling to the ground, they surrender to him. In the Gospel of John, the arrest is not a forced action, but rather self-surrender to enemies, which is clearly expressed in verses 18:7 – 8. (Cf. Lapko, Fenik et al. “Jánovo evanjelium,” 151).

313 Commentary on 18:8: Unlike synoptics (Mk 14:50; Mt 26:56), in the Gospel of John, scholars do not run away, Jesus gives them freedom by ordering soldiers to let them go. This is also a sign of Jesus' sovereignty and control over the situation. (Cf. Lapko, Fenik et al. “Jánovo evanjelium,” 151).

314 Commentary on 18:9: The evangelist perceives Jesus' gesture of letting the scholars go as fulfilment of Jesus own words (probably 6:39; 10:28 or 17:12). (Cf. Lapko, Fenik et al. “Jánovo evanjelium,” 151).

315 Commentary on 18:10: Peter's intervention is an act of defiance, he wants to protect Jesus from the arrest, which indicates that Peter does not understand Jesus' fate chosen by the Father. Jesus voluntarily accepts his fate. Jesus has the opportunity to explain his attitude to the imminent suffering in the following verse. (Cf. Lapko, Fenik et al. “Jánovo evanjelium,” 151).

316 Commentary on 18:11: The cup is a parallel to Jesus' prayer in the Gethsemane as described by the synoptics (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42). John's wording stresses Jesus' full disposal to drink the cup prepared by the Father. The image of a cup is an Old Testament metaphor for God's tribunal (e.g. Ps 75:9; Jer 25:15 – 29; Hab 2:16) or man's bitter fate (e.g. Ps 11:6; 16:5). In John's context, the cup is a metaphor of Jesus' suffering. (Cf. Lapko, Fenik et al. “Jánovo evanjelium,” 151).

317 Commentary on the excerpt from chapter 18, verses 1 – 11: The first episode of John's passions is Jesus' journey from the venue of the last supper and his goodbye through the Kedron valley to the (Gethsemane) garden and subsequent confrontation with a group who came to arrest him consisting of Roman soldiers, guards from the chief priests and Judas. Unlike synoptics, John does not describe a true “Gethsemane” scene, i.e. sleep and disciples' escape, Jesus' prayer to the Father, Judas' kiss. Unlike synoptics, in the Gospel of John, Roman soldiers participate in Jesus' “arrest”. This scene also highlights Jesus' power and sovereignty: Jesus knows what is coming, He willingly walks out of the garden towards Judas, He lets his disciples go, He reveals himself with the “I am” phrase and the ones who came to arrest him fall to the ground. Jesus does not allow Peter to stop his decision to drink the cup prepared by the Father. He identifies himself and surrenders to the group who came to arrest him. (Cf. Lapko, Fenik et al. “Jánovo evanjelium,” 150).

318 Louis Bouyer, *Das vierte Evangelium* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1968). 219 – 220.

group. They, as well other bystanders, just stand there until Jesus introduces himself by saying “I am” and at that moment they all fall to the ground. By repeating the question and answer, Jesus further strengthens his freedom and authority. In John’s gospel – unlike the synoptic gospels – Jesus does not blame his pursuers for bringing their accusations against him, showing his rebellion, but instead, He does what He asks from his pursuers, to stay the same. He does what He says in the Good Shepherd parable: “*I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*”³¹⁹ (Jn 10:11).

We are also interested in a more detailed look at Jesus’ introduction in this excerpt, where He uses the phrase “I am”. On the level of a normal conversation, the phrase “I am” with which Jesus responds, serves as an identification of the Jesus they are looking for, whereas in the synoptic tradition, the main role is played by Judas’ kiss. However, Jesus’ reply caused them to back away in confusion, which is not an expression of spontaneous astonishment. Jesus’ enemies lay down facing the ground in front of his majesty, therefore some doubts may arise whether John really wants to refer to God’s name with the phrase “I am”.³²⁰ To fall on the ground is a reaction to God’s revelation.³²¹ A similar scene can be found in the Book of Psalms, which can help us understand it even better: “*My foes turn back when I call on you. This I know: God is on my side*” (Ps 56:10). It is even better to interpret this scene on the background of the Old Testament story of Moses who uttered mysterious God’s name in front of the pharaoh and pharaoh fell silently to the ground. John’s scene illustrates that Jesus has God’s power over the forces of the darkness, because He has God’s name. This further strengthens the impression that Jesus could not have been arrested had He not had allowed it. Jesus’ attitude is also visible in his words to Pilate: “*You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above*” (Jn 19:11). However, at this point, Jesus does not decide to leave his enemies powerless. In the agony scene described by the synoptics, it is obvious that Jesus does not want to defy the Father’s will, so in the Gospel of John, He allows them to arrest him provided that his disciples are not harmed. Jesus does not use the benefits of God’s name for himself, but for the ones He loves. By sparing his disciples, He fulfils his words from the supper, when He said: “*When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled*” (Jn 17:12). With these words, Jesus also expressed the protective power of God’s name.³²²

As Jesus introduces himself directly by using God’s name “I am”, He expresses his true identity, eternal pre-existence and his true divinity. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did not have

319 Wikenhauser and Kuss, “Das Evangelium,” 318.

320 Some scientists have expressed hypotheses that this could be an allusion to Old Testament theophany, just like in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 11, verse 4: “*But he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide fairly for the land’s afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked*” (Is 11:4), or in the Book of Psalms: “*My foes turn back when I call on you. This I know: God is on my side.*” (Ps 56:10). Not everyone agrees that this statement is anything other than a presentation of Jesus’ identity to those who came to arrest him. Some Biblicists say that these words alone do not reveal much, however, readers of this gospel might have already understood that Jesus clearly identifies himself with the Old Testament Isaiah visions of Lord, God and Saviour. (Cf. Francis J. Moloney, *Sacra pagina – Evangelium podle Jana* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2009). 504 – 505.

321 To put things into better perspective, let us look at excerpts from the Old Testament, namely from the Book of Daniel. Chapter 2, verse 46 reads: “*Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell down and worshiped Daniel and ordered sacrifice and incense offered to him.*” (Dan 2:46). Chapter 8, verse 18: “*As he spoke to me, I fell forward unconscious; he touched me and made me stand up.*” (Dan 8:18). The apostle John’s Book of Revelation: “*When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said, “Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last.”* (Rev 1:17)

322 Brown, “The Gospel,” 818.

a beginning, unlike anyone else. Jesus Christ is eternal God. By using the phrase “I am” when introducing himself, Jesus clearly expressed that He is the true God. In the Book of Exodus, God clearly reveals his identity with “I am who I am”. Therefore, Jesus informed his judges that He is eternal God who exists independently from anything.³²³

From proclamation to knowing and accepting Jesus Christ – kerygmatic message and soteriological importance of John’s gospel for today’s man

“*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.*” (Jn 20:31)

Based on the final words of John’s gospel’s author, this gospel was written especially so that readers may find faith in Jesus, the Son of God, and to get to know him through the light of their faith (Christological nature of the gospel). The author also wanted them to find and receive salvation through this knowing and acceptance of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (the gospel’s soteriological dimension). Therefore, it can be said that the entire text of the gospel entails a relationship between the gospel’s Christology and soteriology, as if Christology was in the service of soteriology, because according to the gospel’s author, not only it is important for the reader to recognize Jesus as the Son of God, but also to accept him as his personal Redeemer and Saviour, which Jesus Christ truly is. This truth – that Jesus is Messiah – is stressed by the gospel’s author on several occasions; He also confirms it with Jesus’ “signs”. The author stresses that Jesus exceeds Jewish expectations of a Messiah, and He demonstrates it by giving two titles to Jesus: “Son of Man” (cf. Jn 3:13; 5: 27; 6:27; 6:62; 12:34; 13:31) and the Only Son (cf. Jn 1:18; 3:16; 5:19-47; 10:22-39; 17:1). The highlight of John’s Christology is the teaching on *logos* in the very first part of the gospel, in the prologue. This is the so-called Christology of the Word (cf. Jn 1:1-18), which we will study in more detail in the second chapter. John’s gospel highlights the redeeming dimension of incarnation, which is then the main foundation of the entire Jesus’ redemptive actions realized in particular by his death on the cross. The secret of Jesus’ death is exercised in the sacrament of baptism (chapter 3 of the gospel), Eucharist (chapter 6) and penance (chapter 20). By believing in the Son of God Jesus Christ, man participates in his work as a Saviour. That is why faith, together with love, is the basic precondition and requirement for man to be saved.³²⁴

Let us briefly stop and think about proclamation of the gospel as a joyous news. Who should proclaim the gospel to the world? Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* says: “*Consequently, the Church’s mission cannot be considered as an optional or supplementary element in her life. Rather it entails letting the Holy Spirit assimilate us to Christ himself, and thus to share in his own mission: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21) to share the word with your entire life. It is the word itself which impels us towards our brothers and sisters: it is the word which illuminates, purifies, converts; we are only its servants. We need, then, to discover ever anew the urgency and the beauty of the proclamation of the word for the coming of the Kingdom of God which Christ himself preached.*” (VD 93)

The Pope clearly says that Church is the first and main bearer and preacher of the gospel’s truth and the joyous message of Jesus Christ to the world. The Church’s apostolic origin brings us to the reality of preaching the gospel by apostles sent by Jesus Christ himself, as stressed especially in the synoptic tradition (cf. Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15-20) and in the Acts of the

323 John MacArthur, *Evangelium podle Jána. Komentář verš po verši* (Kroměříž: Občanské sdružení Didasko, 2012). 84.

324 Cf. *Sváté písmo – Nový zákon* (Trnava: Spolok sv. Vojtecha, 2001). 277 – 278.

Apostles which describes the birth of the Church and various occasions on which apostles preached the gospel. What did the preaching look like? Apostles' preaching had two main goals: 1. To proclaim salvation realized in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (kerygma), and 2. To continuously teach and educate believers in the truths about Jesus Christ and his teaching (catechesis). In this way, reference to Christ is present in both proclamation forms, always with the aim of salvation. It is a message of salvation that invites everyone to accept Christ; the apostolic preaching also serves to educate listeners on important aspects, rights and obligations which the new life entails for anyone who believes and accepts Christ in his life. The requirements of this "oral style" very much influenced initial apostolic preaching, as the message was reduced to short sentences which were easy to remember for preachers and for listeners, who were illiterate and could not use any books or texts to educate themselves.³²⁵

Now we have described the style, manner and content of apostles' preaching. In the dogmatic constitution of the Second Vatican Council on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, the text on apostolic preaching of the gospel reads: "And so the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (see 2 Thess. 2:15), and to fight in defence of the faith handed on once and for all (see Jude 1:3). Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes." (DV 8)

When we come back to the question of who is responsible for preaching the gospel in today's world, we need to move from the apostles to the Church, after all, the first members of the Church were apostles. To understand what the Church is, we need to look at the Church's definition of itself in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "In Christian usage, the word "church" designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. "The Church" is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's Body." (CCC 752)

Church is an assembled People of God which any baptised person is part of: "Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word." (CCC 1213)

In relation to the need to preach the gospel in the world and in connection to thoughts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI says in the above-mentioned post-synodal apostolic exhortation: "Since the entire People of God is a people which has been "sent", the Synod reaffirmed that "the mission of proclaiming the word of God is the task of all of the disciples of Jesus Christ based on their Baptism". No believer in Christ can feel dispensed from this responsibility which comes from the fact of our sacramentally belonging to the Body of Christ. A consciousness of this must be revived in every family, parish, community, association and ecclesial movement. The Church, as a mystery of communion, is thus entirely

325 Cf. Eduard Krumpolc, "The Historical Jesus and Christ of Faith in a Recently Published Work by Vladimír Boublík," *Studia Theologica* 20, no. 1., (2018): 74.

missionary, and everyone, according to his or her proper state in life, is called to give an incisive contribution to the proclamation of Christ." (VD 94)

Saint Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* also reminds us of the role of each baptised person to proclaim what he has accepted, i.e. the gospel: "Finally, the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn." (EN 24)

The Pope goes on by observing that proclamation of gospel in today's world is a very complex process made up of the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, as well as apostolic initiative. These elements and tools are inseparable from the preaching of the gospel (cf. EN 24). After all, if we think about the importance of proclaiming the gospel for those who proclaim it, i.e. for the baptised, one could draw up a conclusion that the importance and aim of proclaiming God's word may lie in Christian conversion. Not only does the baptised proclaim the gospel and the other person happily welcomes it in the light of faith, but the power of God's word which is proclaimed also has an impact on the proclaimers, i.e. those who were already baptised, because it is a reason for continuous contact with God through his word, which results in the baptized proclaimer to convert to God with a desire to be connected to him. Conversion is undoubtedly a God's gift, work of the Holy Trinity, as the Holy Spirit is the one who opens man's heart so that he believes in Jesus Christ, accepts him and loves him so much that he will share it with others.³²⁶

That is why the importance and aim of the gospel for man is not only to proclaim Jesus Christ in this world to those who do not know or love him yet, but this proclamation is also essential and vitally important for those who have known, believed and accepted Christ and who love him now. Contact and any form of connection between man and God and his word results in conversion and continuous restoration. Proclaimed God's word in a joyous message of the gospel makes man find God and be converted by God and his word, and the only and definitive God's Word is Jesus Christ. (cf. Jn 1:1 – 18)

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, there are many questions and unclaritys regarding the presentation of God's name in the Old Testament within theological science. Nevertheless, in this scientific paper, we strived to discuss this issue in the light of the phrase "I am" used in the Gospel of John in the New Testament. The gospel's author's intention was mainly to present Jesus Christ, who reveals himself in the gospel, while the use of the phrase "I am" definitely serves the purpose of confirming Jesus' true divinity and his divine authority. In this contribution, we moved from brief theological reflections on the mysterious revelation of God's name in the Old Testament in the Book of Exodus to reflections on individual "I am" texts in the Gospel of John where we tried to use various Biblical commentaries to further explain and clarify the gospel's Christological character. The gospel's author presents Jesus as God, equal to the Father, with an intentional use of the phrase "I am". This phrase is very important and characteristic of John's gospel. In the entire New Testament canon, this phrase is what makes this gospel unique. When talking about Jesus' self-presentation and revelation of his divine essence in this gospel, we definitely need to mention the revelation of the Holy Trinity through Jesus Christ. Papal preacher R.

326 Cf. Ľubomír Petrik, *Kerygma v homílii a zdroj živej viery : teologicko-homiletická reflexia o význame kerygmy v kontexte novej evanjelizácie* (Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity, 2014), 172.

Cantalamesa provided us with an amazing summary of the Holy Trinity theology and their mutual relations in his homily, mainly inspired by the Gospel of John. In his homily of 14 December 2018, he said: “*The Father glorifies the Son; the Son glorifies the Father (Jn 17:4-5); the Paraclete will glorify the Son (Jn 16:14). Each one devotes himself to making the others known. The Son teaches us to cry, “Abba!”; the Holy Spirit teaches us to cry, “Jesus is Lord!” and “Come, Lord,” Maranatha. Each of them teaches us to speak not his own name but the name of the other two Persons. There is only one “place” in the world where the rule of “love your neighbour as yourself” is perfectly put into practice, and it is in the Trinity! Every divine Person loves the others exactly as himself.*”³²⁷ Even Jesus himself expressed the desire for the gospel to be proclaimed, when he said to his apostles: “*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.*” (Mt 28:19 – 20)

This Christ’s missionary message also has its soteriological side and importance in the life of a man who accepts the gospel through faith and who enters the secret of God’s life in Trinity through baptism. In the final part of the Gospel of John, it seems that the author expresses this kerygmatic and soteriological importance by saying: “*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.*” (Jn 20:31)

Through impulses from its research, this scientific study creates space for detailed scientific and expert discussions and inspiring reflections which could generate new specific and efficient topics beneficial for evangelisation in practice. Missionary and evangelization efforts of the Church must be made practical and more attractive, for example through new ways which will be appealing and interesting for today’s society and all age categories. That is why this scientific study presents several theses on modifying these ways. Similar studies have become increasingly relevant. One of the important reasons is the fact that possibilities of realizing missionary and evangelisation missions of the Church are affected in specific ways by the current situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic and its severe negative consequences.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

327 “Fr Cantalamesa: Contemplating Trinity helps overcome division,” (14 December 2018), accessed March 30 2019, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2018-12/second-advent-sermon-raniero-cantalamesa-2018.html> ; “Fr. Cantalamesa’s 2nd 2018 Advent sermon: The living God and the living Trinity,” (14 December 2018), accessed March 30 2019, <https://aleteia.org/2018/12/14/fr-cantalamesas-2nd-2018-advent-sermon-the-living-god-and-the-living-trinity/>

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THE COVID-19 DISEASE SITUATION PRIOR TO OCTOBER 2020 – IN SELECTED COUNTRIES: THE POTENTIALLY SEVERE CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 ON THE NERVOUS SYSTEM AND SEVERAL KEY SOLUTIONS TO COVID-19 IN RELATION TO DIGITIZATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



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Abstract

Background: The aim of this brief analysis is to discuss the COVID-19 situation in selected countries prior to October 2020, using relevant statistics. In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the current situation in African countries, we will also touch upon certain specificities of missionary and charity work. With regards to the demonstrated consequences of the Spanish flu, we would like to point out certain severe consequences which COVID-19 could have on the nervous system and then discuss the co-morbidities related to COVID-19.

Conclusion: This analysis, including areas mentioned in the final section, also opens space for scientific and expert discussions focused on the specificities of data analysis related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its connection to artificial intelligence, plus the need to carry out further interesting research on the issue of COVID-19 and artificial intelligence. These studies can be of significant help for similar diseases or pandemics.

Keywords: COVID-19. Nervous System. Statistics. Digitization. Artificial Intelligence.

Introduction

Pandemics are widespread epidemics that spread across a large geographical area, even on multiple continents or worldwide. These include high disease incidence over a large area (continents) over a certain period of time. Influenza is a recurrent disease, especially after a se-

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rious antigenic change in the influenza virus (Spanish flu and others). The spread of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 is a similar case with serious health, economic and social consequences.

It should be said that there have been many pandemics and epidemics throughout mankind's history. Let us present a few relevant examples, beginning with the typhoid epidemic which occurred in Athens in 430 BC and which started as enteric fever, killing one quarter of Athenian soldiers and one quarter of the entire population over a 4-year period. The next epidemic was smallpox sometime between 165 and 168 AD. This was documented by Marcus Aurelius Antoninus between 165 and 168 AD. Smallpox spread over the Italian Peninsula, infecting 5 million people and killing a quarter of them. Later, there was the Justinianic Plague which occurred sometime between 541 and 750 AD. It first arrived to Ethiopia and spread across the whole of Europe and Asia. The contagion killed between 25 and 50 million people. Some other examples of major pandemics include: The Black Death (1347 – 1353), which was a plague which affected the whole of Eurasia, killing approximately 75 million people. In 1855 – 1904, the plague gradually spread from India to China, killing around 10 million people in total. During the Spanish flu (1918 – 1920), the virus first spread among soldiers in a camp in Kansas, later affecting approximately 500 million people. The death toll is estimated to have been around 50 million people. The Asian flu (1957 – 1958) originated in southern China, where human and bird flu viruses simultaneously attacked pigs and, after genetically mutating, they merged into a deadly new virus, killing at least one million people.³²⁹ During the Hong Kong flu (1968–1969), human viruses and the bird flu virus created a new virus which was first discovered in Hong Kong. Given the similarity of the new virus to the one from 1957, people were partially immune and the death toll was lower, around 750,000 people.³³⁰ The SARS epidemic (2002-2003) was first identified in November 2002 in the Guangdong province in the south of China. It was caused by a virus identified in 2003 under the name SARS-CoV and it is presumed to have been an animal virus originating in an unidentified animal, probably a bat, which spread to other animals. It affected 26 countries, and in 2003, more than 8000 cases were registered. Since then, there have been a small number of cases due to laboratory accidents or probably due to transfer from animal to man. The Mexican swine flu (2009 – 2010) was first identified in Mexico, before spreading across the entire world. Two million people died as a result of this contagion. The SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19 pandemic which started in December 2019 was declared a pandemic by WHO on 11 March 2020. It seems that the disease originated in the city of Wuhan (China), however, its origin is still unclear.

In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more than relevant to discuss the Spanish flu. It was declared a global influenza pandemic which lasted almost 2 years, from 1918 to 1920. It was caused by the influenza A virus, subtype H1N1. Its mortality rate is estimated to have been 1 to 5% of the global population, while the death toll is estimated to have been somewhere between 17 to 50 million people, and possibly as high as 100 million,³³¹ i.e. 3 to 10% (possibly 20%) of the infected people (case fatality rate). It was one of the deadliest epidemics in the history of mankind. Spain was not the hardest hit country and the disease did not start there. The epidemic is known as the Spanish flu because other countries fighting in the Great War censored reports on the disease, whereas neutral Spain had no reason to do so. With regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, we should learn our lesson from the Spanish flu. The long-term

329 Fadi Al Saiegh, et al., "Status of SARS-CoV-2 in cerebrospinal fluid of patients with COVID-19 and stroke Journal of Neurology," *Neurosurgery and Psychiatry* 91, 8, (2020). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jnnp-2020-323522>

330 Minja Belić, et al., "Artificial intelligence for assisting diagnostics and assessment of Parkinson's disease—A review," *Clinical Neurology and Neurosurgery* 184, (September 2019): 105442. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clineuro.2019.105442>

331 Akshay Avula, "COVID-19 presenting as stroke," *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* 87, (July 2020): 115-119 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2020.04.077>.

effects of the disease have been demonstrated, especially related to the nervous system, for example Parkinson's disease, which was identified as a result of the Spanish flu more than 20 or 30 years after the outbreak. Therefore, we will focus on aspects similar to the Spanish flu.

How epidemics and pandemics are spread

During epidemics and pandemics, some areas might not be affected by the contagion, such as: isolated islands, deep mountain valleys, rain forests, etc. In contrast, some areas which originally were not affected might eventually get infected due to migration and air transport. These two factors currently represent the biggest danger in terms of the pandemic's spread. This fact was proven in 2003 in relation to the SARS epidemic: migration and air transport helped the virus to spread from Asia to Canada.

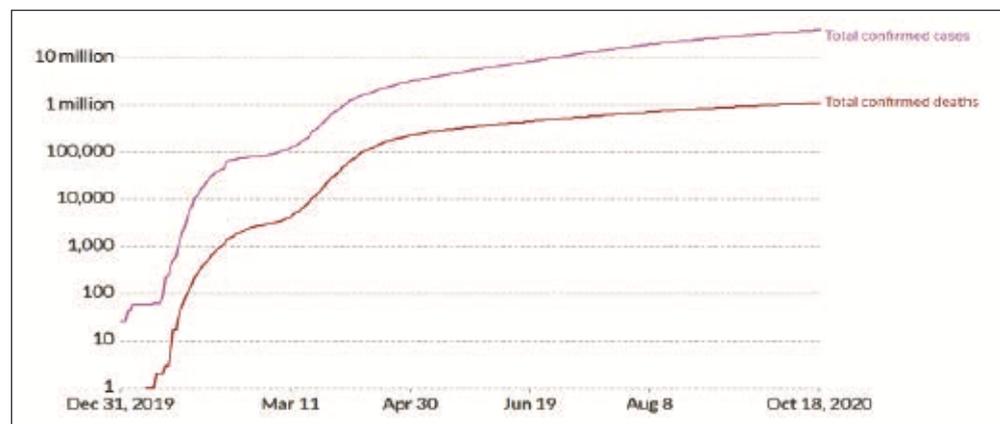
COVID-19 incidence

By the end of September, the total number of deaths caused by the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic worldwide reached one million. The worst situation is currently in the USA, followed by Brazil and India. More than 33 million people have been infected, two thirds of whom have recovered from the disease. Recently, several European countries adopted stricter measures to fight the virus. By September 2020, the pandemic had spread to all continents, with only a few areas remaining unaffected.

Relevant statistics demonstrating the COVID-19 situation by October 2020

We will now present statistics to compare the mortality rate in individual countries based on the number of deaths associated with COVID-19 per 1 million inhabitants. This information is only indicative, given the fact that the methods of reporting the number of deaths vary from country to country. Statistics will be presented in the form of charts with a logarithmic scale and tables with relevant geographic names and data. In relation to statistics, we will also point out other efficient forms of research.

Figure 1: The correlation between COVID-19 confirmed cases and mortality associated with the SARS-CoV-2 virus worldwide since the outbreak of the first wave up to 18 October 2020



Source: COVID19info.live (<https://covid19info.live/>)

Table 1: The ten countries with the highest total number of deaths caused by COVID-19 per 1 million inhabitants by 16 October 2020

N.	Country	Confirmed deaths (absolute)	Population (in millions)	Deaths per million	Population density
1	Peru	33,577	31.99	1050	25
2	Belgium	10,327	11.42	904	376
3	Bolivia	8,407	11.35	741	10
4	Brazil	152,460	209.47	728	25
5	Ecuador	12,306	17.8	691	64
6	Spain	33,553	46.72	718	93
7	Chile	13,434	18.73	717	23
8	Mexico	85,285	126.19	676	66
9	USA	216,873	327.17	663	34
10	United Kingdom	43,203	66.49	650	280

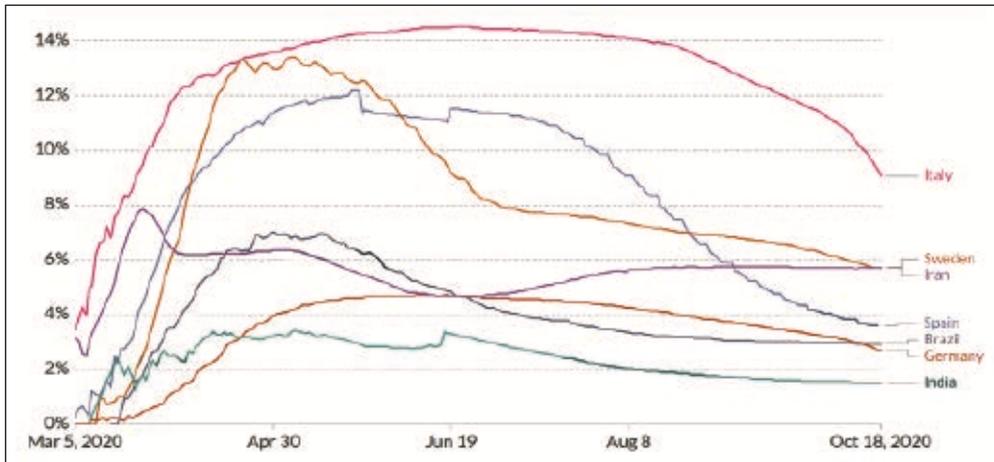
Source: COVID19info.live (<https://covid19info.live/>)

South and Central America countries, for example Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Chile, have faced major problems with patients infected by COVID-19 although their population density is lower than in European countries (e.g. Peru has only 25 inhabitants per 1 km²). The high number of deaths (700 to approximately 1000) per one million inhabitants shows that their healthcare systems were not prepared to handle such a widespread pandemic. In Europe the hardest hit country is Belgium with 904 deaths per 1 million inhabitants, which makes it the second hardest hit country in terms of the number of COVID-19 deaths. In Europe it is followed by Spain and the UK. In these countries, population density is higher which, combined with intense migration from economically less-developed countries with poorer hygiene standards, resulted in a higher percentage of deaths caused by COVID-19. The worst situation is in North America, with Mexico ranking first and the USA second.

If we were to answer the question *How likely is it for a person infected by COVID-19 to die?*, we would have to take into account that "mortality rate", the most commonly discussed death risk rate, is not an answer to this question for two reasons. First of all, it relies on the number of confirmed cases and many cases are not confirmed. The second reason is that it relies on the total number of COVID-19 deaths. These two facts mean that it is extremely difficult to determine a precise number of deaths and to estimate the real risk of death.

The following chart related to COVID-19 mortality shows the case-fatality rate (CFR) from 5 March to 18 October 2020. CFR is a proportion of people who die from the disease from the total number of confirmed cases. During a pandemic outbreak, CFR shows a poor fatality risk rate. For a disease to be the cause (where the number of total cases is unknown), CFR must be interpreted with caution. The situation is quite critical in Iran, where this proportion has been continuously increasing.

Figure 2: Case-fatality rate (CFR) from 5 March until 18 October 2020



Source: COVID19info.live (<https://covid19info.live/>)

The P-score method is much more accurate.³³² Based on the P-score, COVID-19 has the highest number of infections and deaths, which represents approximately 22% of deaths worldwide. American pandemic policy protectors claim that these numbers are misleading, as the number of reported COVID-19 cases depends on the testing system and, in many countries; COVID-19-related deaths are not counted. Healthcare decision-makers in the USA enjoyed several advantages when compared to European countries like Italy or Spain, which presumably led to a lower mortality rate for the following reasons:

- They had more time to prepare. Genetic evidence shows that Europe was the source of most infections which later manifested in New York.
- The USA has a younger population and COVID-19 mortality greatly correlates with age.

If we look at the proportion of excess deaths compared to normal deaths, which is a more transparent and comparable P-score, European countries have had a high excess death rate during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the *all age groups* category, especially in the productive age group (15-64), the UK has had the highest excess mortality rate. Spain had the highest cumulative P-score in September in the age group *over 85*.³³³

332 Janine Aron and John Muellbauer, "The US excess mortality rate from COVID-19 is substantially worse than Europe's," 29 September 2020, accessed October 2, 2020, <https://voxeu.org/article/us-excess-mortality-rate-covid-19-substantially-worse-europe-s>

333 Aron and Muellbauer, "The US excess mortality rate from COVID-19, See also: Charlie Giattino, et al., "Excess mortality during the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19)," *Our World in Data* June 29, 2020, accessed October 2, 2020, <https://ourworldindata.org/excess-mortality-covid>

Table 2: The ten countries with the lowest number of deaths caused by COVID-19 per one million inhabitants by 16 October 2020

N.	Country	Confirmed deaths (absolute)	Population (in millions)	Deaths per million	Population density
1	Burundi	1	11.18	0.1	403
2	Tanzania	21	56.32	0.4	59
3	Vietnam	35	95.54	0.4	290
4	Sri Lanka	13	21.67	0.6	332
5	Papua New Guinea	7	8.61	0.8	19
6	Thailand	59	69.43	0.8	130
7	Uganda	96	42.72	2.2	166
8	Mozambique	73	29.5	2.5	36
9	Rwanda	33	12.3	2.7	470
10	Niger	69	19.75	3.5	19

Source: COVID19info.live (<https://covid19info.live/>)

Paradoxically, these countries are mostly African countries: Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique, Rwanda and Niger. However, the reality is very different due to the fact that a very small number of tests for COVID-19 are performed in these countries and the mortality records do not correspond to reality. We will present the information available on health for the first two African countries.

Burundi is a landlocked country located in Africa's Great Rift Valley with a population of approximately 11 million people and a relatively high population density, where only one death has been registered. Burundi has the highest hunger and malnourishment levels from the 120 countries listed in the Global Hunger Index, so the question is whether the healthcare system is actually monitoring the number of COVID-19 deaths correctly. Burundi is followed by Tanzania, located on the eastern coast of central Africa, which has more than 56 million inhabitants. Malnutrition in Tanzania remains a problem and differs greatly between individual regions. USAID (the United States Agency for International Development) claims that 16% of children are overweight and 34% experience slower growth due to malnutrition.

Asian countries are the most economically developed countries; therefore, Vietnam is an interesting example in terms of the number of deaths caused by COVID-19. Vietnam reported its first COVID-19 case in January 2020. In the following four months, it reported only a little more than 300 cases and zero deaths.³³⁴ This success was due to several key factors, which include a well-developed healthcare system, a strong central government and a proactive control strategy based on complex testing, tracing and quarantine. Insights from the successful Vietnamese strategy of early detection and containment are worth analysing in more detail, so that other countries can use them in their own response. Vietnam used a targeted approach to testing,

334 Al Saiegh, et al., "Status of SARS-CoV-2 in cerebrospinal fluid of patients with COVID-19," <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jnnp-2020-323522>; Belić, et al., "Artificial intelligence," 105442.

providing tests to areas with community transfer and, for each positive case, there were three levels of contact tracing.

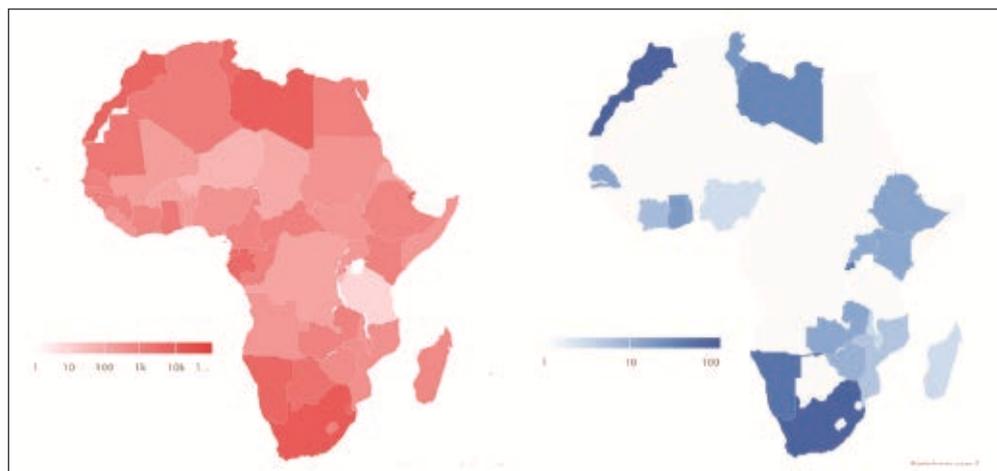
The mortality rate in COVID-19 in African countries is also important. Since 31 December 2019 and as of 25 October 2020, more than 43 million cases of COVID-19 (in accordance with the applied case definitions and testing strategies in the affected countries) have been reported, including 1.14 million deaths throughout the world.

Table 3: COVID-19 Cases and Deaths reported up to 25 October in Africa: 1.69 million cases with more than 43 thousand deaths. The first ten countries reporting the most cases:

N	Country	COVID-19	Deaths	% of Deaths
1	South Africa	714,246	18,944	2.7%
2	Morocco	194,461	3255	1.7%
3	Egypt	106,397	6187	5.8%
4	Ethiopia	92,858	1419	1.5%
5	Nigeria	61,930	1129	1.8%
6	Libya	56,013	795	1.4%
7	Algeria	55,880	1907	3.4%
8	Kenya	49,721	902	1.8%
9	Tunisia	48,799	819	1.7%
10	Ghana	47,690	316	0.7%

Source: COVID19info.live (<https://covid19info.live/>)

Figure 3: Mapping COVID-19 in Africa by 16 October 2020



Source: COVID-19 Africa Watch (<https://covid19africawatch.org/data-and-charts/>)

In the image on the left, the countries of Africa are coloured in a darker red colour, according to the number of cases of COVID-19 per 1 million inhabitants. In the image on the right, the countries of Africa are coloured in blue, which are shown in a darker blue according to the number of tests per thousand inhabitants. The situation was updated on 25.10.2020. As the map of African countries shows, test data are not available for many African countries. This is due to the poor economic situation and health care in these African countries. For these reasons, it is not possible to take the results of the number of infections and deaths from COVID-19 in Africa as being authoritative, especially in countries with a lower number of COVID-19 testing.

We focused on relevant statistics of mortality rates and case-fatality rates connected to COVID-19. It is especially important to focus on African countries with high poverty levels regardless of the current pandemic, given the fact that many missionary and charity activities are carried out in these countries.

Selected Specificities of Missionary and Charity Work in African Countries during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Consequences

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its many devastating effects, the African middle class will probably fall into even greater poverty and lose even the small chance of improving its life in areas where, prior to the pandemic's outbreak, there were at least some possibilities for improvement. However, under the current circumstances, these possibilities have become very limited and have been replaced by the need to resolve much more serious complications related to everyday life in African countries caused by the pandemic.

Therefore, missionary and charity work currently face several important tasks and questions.

On the level of charity work, it will be necessary to strengthen international and national missionary and charity social projects in individual countries whose aim is to provide healthcare, social, economic and pedagogic support in African regions or territories. Many such international projects are carried out by the St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Sciences, Bratislava – Slovakia. In these missionary and charity social projects, it is necessary to ensure that all the above-mentioned areas where aid is provided are allocated in the best possible way. Given current travel restrictions, securing financial support for these projects is problematic, because many sponsors and donors have suffered great economic losses due to the current situation, and some of them even face complete dissolution.

An important task on the level of charity work is to draft and create an efficient plan to acquire transparent financial support for further operation of such projects, which will be even more difficult given the complications and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. One possibility is through efficient fundraising and an interesting fundraising campaign. However, all matters related to fundraising and the use of its tools must look credible and transparent. Credibility and unwillingness to support projects financially might complicate the situation, given the fact that different countries face different problems and have their own risk groups which need economic and other kinds of support. Therefore, to make project support more efficient, it is necessary to consider this important aspect.

On the level of missionary work/evangelisation, it is necessary to ask the following crucial questions:

What can we do to make Christian mission/evangelisation in African countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic even more successful?

In what ways can evangelisation be made more attractive for African countries which have their own religions under the current global epidemiological situation?

*An important part of missionary work is to highlight social action together with evangelisation. To make evangelisation more attractive, and not just in African countries, it is important to bear in mind that the current pastoration and evangelisation trend is to provide experiences, to establish contact with positive emotions and feelings, although by using sober methods.*³³⁵

In the initial part of our article, we mentioned several similarities between the Spanish flu and the COVID-19 pandemic, which are related to the Spanish flu and its implications on the nervous system. For this reason, we will focus in detail on serious nervous system implications of COVID-19.

Possible severe consequences of COVID-19 on the nervous system

The WHO declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a threat to international public health on 30 January 2020, and a pandemic on 11 March. World research laboratories have found that the risks in patients due to severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) vary most significantly with age and the presence of an underlying co-morbidity (Fang et al. 2020). Co-morbidities have been observed in the global population as follows by significance: cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cancer, and chronic kidney disease. Observations of frequent hypercoagulable conditions in patients with COVID-19 lead more frequently to stroke, also to infectious, para-infectious, and post-infectious consequences (SARS-CoV-2) on the nervous system.³³⁶

Influenza is a viral disease. It affects the respiratory system, causing symptoms such as coughing, fever, sore throat, tiredness, muscle pain, and a runny nose. One of the complications of influenza is pneumonia which, along with infections of the sinuses and ears, is more common in infants and the elderly. The influenza virus changes its genetic material, so influenza vaccines are not very effective and change almost every year. Influenza vaccines are not a protection against COVID-19, but they reduce the vulnerability of people to coronaviruses, which often have similar symptoms.

COVID-19 is similar to influenza. Common symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, and loss of smell.³³⁷ Complications may include pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome. In most people, the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) causes mild

335 András Szabó, and Ladislav Bučko, "The influence of the evangelization by the "Surf Church Porto" Christian surfing community on generations Y and Z: Opportunities for dialogue with a potential to make evangelization in general more attractive," *Acta Missiologica* 13, no. 2, (2019): 93-106. <https://www.actamissiologica.com/>

336 Miron Šramka, et al., "Combined methods of rehabilitation of patients after stroke: virtual reality and traditional approach," *Neuroendocrinology Letter* 41, 3, (2020): 101-111.; Miron Šramka, et al., "Possible consequences of Covid-19 on the nervous system," *Neuroendocrinology Letter* 41, 2020 (manuscript). See also: M. Martinek et al., "Changes of electrical brain activity during the stimulation of thoracic trigger zone by Vojta's principle concept," *Rehabilitácia* 55, no. 3, (2018): 184-192.

337 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), "Similarities and Differences between Flu and COVID-19," accessed October 2, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>

disease, while in others it can cause severe pneumonia; in some cases, it can lead to death. If a patient shows symptoms of COVID-19, then they should take a coronavirus test and must be isolated at home. The patient should have a pulse oximeter³³⁸ with which he/she can identify a worsening condition. If the patient tests positive for the coronavirus and his/her condition worsens, then he/she must contact the Institute of Public Health or call a general practitioner.

The pulse oximeter measures blood oxygenation (SpO₂) and heart rate. The normal SpO₂ value is higher than 95%. An SpO₂ value of less than 92% means that the blood is weakly saturated with oxygen (hypoxemia). A drop in SpO₂ below 92% can severely impair heart and brain function. No symptoms of respiratory distress were observed in some COVID-19 patients with low SpO₂. Their brains responded to low oxygen levels with silent hypoxemia.³³⁹ Patients with such low blood oxygen levels should be unconscious, but patients are able to talk and show minimal anxiety. During the expected second wave of the pandemic, such patients will not need to undergo unnecessary intubation and pulmonary ventilation.

If a person has hypoxemia and symptoms of infection, they must be hospitalized immediately. In the hospital, the patient needs to have detailed blood tests performed, and lung X-rays and a clinical examination carried out by a pulmonologist. When the SpO₂ oxygen level falls below 92% and the patient shows symptoms of pneumonia, it is advisable to perform a lung CT on the patient and initiate treatment in the intensive care unit or prepare the patient for pulmonary ventilation. In the case of neurological symptoms, it is advisable to give the patient a brain MRI examination.

COVID-19 and co-morbidities

Patients with co-morbidities of hypertension, diabetes mellitus, coronary heart and cerebrovascular diseases are at increased risk of COVID-19 infection.³⁴⁰ Cerebrovascular ischemic strokes often occur in COVID-19³⁴¹, as well as intracerebral haemorrhaging³⁴², cerebral sinus thrombosis³⁴³ and transient ischemic events.³⁴⁴

338 Martin J. Tobin et al., "Why COVID-19 Silent Hypoxemia Is Baffling to Physicians," *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* 202, 3, (2020): 356-360. doi/10.1164/rccm.202006-2157CP

339 Tobin et al., "Why COVID-19," ; Jennifer Couzin-Frankel, "The mystery of the pandemic's 'happy hypoxia' ," *Science* 368, 6490, (01 May 2020): 455-456. DOI: 10.1126/science.368.6490.455

340 Lei Fang et al., "Are patients with hypertension and diabetes mellitus at increased risk for COVID-19 infection?," *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine* 8, 4, e21 (April 01, 2020). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600\(20\)30116-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600(20)30116-8)

341 Avula, "COVID-19," <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2020.04.077> ; Rahma Beyrouti et al., "Characteristics of ischaemic stroke associated with COVID-19," *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry* 91, 8, (August 2020): <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jnnp-2020-323586> ; Mauro Morassi et al., "Stroke in patients with SARS-CoV-2 infection: case series," *Journal of Neurology* 267, 2185-2192 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00415-020-09885-2>

342 Morassi et al., "Stroke in patients with SARS-CoV-2," <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00415-020-09885-2> ; Al Saiegh, et al., "Status of SARS-CoV-2 in cerebrospinal fluid of patients with COVID-19," <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jnnp-2020-323522>

343 Yanan Li et al., "Acute cerebrovascular disease following COVID-19: a single center, retrospective, observational study," *Stroke and Vascular Neurology* 5, 3, (2020). e000431. doi:10.1136/svn-2020-000431 ; Corrado Lodigiani et al., "Venous and arterial thromboembolic complications in COVID-19 patients admitted to an academic hospital in Milan, Italy," *Thrombosis Research* 191, (July 01, 2020): 9-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.thromres.2020.04.024> ; Thomas J. Oxley et al., "Large-Vessel Stroke as a Presenting Feature of Covid-19 in the Young," *New England Journal of Medicine* (April 28, 2020). <https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMc2009787>

344 Alberto Benussi et al., "Clinical characteristics and outcomes of inpatients with neurologic disease and COVID-19 in Brescia, Lombardy, Italy," *Neurology* 95, 7, (May 22, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0000000000009848> See also: Zuzana Hudakova et al., "Influence of movement on quality of seniors' lives," *Clinical Social Work and*

Hypercoagulable conditions and cerebrovascular diseases are rare in some acute viral infections but are often a neurological complication of COVID-19. COVID-19 patients with cardiovascular co-morbidities are more likely to die of coronavirus.

Protecting the population from COVID-19 and its consequences requires the necessary clinical, diagnostic, and epidemiological studies. A distinction needs to be made between non-specific complications such as hypoxic encephalopathy, acute neuropathy, including infectious, para-infectious, and post-infectious encephalitis, as well as hypercoagulable conditions causing stroke, from those caused by the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. Recognition of neurological diseases associated with COVID-19 patients in whom the respiratory infection is mild or asymptomatic will be challenging. If primary COVID-19 has occurred with smell and taste disorders, the patient should be isolated as soon as possible³⁴⁵. These patients can suffer from serious neurological consequences. Neurological disorders are increasingly occurring in the central nervous system (CNS) and the peripheral nervous system (PNS) and may occur in the absence of other clinical signs. Acute cerebrovascular disease is another serious complication of COVID-19.

Clinical signs of neurological disease associated with COVID-19 and the effects of coronavirus on the nervous system lead to neurological and psychiatric diseases.³⁴⁶ Published changes and diseases are reported as being mental status, encephalopathy, encephalitis, neuropsychiatric diagnoses, psychosis with a neurocognitive dementia-type syndrome, and affective disorders.³⁴⁷

Inflammation of the brain parenchyma is caused by an infection or immune defence of the body associated with COVID-19. Neurological symptoms begin mostly from the onset of respiratory symptoms, preceded by cough and fever with irritability, confusion, and decreased consciousness, sometimes associated with seizures³⁴⁸ and psychotic symptoms³⁴⁹, or rhombencephalitis³⁵⁰. A patient with ataxia had a brain lesion that extended to the spinal cord. Changes in personality, behaviour, cognition, disorders of consciousness, including clinical manifestations of delirium or coma, have been reported.³⁵¹ In patients with encephalopathy and COVID-19 who

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Health Intervention 11, 3, (2020): 71 – 77. DOI: 10.22359/cswhi_11_3_11

- 345 Shima T Moein et al., "Smell dysfunction: a biomarker for COVID-19," *International Forum of Allergy & Rhinology* 10, no. 8, (August 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1002/alr.22587>
- 346 Aravinthan Varatharaj et al., "Neurological and neuropsychiatric complications of COVID-19 in 153 patients: a UK-wide surveillance study," *The Lancet Psychiatry* 7, 10, (2020): 875-882. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30287-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30287-X)
- 347 Mark A Ellul et al., "Neurological associations of COVID-19," *The Lancet Neurology* 19, 9, (September 2020):767–783. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422\(20\)30221-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422(20)30221-0)
- 348 R Bernard-Valnet et al., "Two patients with acute meningoencephalitis concomitant with SARS-CoV-2 infection," *European Journal of Neurology* (07 May 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1111/ene.14298> ; Sandeep Sohal et al., "COVID-19 Presenting with Seizures," *IDCases* 20, (2020): e00782 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.idcr.2020.e00782>
- 349 Catello Vollono et al., "Focal status epilepticus as unique clinical feature of COVID-19: A case report," *Seizure - European Journal of Epilepsy* 78, (May 01 2020): 109-112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.seizure.2020.04.009>
- 350 Po Fung Wong et al., "Lessons of the month 1: A case of rhombencephalitis as a rare complication of acute COVID-19 infection," 20, 3, (2020): 293–4 *Clinical Medicine Journal* <https://doi.org/10.7861/clinmed.2020-0182> See also: Raymond W. Wong et al., "An activator of G protein-coupled receptor and MEK1/2-ERK1/2 signaling inhibits HIV-1 replication by altering viral RNA processing," *PLOS Pathogens* (February 2020) DOI: 10.1371/journal.ppat.1008307.r003
- 351 Arjen J C Slooter et al., "Updated nomenclature of delirium and acute encephalopathy: statement of ten Societies," *Intensive Care Medicine* 46, (2020): 1020–1022 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00134-019-05907-4>

have not been reported to have brain inflammation, this can be caused by hypoxia, drugs, toxins, and metabolic disorders.³⁵² CNS symptoms including dizziness, headaches, and impaired consciousness of patients with symptoms of CNS who had severe respiratory disease. It has occurred as acute disseminated encephalomyelitis³⁵³, multifocal demyelination syndrome³⁵⁴ acute haemorrhagic necrotizing encephalopathy³⁵⁵ and myelitis. Neurological symptoms that began after respiratory or systemic disorders in COVID-19 patients with Guillain-Barré syndrome included limb weakness, and loss of sensation³⁵⁶ Excluding Guillain-Barré syndrome, the symptoms also included facial nerve involvement, dysphagia³⁵⁷, respiratory failure ophthalmoplegia³⁵⁸, ataxia with areflexia, acute vestibular syndrome³⁵⁹ and rhabdomyolysis.³⁶⁰ Fischer Miller syndrome is included among other neuropathies.³⁶¹

Disorders of sensory functions. Loss of smell (anosmia) and taste (ageusia), frequent symptoms of COVID-19, combined with other symptoms or in isolation could be useful diagnostic markers (Lodigiani et al. 2020). Unusual smell and taste in patients are linked to COVID-19. Patients report a loss of smell and taste 7 days prior to the appearance of fever and respiratory

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- 352 See: Kevin V. Solomon et al. "A dynamic metabolite valve for the control of central carbon metabolism," *Metabolic Engineering* 14, 6, (November 2012): 661-671
- 353 See also: Luca Zanin et al. "SARS-CoV-2 can induce brain and spine demyelinating lesions," *Acta Neurochirurgica* 162, (2020): 1491–1494 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00701-020-04374-x>; Yan Zhang "Coagulopathy and Antiphospholipid Antibodies in Patients with Covid-19," *New England Journal of Medicine* (April 8, 2020). <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2007575>
- 354 Rachele Dugue et al., "Neurologic manifestations in an infant with COVID-19," *Neurology* 94, 24, (April 23, 2020): <https://doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0000000000009653> ; Julie Helms et al., "Neurologic Features in Severe SARS-CoV-2 Infection," (April 15, 2020) *New England Journal of Medicine* <https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMc2008597> ; Ling Mao et al., "Neurologic Manifestations of Hospitalized Patients With Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Wuhan, China," *JAMA Neurology* 77, 6, (April 10, 2020): 683-690. doi:10.1001/jamaneurol.2020.1127 ; Alberto Paniz-Mondolfi et al., "Central nervous system involvement by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2)," *Journal of Medical Virology* (21 April 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmv.25915>; See also: Fei Zhou et al. "Clinical course and risk factors for mortality of adult inpatients with COVID-19 in Wuhan, China: a retrospective cohort study," *The Lancet* 395, 10229, (March 28, 2020): 1054-1062, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30566-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30566-3) ; Peng Zhou "A pneumonia outbreak associated with a new coronavirus of probable bat origin," *Nature* 579, (2020): 270–273. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2012-7>
- 355 Neo Poyiadji et al. "COVID-19–associated Acute Hemorrhagic Necrotizing Encephalopathy: Imaging Features," *Radiology* 296, 2, (August 2020) <https://doi.org/10.1148/radiol.2020201187>
- 356 Gianpaolo Toscano et al. "Guillain-Barré Syndrome Associated with SARS-CoV-2," *New England Journal of Medicine* (April 17, 2020) <https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMc2009191>
- 357 J-P Camdessanche et al. "COVID-19 may induce Guillain-Barré syndrome," *Revue Neurologique* 176, 6, (June 2020): 516-518 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuro.2020.04.003>
- 358 Consuelo Gutiérrez-Ortiz et al., "Miller Fisher syndrome and polyneuritis cranialis in COVID-19," *Neurology* 95, (2020). e601-e605. doi:10.1212/WNL.0000000000009619; Marc Dinkin et al., "COVID-19 presenting with ophthalmoparesis from cranial nerve palsy," *Neurology* 95, 5, (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0000000000009700>
- 359 S. Escalada Pellitero and Garriga Ferrer-Bergua et al., "Report of a patient with neurological symptoms as the sole manifestation of SARS-CoV-2 infection Paciente con clínica neurológica como única manifestación de infección por SARS-CoV-2," *Neurología (English Edition)* 35, 4, (May 2020): 271-272. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nrleng.2020.04.009>
- 360 Min Jin and Qiaoxia Tong, "Rhabdomyolysis as Potential Late Complication Associated with COVID-19," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 26, 7, (2020): 1618-1620. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3201/eid2607.200445>.
- 361 Gutiérrez-Ortiz et al., "Miller Fisher syndrome," doi:10.1212/WNL.0000000000009619

difficulties.³⁶² Such patients should be quarantined. Patients with viral infections of the upper respiratory tract also have a temporary or permanent loss of smell and taste. These symptoms are more common in COVID-19 cases with a subjective loss of smell or taste. A higher percentage of smell loss is detected when the testing is done using objective methods that measure the smell function. Most patients first notice problems with smell, but because smell is often necessary as a supplement to taste; these symptoms are often connected. Patients with COVID-19 who did not have smell problems had a worse course of the disease and were more often hospitalized and placed in an intensive care unit. Patients with smell dysfunction had a milder course of the COVID-19 disease. The loss of smell in patients infected with COVID-19 may be the first or the only symptom of the disease. Loss of smell and taste could serve as a screening tool because these symptoms appear earlier. Loss of smell is one of the first and sometimes the only one symptom in up to 25% of COVID-19 patients. In studies, the loss of smell occurred in 87% of COVID-19 patients compared to in only 56% of patients who had taste disorders. The most common symptoms were loss of smell and headaches. Anosmia could be a reliable way to predict whether a patient will have a cough and fever.³⁶³

Data analysis and artificial intelligence

In the years since the onset of SARS, supportive tools using artificial intelligence have been developed to diagnose, monitor, and predict the disease. Many publications on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for neurodegenerative diseases have appeared.³⁶⁴ Applying deep-learning-based medical image analysis to computer-aided diagnosis (CAD) provides better decision-making support to clinicians and improves the accuracy and efficiency of various diagnostic and treatment processes.³⁶⁵ AI and machine learning (ML) have created numerous applications in computer-aided monitoring and diagnostics of neurodegenerative movement disorders.³⁶⁶ An overview of the research using ML methods to perform quantitative analysis of MR image data indicates using the study of Parkinson's disease³⁶⁷ Fast and automated analysis of CT and MR scans with the support of artificial intelligence enabled the optimization of diagnostic processes, to quickly and reliably recognize the patient's condition, and propose other treatments.

Recently, there have been rapid advances in computerized technology, including wearable devices, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), mobile internet, and robot assistant systems. These new-generation assessment tools can produce real-time, programmable, and safe measurement of neurological deficits. New technologies using Virtual Reality (VR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) changed the processing and interpretation of the medical data on central nerv-

362 Ellul et al., "Neurological associations," [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422\(20\)30221-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422(20)30221-0) ; Ahmad R Sedaghat et al., "Olfactory Dysfunction: A Highly Prevalent Symptom of COVID-19 With Public Health Significance," *Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery* 163, 1, (July 2020): 12-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0194599820926464>

363 Ellul et al., "Neurological associations," [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422\(20\)30221-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422(20)30221-0)

364 Belić, et al., "Artificial intelligence," 105442 ; U Raghavendra et al., "Artificial Intelligence Techniques for Automated Diagnosis of Neurological Disorders," *European Neurology* 82, 1-3, (2019): 41-64. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000504292>

365 Heang-Ping Chan et al., "Deep Learning in Medical Image Analysis," in Lee G., Fujita H. (eds) *Deep Learning in Medical Image Analysis. Advances in Experimental Medicine and Biology*, vol 1213. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33128-3_1

366 Belić, et al., "Artificial intelligence," 105442.

367 See also: Zhe Xu et al., "Pathological findings of COVID-19 associated with acute respiratory distress syndrome," *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine* 8, 4, (April 01, 2020): 420-422. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600\(20\)30076-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600(20)30076-X)

ous system diseases such as for diagnosing Parkinson's disease and stroke.³⁶⁸ The Virtual Reality methods have the potential to accelerate rehabilitation and increase the motivation of selected groups of patients after stroke and PD.³⁶⁹ The exercise unit using Imoove has positive effects on increasing the load of the paretic lower limb in patients after overcoming ischemic stroke.³⁷⁰ In recent years, a few studies have helped quantify the motor properties of Parkinson's disease, which have evaluated the disease in a "free-living" environment using mobile devices.³⁷¹ This phenotyping could help us to use artificial intelligence to evaluate the possible consequences of COVID-19 objectively and effectively in the future.

Conclusion

Neurological complications, especially encephalitis and stroke, can cause lifelong disability in patients. This will involve long-term care needs and, potentially, major health and social problems, as well as economic costs.

In the context of public health protection, prevention and treatment, as well as the need for long-term care in these areas, it is important to instigate stimulating scientific and professional research and reflection in this field for the international scientific and professional public, which should focus its research activities on:

- analysing current solutions for monitoring the course of the COVID-19 disease in patients with mild, moderate and severe courses;
- designing subjective and objective parameters implementable in a database divided into structured text and image data;
- finding comprehensive applications for the acquisition, evaluation, and interpretation of patient data, and implementing comprehensive applications, including the necessary testing;
- evaluating the proposed applications for their real world usability;
- designing methods for image processing and statistical analysis of input image and text data;
- implementing artificial intelligence methods to predict the development of the COVID-19 disease based on the generated data;
- using the proposed methods of artificial intelligence to predict the development of COVID-19;
- and, using the results of all these for other similar diseases and pandemics.

368 Eugen Ruzicky et al., "Processing and Visualization of Medical Data in a Multiuser Environment Using Artificial Intelligence," *Proc 30th Int Conf Cyb Inf* (2020): 9039890.

369 Miron Šramka, et al., "Combined methods of rehabilitation of patients after stroke: virtual reality and traditional approach," *Neuroendocrinology Letter* 41, 3, (2020):101–111. ; Miron Šramka, et al., "Possible consequences of Covid-19 on the nervous system," *Neuroendocrinology Letter* 41, 2020 (manuscript).

370 Ján Mašán et al., "Use of 3D Imoove stimulation in hemiparetic patients with lower limb instability," *Health and social work* 15, 3, (2020): 111-117.

371 E. Ray Dorsey et al., "Deep Phenotyping of Parkinson's Disease," *Journal of Parkinson's Disease* 10, 3, (2020): 855–873. doi: 10.3233/JPD-202006

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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THE COSTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. THE ITALIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Background: The COVID-19 epidemic has strongly affected Italy since it began in February 2020, infecting over a million people and causing well over 40,000 deaths. The impact of the first wave of the epidemic was strong and unexpected, finding government institutions and the population unprepared. The second wave in Autumn 2020 found the country unprepared in terms of hospital facilities and logistical mechanisms for managing the impact of the growing number of infected. In addition to the huge economic damage caused by the lockdown, which will have consequences in subsequent years and affect future generations such as the lack of economic growth in the country and the increase in public debt, the epidemic has also had a dramatic impact on people's health, causing many deaths, especially among the elderly and vulnerable people with co-morbidities, it has negatively influenced the mental health of many, especially health workers who have been fighting the consequences of the epidemic on the front line, and it has had a significant impact on the quality and stability of interpersonal relationships.

Conclusion: In this context, in addition to health and government measures aimed at avoiding the country's economic collapse, far-reaching actions are needed to preserve the weakest and most vulnerable sections of society and increase resilience in the face of a long battle against the virus. The contribution outlined several very serious negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the coming years in various fields. These consequences may serve as the basis for new research at a scientific level as well as at the level of very effective discourse in various scientific and professional fields with the possibility of practical applications across a broad spectrum.

Keywords: SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19. Pandemic's impact on Italy. Economic and human costs. Social resilience.

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Introduction

Coronaviruses (CoVs) were identified as human pathogens as early as the 1960s. They are positive-stranded RNA viruses. With their characteristic surface, virions have a corona-like appearance under the electron microscope, which is why viruses get their name from the Latin word *corona*, which means “crown”. Most coronaviruses infect animals (i.e. bats, birds and mammals), which act as an intermediate host reservoir. Sometimes they change hosts and infect humans.

There are currently seven coronaviruses capable of infecting humans. Over the past 20 years, three of them have caused more serious and even fatal diseases: SARS-CoV, responsible for severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2002; MERS-CoV, Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) in 2012; and SARS-CoV-2, identified in Wuhan (China) at the end of 2019 and which triggered the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The hypotheses about the origins of the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus range from natural to conspiracy theories³⁷³, to those of mistakes made in the laboratory. This was further aggravated by the spread of the hypothesis of the creation of a supervirus in a Chinese laboratory in Wuhan: a coronavirus precisely, manipulated in order to become capable of infecting humans as well. This last hypothesis speaks of a “chimera” virus, consisting of the skeleton of the SARS-CoV of mice and covered with spike proteins (that is, the spikes used by the virus to attach itself to the host cell) of the SARS-CoV of bats. The virus would be produced to assess the ability to cause COVID-19 infection in primary human airway cells. To fuel the conspiracy theory or the hypothesis of human error, there is evidence that in the Chinese metropolis there is a structure with the highest level of biosecurity for the containment of infectious agents. A group of international researchers intervened to deny this theory with a publication in *Nature Medicine*³⁷⁴ in which the results of the study on the origins of the new coronavirus were presented. The authors of this study examined two possible scenarios concerning the origins of SARS-CoV-2, placed temporally before and after the species jump from animal to man:

- natural selection in a host animal (bat or pangolin) before the species jump. The new coronavirus probably passed from animals to humans at the Wuhan meat market. There is a high homology between the SARS-CoV-2 RNA sequence and that of the bat coronavirus itself. The only difference between the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein and that of the bat is the greater ability of the new coronavirus to penetrate the human body, infecting it. The pangolin, a species of anteater, also possesses a coronavirus similar to SARS-CoV-2. This is therefore the evidence that clearly explains how the spike protein responsible for COVID-19 is the result of natural selection;
- natural selection in humans after the species leap. It is possible that a coronavirus “ancestor” of SARS-CoV-2 entered the human genome, adapting as it was transmitted from human to human through genetic mutation events. Until then it would be “fortified” to the point of triggering the pandemic. Only by studying a large number of cases in humans will it be possible to understand when this leap of species or this mutation occurred. Retroactive serological studies can also be very useful for understanding when humans started being exposed to SARS-CoV-2.

373 Yan, Li-Meng et al., “Unusual Features of the SARS-CoV-2 Genome Suggesting Sophisticated Laboratory Modification Rather Than Natural Evolution and Delineation of Its Probable Synthetic Route,” (published September 14, 2020), <https://zenodo.org/record/4028830#.X6J5s2hKjIX>; Yan, Li-Meng et al., SARS-CoV-2 Is an “Unrestricted Bioweapon: A Truth Revealed through Uncovering a Large-Scale, Organized Scientific Fraud,” (published October 8, 2020), <https://zenodo.org/record/4073131#.X6J7jWhKjIU>

374 Kristian G. Andersen et al., “The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2,” *Nature Medicine* 26, (2020): 450–452. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-0820-9> (2020): 450–452.

In reality, the study also takes into consideration a third hypothesis: the selection of SARS-CoV-2 during passage in a laboratory. Basic research, in fact, involves a number of “passages” of the bat coronavirus in cell cultures or animal models. There are documented cases of laboratories where the virus “got out of hand”. Therefore, this involuntary case must also be considered. The increased pathogenicity of SARS-CoV-2 may also have been acquired following a prolonged time in cell cultures. In any case, the study’s authors argue that it is highly unlikely that SARS-CoV-2 was created by the manipulation of viruses similar to SARS-CoV, when considering its genetic characteristics. To confirm the natural origin of the coronavirus, it will probably be necessary to carry out large-scale sampling of several animals, including populations of bats and humans, in China to trace the evolution of the new coronavirus. To better understand the origins of the outbreak, the World Health Organization seeks to create a team to conduct an investigation in China, although no plans have yet been disclosed.

On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) called the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 - “COVID-19” (*CO*rona*V*irus *D*isease 2019). Symptoms of this disease can be relatively non-specific. Common symptoms include fatigue, loss of smell, loss of taste, shortness of breath, muscle and joint pain, sore throat, headache, chills, vomiting, coughing up blood, diarrhoea, and rash. Further development of the disease can lead to complications including bilateral pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome, septic shock, and kidney failure. The incubation period is typically around five days but may range from one to 14 days.

To deal with the COVID-19 infection, some strategies have been put in place: prevention through social distancing, wearing face masks, and hand hygiene using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser with at least 60 percent alcohol by volume when soap and water are not readily available. Ventilation and air filtration in public spaces to help clear out infectious aerosols is recommended. For those who suspect they may have been infected, self-isolation at home has been recommended.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, research on a vaccine has begun. As of October 2020, there were 321 vaccine candidates in development. Some 44 vaccine candidates were in clinical research: namely 34 in Phase I–II trials and 10 in Phase II–III trials³⁷⁵.

Meanwhile, pending an effective vaccine, drug therapies have been put in place to treat patients with COVID-19³⁷⁶. While waiting to clarify the effectiveness of the drugs currently available, another way is represented by the use of plasma from recovered patients. Under development are human monoclonal antibodies directed against the Spike protein, one of the components of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. However, even for therapies based on these antibodies it will be necessary to proceed rigorously in the clinical evaluation of their safety, tolerability and efficacy in patients affected by COVID-19.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe

The COVID -19 pandemic event caused massive economic damage due to the restrictions that were used to prevent the virus from proliferating. Estimates from the International Monetary Fund speak of the „COVID cost“ for the European Union of three trillion Euros. For the Eurozone, the expected decline in GDP for this year will be on average 8.3%, but without the measures to support the economy it would have reached around 11%. Europe, made up of 27 states, has been the area of the world that has so far done the most to cushion the blow of the crisis.

375 Cf. Tung Thanh Le et al., “Evolution of the COVID-19 vaccine development landscape,” *Nature Reviews Drug Discovery* 19, 10, (2020): 667–668. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41573-020-00151-8>

376 Cf. James M. Sanders et al., “Pharmacologic Treatments for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): A Review,” *JAMA* 323, 18, (April 13, 2020): 1824–1836. [doi:10.1001/jama.2020.6019](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.6019).

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has developed the COVID-19 vulnerability index which examines three main factors affecting the resilience of economies to the COVID-19 shock³⁷⁷:

1. Health care capacity in various countries and population age. Older societies and poorly functioning health systems often make countries vulnerable to the health impacts of the pandemic.
2. Economic structure of the countries affected. Variables include integration into global value chains, dependence on commodity imports, the country's export capacity, tourism revenue and each country's public debt.
3. The country's ability to respond to shocks. The shocks considered include the reversal of capital flows. Economies with large current account deficits not financed by direct foreign investment have financed their remaining external financing needs through volatile capital flows, such as portfolio investments. These flows have declined dramatically, particularly in emerging and developing markets. Other variables include the ability of countries to implement countercyclical fiscal policies, the strength of the banking sector and its ability to sustain recovery from the crisis.

The Board of Directors of the European Investment Bank (EIB) has agreed on the structure and business approach of the European Guarantee Fund (EGF) to tackle the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fund was endorsed by the European Council as part of the overall EU COVID-19 response package and it will enable the EIB Group to scale up its support for mostly small- and medium-sized European companies, providing up to €200 billion of support through a dedicated €25bn guarantee fund set up by EU Member States; €10bn of additional working capital through liquidity lines to banks; €10bn of loans to SMEs through asset-backed securities purchasing programmes; €8bn of financing through guarantee schemes for immediate deployment; €5.2bn of EIB financing for COVID-19 related projects outside the EU; €5bn of EIB financing for investments into healthcare infrastructure and the development of vaccines and drugs.

Despite the lack of up-to-date information on the effects of the ongoing health crisis on production activity, the available data on the confidence and expectations of families and businesses and those relating to the labour market clearly indicate that the economic and social costs of the COVID-19 pandemic will be enormous: its impact on production will be comparable to that of the greatest crises of the previous century³⁷⁸. However, European institutions are trying to solve the immediate health emergencies and the need to quickly find a cure and a vaccine against COVID-19, as well as solutions to be adopted to limit the spread of the virus. They also promote measures to contain the economic effects of the crisis, which are having a profound impact on European businesses and the European economy as a whole.

The Italian situation

The spread of the virus in Italy was first confirmed on January 31, 2020, when two Chinese tourists in Rome tested positive for the virus³⁷⁹. A week later, the COVID-19 infection was con-

firmed in an Italian man repatriated to Italy from the city of Wuhan (China) who was hospitalized and confirmed as the third case in Italy. Clusters of cases were subsequently identified in Lombardy and Veneto on 21 February, with the first deaths on 22 February. At the beginning of March the virus had spread to all regions of Italy. At this time, the Italian College of Anaesthesia, Analgesia and Intensive Care published medical ethics recommendations regarding the triage protocols that were to be employed³⁸⁰.

At the end of January, the Italian government suspended all flights to and from China and declared a state of emergency. On March 9, 2020, the premier of the Italian government Giuseppe Conte extended the quarantine to all of Italy³⁸¹. On March 21, the Italian government closed all non-essential activities and industries and restricted the movement of people.

As of 08 November 2020, the data collected through the integrated surveillance system of COVID-19 and processed by the Istituto Superiore di Sanità integrating the epidemiological and microbiological data provided by the autonomous regions / provinces and by the national reference laboratory SARS-CoV-2 identified 935,104 cases since the beginning of the pandemic in Italy, and 41,394 deaths³⁸².

Economic costs

Italy suffered an unpredictable shock in February 2020, when the spread of the COVID-19 virus began in the country. A relevant factor is the nature of the shock to the economy caused by the pandemic: it did not manifest itself in a single moment of time but, on the contrary, it was prolonged over time, while remaining not easily predictable, as its evolution is affected by multiple factors, including the rapid spread of the infection and the success of the measures adopted to curb it. Another feature that makes the current crisis exceptional is the fact that the main channel of transmission of the effects of the epidemic to the economic system is linked to the containment measures decided upon by the government. This is a joint shock of supply and demand: the progressive, temporary but prolonged blockade of many economic activities within the national territory, necessary to stem the epidemic, has been associated with a collapse in the demand for goods and services, both internally and from abroad. The economic prospects, in this phase of the health emergency, are therefore seriously compromised. Furthermore, it is not clear with what time-frame they can be re-established even on the supply side. A fall in demand, increased uncertainty, reduction in credit, forced closures of business: in this context, companies are not infrequently carrying out new production projects, given that current production activities are compromised or at high risk.

In 2020, the decline in GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is expected to be -10.6%, assuming that the acute phase of the health emergency ends at the end of the year. Each additional week of regulatory blockade of production activities, according to current parameters, could cost an additional percentage of Gross Domestic Product of the order of at least 0.75%.

Household consumption in the first half of 2020 will be significantly lower than last year (-6.8%). There is a substantial decline in various goods and services, such as clothing, transport, recreational and cultural services, hospitality and catering services. Italy's exports have not been

377 European Investment Bank, (2020), "The EIB COVID-19 Economic Vulnerability Index - An analysis of countries outside the European Union," https://www.eib.org/attachments/thematic/the_eib_covid-19_economic_vulnerability_index_en.pdf

378 Cf. Lisa Rodano, Stefano Siviero and Ignazio Visco, "Inversioni cicliche e previsioni macroeconomiche: racconto di due recessioni," in *Economic multisectoral modelling between past and future: a tribute to Maurizio Grassini and a selection of his writings*, R. Bardazzi, ed. 229-247, (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2013).

379 Chiara Severgnini, "Coronavirus, primi due casi in Italia «Sono due cinesi in vacanza a Roma» Sono arrivati a Milano il 23 gennaio," *Corriere della sera* (published 30 gennaio 2020). https://www.corriere.it/cronache/20-gennaio_30/coronavirus-italia-corona-9d6dc436-4343-11ea-bdc8-faf1f56f19b7.shtml

380 SIAARTI, "Raccomandazioni di etica clinica per l'ammissione a trattamenti intensivi e per la loro sospensione in condizioni eccezionali di squilibrio tra necessità e risorse disponibili," (published 6 March 2020), <http://www.siaarti.it/SiteAssets/News/COVID19%20-%20documenti%20SIAARTI/SIAARTI%20-%20COVID19%20-%20Raccomandazioni%20di%20etica%20clinica.pdf>

381 BBC News, "Coronavirus: Italy extends emergency measures nationwide," (published 10 March 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51810673>

382 See also: "Istituto Superiore di Sanità," <https://www.epicentro.iss.it/en/coronavirus/sars-cov-2-integrated-surveillance-data>

spared by the general decline in economic activity (-5.1% in 2020) given that the pandemic has hit the whole world. Since the decline in activity will be particularly strong in the main target markets of Italian products, and exporters will be more penalized by production and logistical difficulties, exports are expected to fall more than the world average³⁸³. A longer and more widespread block of activity at the international level could lead to a collapse of world trade and favour Italy's foreign competitors in stealing market shares from traditionally appreciated Italian manufacturing, especially the fashion industry and the agri-food sector³⁸⁴. The coronavirus pandemic is estimated to cost Italy around 160 billion EUR in wealth and Italy's GDP will drop by around 10% this year.³⁸⁵

The substantial economic impact of the pandemic may in fact hinder progress towards economic growth as well as mental well-being.

Human costs

In addition to the economic costs, albeit serious, the COVID-19 pandemic incurs human costs. The measures to contain the contagion, such as mainly physical distancing and isolation, are having detrimental consequences on the mental health of the general population worldwide.³⁸⁶ International literature, starting with the data collected in China which first experienced the crisis, has confirmed the psychological implications related to COVID 19.³⁸⁷ It placed attention on the stressors present in this pandemic which could affect the health, safety and well-being of the population; among these are those that affect the individual, such as insecurity, confusion/loss, emotional isolation, stigma, and those that affect the community such as economic loss, closure of work and educational activities, inadequate health responses, and a lack of necessities. Determining characteristics for the management of stress and the potential adaptation in people are the restrictive measures imposed on the population: limitations of personal freedoms, forced coexistence, physical distance, distance from loved ones and from the workplace, but also inadequate information, uncertainty about the future in general for oneself and for one's family members, or the sudden death of an acquaintance and/or family member.³⁸⁸ A study conducted in China during the current emergency observed a substantial increase in "negative" content, including anxiety, depression, an increased perception of threats, and a decrease in positive content and satisfaction with one's life in general.³⁸⁹

383 See also: "Diagnosing COVID-19 Impacts on Entrepreneurship. Exploring policy remedies for recovery," (London: Global Entrepreneurship Research Association, London Business School, 2020) ; McKinsey & Company, "COVID-19: Implications for business," <https://www.mckinsey.com/>

384 Centro Studi Confindustria, "Le previsioni per l'Italia. quali condizioni per la tenuta ed il rilancio dell'economia," (published 31 March 2020), <https://www.confindustria.it/home/centro-studi/temi-di-ricerca/congiuntura-e-previsioni/tutti/dettaglio/rapporto-previsione-economia-italiana-scenari-geo-economici-primavera-2020>

385 See also: RaboResearch Global Economics & Markets, Maartje Wijffelaars, "COVID-19 has a devastating impact on Italy's economy," (published 10 July 2020), <https://economics.rabobank.com/publications/2020/july/covid-19-devastating-impact-on-italy-economy/>

386 Samantha K Brooks, "The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence," *The Lancet* 395, 10227, (14 March 2020): P912-920. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30460-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30460-8)

387 Cuiyan Wang et al., "Immediate psychological responses and associated factors during the initial stage of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) epidemic among the general population in China," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, 5, (2020):1729. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17051729>

388 Betty Pfefferbaum et al., "Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic", *New England Journal of Medicine* (April 13, 2020). <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2008017>

389 Sijia Li et al., "The Impact of COVID-19 epidemic declaration on psychological consequences: a study on active Weibo users," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, 6, (2020): 2032. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17062032>

It therefore appears that the impact of the epidemic results in a variety of emotional maladaptive reactions³⁹⁰ which include fear of being infected³⁹¹, the experience of the death of loved ones³⁹², and all reactions resulting from the quarantine experience.

More generally, there are conditions that vary from states of distress to psychopathological situations such as depressive disorders and anxiety.³⁹³ There are also behaviours connected to excessive alcohol use or opposition to restrictive/protective rules, and both self and hetero aggressive behaviour. Although these reactions do not meet the diagnostic criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), they are configured as anxiety and depressive disorders.³⁹⁴ Population groups at risk of psychopathology during and after the COVID19 pandemic have been highlighted and include: people who have contracted the virus and who are at high risk of contracting it, health personnel or social health personnel at risk of exposure, people with a previous psychiatric disorder or substance use. In many cases, it reaches the threshold of clinical relevance.³⁹⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic has been proven to be a traumatic event for people with mental disorders, and more generally people in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions. There is also an increase in several psychosocial risk factors, such as economic stress, unemployment, bereavement, and job loss.

The last few months of the pandemic have brought many challenges for the care of people with viral infection, for health care workers and for the families of the sick. This causes significant psychological distress: in particular, frustration, loneliness and worries about the future are common reactions and represent well-known risk factors for several mental disorders.

Social isolation can increase the risk of recurrence of episodes of mental disorders, as well as triggering the onset of new mental disorders in the most vulnerable people. For many people with mental disorders, being alone is a heavy burden, far beyond what many other people experience.³⁹⁶ Furthermore, objective social isolation and subjective feelings of loneliness are associated with a higher risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts.³⁹⁷

390 Steven Taylor, *The psychology of pandemics. Preparing for the next global outbreak of an infectious disease* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019).

391 Xiaobo Zhou, "Psychological crisis interventions in Sichuan Province during the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak," *Psychiatry Research* 286, (April 2020): 112895. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112895>

392 Wang et al., "Immediate psychological responses and associated factors," <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17051729>

393 Ellie M. Jack, "Supporting clients who experience anxiety about COVID-19," *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy (Online)* 54, 2, (April 1, 2020):180-183.

394 Pfefferbaum et al., "Mental Health", <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2008017>

395 Jiaqi Xiong et al., "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in the general population: A systematic review," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 277, (1 December 2020): 55-64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.08.001> ; With this regard see also: Lucia Ludvig Cintulova and Georgina Kafkova, "Domestic Violence Against Self-Reliant Elderly Resulting from COVID-19 and Potential Solutions," *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention* 11, 3, (2020): 57 - 64. DOI: 10.22359/cswhi_11_3_11

396 Armando D'Agostino et al., "Mental health services in Italy during the COVID-19 outbreak," *Lancet Psychiatry* 7, 5, (May 01, 2020): P385-387. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30133-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30133-4)

397 Raffaella Calati et al., "Suicidal thoughts and behaviors and social isolation: A narrative review of the literature," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 245, (15 February 2019): 653- 667. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2018.11.022>

Many patients with severe mental disorders have been neglected during the pandemic. They feel abandoned and excluded from social life. For them, the internet and social media can play a buffer role in the development of psychiatric symptoms.³⁹⁸ Online contacts and interactions can limit the harmful effects of social isolation and can represent the ideal context for providing supportive interventions through tele-mental health applications.³⁹⁹

To provide this type of help, the Istituto Superiore di Sanità prepared the ISS COVID-19 Report n. 31/2020 - Interim indications for second-level psychological telephone support in the health sector in the COVID-19 emergency scenario.⁴⁰⁰ The high human costs of the pandemic with regard to mental health confirm the results of some research in the field that investigated the levels of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) in the general population and health professionals (doctors and nurses). The study was conducted by the Department of Psychology of the University of Turin between 19 March and 5 April 2020⁴⁰¹. The study was conducted on 1321 participants from different areas of Italy. Participants were asked to fill out a series of questionnaires, via an anonymous online survey. The results highlighted not only a high percentage of individuals who have symptoms of clinically relevant anxiety and depression, respectively 69% and 31%, but also a high prevalence of post-traumatic stress symptoms. In fact, 20% of the sample reports the presence of significant PTSS which, as evidenced by the scientific literature, tend to worsen over time and which can lead to real post-traumatic stress disorders. From the analyses carried out it emerges that the subjects most at risk for the development of PTSS are women, subjects with low levels of education and those who have come into contact with COVID-19 positive patients.

The other study conducted on health professionals⁴⁰² was conducted on 145 healthcare workers (72 doctors and 73 nurses), comparing psychopathological symptoms (anxiety, depression and PTSS) among healthcare workers who were working in COVID-19 wards (63), i.e. with positive COVID patients, and those who worked in other hospital units (82) and were therefore not in contact with positive COVID patients. The results showed that the former reported significantly higher levels of both depression and PTSS than the latter. Furthermore, among health professionals working in COVID-19 departments, being a woman and being single represent risk factors for depressive symptoms while being a woman and being older are associated with higher levels of PTSS.

These results, in addition to highlighting the dramatic impact of the ongoing epidemic on the mental health of the Italian population, and in particular on health professionals engaged in the front line in the fight against COVID-19⁴⁰³, highlight the need to implement timely screening programs, aimed at identifying people with clinically relevant levels of psychopathology.

398 Pfefferbaum et al., "Mental Health", <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2008017>

399 Jake Linardon et al., "The efficacy of app-supported smartphone interventions for mental health problems: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials," *World Psychiatry* 18, 3, (2019): 325-336. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20673>

400 Istituto Superiore di Sanità: "Indicazioni ad interim per il supporto psicologico telefonico di secondo livello in ambito sanitario nello scenario emergenziale COVID-19," n.31/2020, Versione del 26 maggio 2020, https://www.iss.it/documents/20126/0/Rapporto+ISS+COVID-19+31_2020+%281%29.pdf/8983f818-4d17-b3f8-4c67-7c78cbc86549?t=1590499689876

401 Lorys Castelli et al., "The Spread of COVID-19 in the Italian Population: Anxiety, Depression, and Post-traumatic Stress Symptoms," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 65, 10, (June 26 2020):731-732. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743720938598>

402 Marialaura Di Tella et al., "Mental health of healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy," *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice* 26, (25 July 2020): 1583-1587. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jep.13444>

403 Neil Greenberg et al., "Managing mental health challenges faced by healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic," *British Medical Journal* 368, m1211, (26 March 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m1211>

The famous 'motto' of the World Health Organization (WHO) "there is no health without mental health", well describes the need to take charge of this discomfort today, so that it does not become chronic and does not translate into more general worsening of mental and physical health, with the consequent human, social and economic costs.

The humanist psychologist Carl Rogers tells of the sack of potatoes reserved for the winter, kept closed in the cellar in the dark, which in completely adverse conditions however manages to germinate and direct its jets towards a glimmer of light. The key word is resilience as an invisible force of the human spirit.

During this period that separates us from the momentous introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine, it is important to develop a strategic approach to strengthen the resilience mechanisms related to mental health in this global crisis. This will help guide prevention and treatment approaches for various groups. It will also be important to obtain data on the psychosocial impact in acute and cured COVID-19 patients and their relatives on how best to mitigate the negative effects. Such studies will allow factors associated with resilience, based on life context, coping strategies, personal history and, if possible, biological characteristics such as genetic background, to be identified⁴⁰⁴.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has highlighted the total unpreparedness of the globalized world in the face of a pandemic that the unprecedented interconnectedness of globalization has made so lightning-fast.

Italy, one of the European countries that first had to deal with the "invisible enemy" that no one knew well, has paid dearly for this battle in economic and human terms. The consequences and difficulties will also be clearly visible in the years to come, but it is important, together with the economic recovery and that of industrial production, to heal the damage that the epidemic has caused in society, in families and in the lives of individuals by strengthening their resilience. The significant negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to new research at a scientific level and at the level of very effective discourse in numerous international scientific and professional fields with the possibility of broad-spectrum applications in practice.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES IN INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE IN THE COVID-19 ERA ON EXAMPLE OF SLOVAK DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEER PROJECTS



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Abstract

Background: International or development volunteering is recognized as an important tool for overcoming challenges of international development. In 2012 development volunteering has been defined and used as one of the tools of Official development assistance (ODA) of the Slovak Republic. In 2019, twenty-one applications by seven Slovak development organisations were approved and selected persons were sent on missions to thirteen low-income countries. However, in March–April 2020, after a strike of global pandemic COVID-19, ten of them returned immediately due to the country lockdown or closure of the project locations (schools, community centers), rendering them impossible to continue in volunteering activities. Therefore, year 2020 is presenting significant changes and challenges in volunteer management of nonprofits (IVCOs) because of an impact of COVID-19.

Methods: A qualitative study design was used to collect data from development volunteers and their coordinators from particular Slovak development nonprofits in March–August 2020. After the content analysis of eighteen media products, eight semi-structured interviews and two focus group (FG) discussions followed. Collected data was analyzed thematically.

Results: Three thematic areas where a different impact on the actors of volunteer management (including host and sending nonprofits, as well as donors) were identified: 1. Changes in delivery of Official development assistance (at institutional level impacting donors–IVCOs relations); 2. An importance of new remote approach to volunteering (at individual level impacting volunteers' experience); 3. An occurrence of internal issues within the nonprofits (at interpersonal level impacting IVCO–employees/volunteers relations). Two new approaches to volunteering came to the fore: online volunteering and support to local, community-level volunteers.

Conclusions: This study shows how the COVID-19 affected particular missions of development volunteers: their field work, communication and contact with beneficiaries from vulnerable communities in low-income countries. Sending and host organizations are testing new online models and approaches to international volunteering (recently implemented to practice) while trying to get volunteers back into the field to make an impact. Stakeholders need to cooperate and share intelligence on risks, travel, and other restrictions to make this work. This requires continual following and comparison of up-to-date empirical research results in the field of international volunteering in the light of constant updates on prevention and elimination of the pandemic COVID-19.

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Keywords: Development volunteers. International voluntary service. Volunteering. Pandemic COVID-19. Vulnerable communities.

Introduction

International voluntary service or development volunteering consists of implementing activities for the benefit of other people and organisations in low-income countries, formerly referred to as developing countries, without the right to remuneration. Through their volunteering, young people pass on their expertise, a combination of knowledge, skills and experience, directly in the field⁴⁰⁶. Volunteering is uniquely flexible. People from all backgrounds sign up to support a wide range of organizations across social, economic, and environmental development. The approach is universal and adaptable; it works in every context and adds value to every type of program, from training medical staff to mentoring small-business owners. Skilled international volunteers build relationships – with communities, organizations, and governments. These relationships form a solid foundation on which volunteers can create positive change and improve the skills and abilities of their local colleagues⁴⁰⁷.

International Voluntary Service Organizations (IVSOs) or International volunteer cooperation organisations (IVCOs) are the national organizations and programs that send and/or receive international volunteers⁴⁰⁸. In case of Slovak development volunteer program these nonprofits just send volunteers abroad. An existing typology⁴⁰⁹ of International voluntary service (IVS) addresses duration, nature of service, and degree of 'internationality'. IVS for development and relief recruits skilled and experienced professionals who provide expertise to communities and nations where skill-based assistance is needed. This type of service is usually long term and tends to be performed by individual volunteers rather than groups. Funding usually comes from national or international governmental sources, and programs are more likely to be unilateral (linked to foreign policy as national government initiatives)⁴¹⁰.

Different forms of international voluntary service or development volunteering as a form of assistance to those in need abroad have been operating in Slovakia for decades. The pioneering organisations (IVCOs / IVSOs) among the members of Ambrela – Slovak platform for development organizations include eRko – Christian Children Communities Movement, SAVIO, St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Work, and others. Based on Ambrela's recommendations⁴¹¹ (still entitled the Slovak NGDO Platform⁴¹² at the time) in 2011, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic (MFEA SR) launched an official, state-subsidised programme for

sending junior and expert volunteers to the so-called developing countries within the framework of official development assistance (ODA) of the Slovak Republic at the beginning of 2012. Since then, development volunteering has been defined and used as one of the tools of ODA SR⁴¹³. The purpose is to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in the so-called developing countries, namely the goals such as: reducing poverty, helping to transform society, raising educational attainment, etc. This particular program of the MFEA Slovakia for sending volunteers provides a financial contribution that can be applied by Slovak IVCOs. In 2017, the SlovakAid program financed the volunteer stay of 34 volunteers, 31 volunteers in 2018 and 21 in 2019. The main goal of this volunteer program is to support SlovakAid's interventions in partner countries in accordance with the current Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019–2023⁴¹⁴, whilst also keeping in mind the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The whole volunteer stay – a cycle of development volunteering, led by Slovak non-governmental development organizations, is described in the manual 'Slovak Guide to Development Volunteering'⁴¹⁵. It consists of a preparatory, implementation and evaluation phase, while the return home to Slovakia does not mean an end of volunteering cycle.

Young people sent to low-income countries by the members of Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations work on their missions for three to twelve months (six months in average). Hence, they focus on long-term development volunteering. They are sent to the field where they are really needed⁴¹⁶ – based on consistent communication between the sending and host organisations, as well as the needs of the local communities⁴¹⁷. Ambrela as the national platform for development organisations is considered as an International Volun-

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tary Service Support⁴¹⁸ (IVSS) organization that supports, conduct research, and advocate for international voluntary service. However, it is not engaged directly in coordinating or managing volunteer placements, nor in directing the work of member organizations sending volunteers abroad.

Motivational indicators and logistical feats of voluntary service

The projects of Slovak development organisations are financially supported mostly by the SlovakAid scheme. Most volunteer projects could be included in categories such as the field of social development, social work, health care and education, all in the provision of services to the local (very often migrating) community, including sharing of know-how and the transfer of experience.

For example ADRA Slovakia is training and sending volunteers abroad through the MFEA SR programme administered by SlovakAid⁴¹⁹ or through the EU Aid Volunteers⁴²⁰ initiative. It has sent out almost thirty development volunteers in the last six years⁴²¹. Some went to help typhoon victims in the Philippines or socially excluded families in Kenya, budding activists in Ukraine, traumatised people after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, internally displaced women in Georgia, Roma children of returnee parents in Albania, and refugee communities in Lebanon. The actual sending of a volunteer abroad is preceded by an orientation, a series of pre-departure trainings and a two-month internship in ADRA Slovakia⁴²². On other hand, SAVIO NGO sends Slovak volunteers aged 20–30 to support development projects' implementation and work with vulnerable communities in Angola, Azerbaijan, Kenya, Tanzania and Ukraine. It has sent out more than thirty development volunteers so far. Volunteer's travel to the host country is preceded by the fulfillment of particular requirements (covering travel expenses, previous experience with the organization and a ten-months long preparation in the form of group meetings during the weekends)^{423, 424}.

ing_2020.pdf; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Examples of Humanitarian Aid Projects of Slovak Organisations in Lebanon," (Case study), (Bratislava: Ambrela, 2020). 13. September 19, 2020, https://ambrela.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Ambrela_Case_Study_Humanitarian_Aid_projects_Libanon_2020.pdf

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Motivation is an internal state of a person that activates or sets in motion all the internal forces of human being. It is the desire of a particular volunteer to do the work performance abroad. To examine the motivation of volunteers, one can use various approaches. Several authors in Slovakia (Mydlíková⁴²⁵, Brozmanová Gregorová^{426, 427}, Matulayová^{428, 429}, Markovič Baluchová^{430, 431}, Kráľová⁴³²) have already identified motivational indicators that play a key role for people in their decision-making whether or not to engage in voluntary activities. For Slovak volunteers, the most important motive for volunteering is their values. People are motivated especially by a strong belief that it is important to help others. Social interaction was another significant motive, especially in international voluntary service. This means that the desire to meet new people through volunteering and to make friends is also a very strong factor for becoming involved in volunteering.

In 2019, twenty-one applications by seven organisations (mostly Ambrela members) were approved, and selected persons were sent on missions to thirteen low-income countries⁴³³. However, in March–April 2020 (after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in mid-March) ten of them returned immediately, the rest came later or decided to stay and work online remotely. Early returns were from Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Lebanon. The reasons were obvious: the total lockdown in the country due to the COVID-19 or even closure of the schools, community centers and the impossibility to continue in activities due to the COVID-19⁴³⁴.

In recent weeks, the pandemic has seen international volunteer cooperation organizations (IVCOs) repatriate thousands of volunteers from hundreds of countries. It has been an unprecedented logistical feat in unprecedented times. COVID-19 pandemic is also presenting very real challenges for well-established approaches to international volunteering. Moving overseas, living and working with local communities, creating mutual respect and trust by building relationships, and developing capacity according to local needs are now much more challenging⁴³⁵.

In this study, we will show how the global pandemic COVID-19 affected volunteer management and particular missions of Slovak development volunteers working with vulnerable beneficiary communities in low-income countries.

425 Eva Mydlíková, *Volunteering in Slovakia, or 'What to do with a volunteer'* (Bratislava: Ipera, s.r.o. 2002).

426 Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová et al, *Analysis of volunteering in Slovakia* (Bratislava: PDCS-Panet, 2009). [In Slovak language]. accessed September 19, 2020, http://dobrovolnictvo.sk/_subory/PDCS_Analyza_dobrovolnictva_SK.pdf

427 Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová et al., *Volunteering – When Help Is Fun and Fun Helps* (Bratislava: Iuventa, 2011).

428 T. Matulayová et al., *Volunteering in Slovakia - research reflections* (Bratislava: Iuventa, 2012).

429 T. Matulayová et al., *Motivation for volunteering* (Olomouc: UP, 2017).

430 Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Motivation of community health workers and the influence of conflicts on work performance within the Slovak development project in Kenya," *Acta Missiologica* 9, no. 2, (2015): 51–65. <https://www.actamissiologica.com/>

431 Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Humanitarian volunteering in developing countries," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Get to know the motivations of humanitarian volunteers," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "How to Strengthen the Capacities,"

432 Kráľová et al., "Motivation to volunteering," 239–245.

433 SAIDC 2019, "List of Grant Applications," ; SAIDC 2019: "Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation,"

434 N. Nálepková, 2020, "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sending SlovakAid volunteers abroad in 2020," (E-mail communication) (unpublished).

435 J. O'Brien, "Opinion: The future of volunteering",

Methods

The aim of the paper is to analyse an immediate impact of the global pandemic COVID-19 on Slovak development volunteers and their projects abroad. This study utilized qualitative research methods to collect data in Slovakia between March and August 2020. Content analysis of particular media products was followed by focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with volunteers, as well as their coordinators from particular Slovak non-profits in the field of international volunteer management (IVCOs). This kind of research⁴³⁶ is considered to be flexible because changes in research design are possible.

The material for content analysis consisted of online media products (blog posts, social media posts, reports, reportages, news interviews) published by Slovak broadcasting companies and IVCOs in six months period after the strike of global pandemic (March-August 2020). Media products must contain the following keywords: 'COVID-19', 'SlovakAid', 'development cooperation', 'volunteer'. Eighteen articles met the criteria. An important step in the content analysis is to clearly define the research sample and unit of analysis. An open coding (code generation and categorization) was the primary procedure for this type of qualitative research method. Subsequently, the search for contexts and connecting particular categories by using axial coding followed⁴³⁷. All the media products have been analysed sequentially according to this method.

The second method implemented during this qualitative research was the use of semi-structured interviews. Eight online interviews were conducted, guided by prepared open-ended questions. In this study they were the main source of collected data. Qualitative interviewing is very flexible and brings rich data⁴³⁸. Also the Focus group (FG)⁴³⁹ method was used during the research. It allows continuous discussion and it strengthens the creation of new ideas and topics that could have been omitted in the semi-structured interviews. The group is supposed to collect more ideas than a single interview session. The transcribed data from two conducted focus group discussions was read and re-read multiple times to immerse in the data. In doing so, the key categories / theme were identified and data were summarized under appropriate categories⁴⁴⁰. The research sample in this study is purposive and is set up from current and former volunteers (labeled according to their sending organizations: adra1–4, caritas1–3, erko1–3, savio1–3) and volunteer coordinators from Slovak IVCOs.

All three methods (content analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions) were focused on the field work and volunteer management of six Ambrela members hit by COVID-19 measurements and restrictions. Among the IVCOs participated in this study were: Christian Children Communities Movement – eRko, SAVIO NGO, St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Work / Jua NGO, People in need Slovakia, Caritas Slovakia and ADRA Slovakia.

436 Jan Hendl, *Qualitative research: Basic theories, methods and applications* 2nd Ed. (Praha: Portál, 2008).

437 L. Dušková and Šafaříková, S. *Qualitative research methods for International development studies* [In Czech language]. (Olomouc: Palacky university, 2015).

438 S. Šafaříková, *The influence of sport and physical activities on youth development within the context of developing countries (The Kids League, Uganda)*, (Olomouc: UP, 2013).

439 Monique M. Hennink, *International focus group research: A handbook for the health and social sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

440 Julie Green et al., "Generating best evidence from qualitative research: the role of data analysis," *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health* 31, no. 6, (07 December 2007): 545-50. DOI: 10.1111/j.1753-6405.2007.00141.x

Results

The global pandemic of COVID-19 may, even more than previous humanitarian crises, point to the validity and importance of development cooperation, solidarity with low-income countries and Global goals (SDGs) such as poverty reduction, the elimination of inequalities and conflict resolution. In the face of lockdowns and social distancing, Slovak development volunteers and their sending organizations (IVCOs) are mobilizing, moving online, and finding entirely new ways to play a crucial role in the coronavirus response.

Analyzed data gathered by three qualitative research methods (content analysis of eighteen media products, eight semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions with volunteers, as well as their coordinators from particular nonprofits) identified three thematic areas where the immediate impacts of COVID-19 on the actors of volunteer management (including host and sending nonprofits, as well as donors) were the most significant.

Changes in delivery of Official development assistance (ODA)

Organizations that receive funding from SlovakAid grants are aware that the system of Official development assistance (ODA) will be one of the areas that will be hit hardest by economic cuts in next year's state budget of the Slovak Republic. The COVID-19 crisis shows several very specific consequences for the ODA of the Slovak Republic (including the SlovakAid volunteer program). Therefore Donors–IVCOs relations at institutional level could be affected.

The pandemic affected the whole world and did not take into account the divide between developed and developing countries. In contrast to the already mentioned financial crisis or migration crisis, the Slovak Republic has experienced only a fraction of the effects of the crisis. A large part of inhabitants in low-income countries has lived for most of their lives under the much more intense effects of social conflicts and repeated natural disasters, resulting in humanitarian crises. As expected, in recent months the health sector has been given priority over other equally important sectors such as food safety, safe water and sanitation, but also within health sector itself, the main focus of activities was on preventing and combating COVID-19⁴⁴¹. It is evident that urgent nonprofits' response reacting to the immediate needs (such as medical supplies) of the vulnerable communities had to be adopted by the organisations on the account of their long term programs (such as livelihood programs, family planning, wells digging etc.). Online sessions of volunteers and other field workers with projects' beneficiaries to promote health risk prevention strategies or distribution of health materials were among those activities⁴⁴². The situation in the field is changing very fast and for an efficient response a high flexibility from SlovakAid is needed.

However, the Slovak government did not provide new source of funding to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic, but only redirected about ten million euros (originally intended for other development goals' implementation) to this cause. For example, the government redirected five million euros from a project in Libya and sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine in the amount of 200,000 euros. It also adapted projects under the SlovakAid brand in the total amount of 3.5 million euros (implemented mainly by Slovak non-governmental development organizations –

441 Zahraničná Politika (Foreign policy affairs), Bratislava: SPPA, Daniel Kaba, "A pandemic must not stop development cooperation," 30 June 2020. [In Slovak language]. accessed September 19, 2020, <https://zahranicnapolitika.sk/pandemia-nesmie-zastavit-rozvojovu-spolupracu/>

442 Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "Adaptation of Slovak NGOs and their partners operating in the Middle East to the COVID-19 situation (Meeting Minutes from Focus Group)," Bratislava: Ambrela. (unpublished). ; Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "COVID-19 pandemic and the activities of Ambrela's members and observers (Slovak NGOs)," [In Slovak language]. accessed September 19, 2020, <https://ambrela.org/spravu/koronavirus-a-aktivita-clenov-i-pozorovatelov-nasej-ambrela>

mostly Ambrela members) for the needs of prevention and COVID-19 solutions. At the 'Global Goal: Unite for our Future' summit, Slovak government pledged 750,000 euros for vaccine development. Several large donors are doing the same, although it is clear that these funds will be lacking elsewhere (e.g. to combat malaria and Ebola, to provide food and livelihoods for the most vulnerable communities in low-income countries). This shortcoming in the form of redirection of resources, together with COVID-19 measures (closed schools and markets, rising food prices, rising social tensions and domestic violence, increased violations of fundamental human rights by law enforcement agencies) has far-reaching effects on the poorest⁴⁴³.

Importance of new remote approach to volunteering

Perhaps the most significant manifestation of the pandemic COVID-19 is the closure of borders and measures aimed at restricting movement. As a result, non-governmental development organizations (IVCOs) and the development volunteers sent by them, implementing development cooperation projects in low-income countries, then have limited opportunities to operate. It also complicates the implementation of many (usually simple) operations and their financing. For this reason, too, donor governments even more favor the multilateral part of development assistance.⁴⁴⁴

It became increasingly difficult to plan any domestic or even international travels of nonprofits towards their beneficiaries. *It is very unpredictable how much it will cost, what are the security risks or even if there will be any possibility to return back. The nonprofits are not able to send volunteers anywhere, hence losing direct contact with the field*⁴⁴⁵. According to the information from Slovak agency for international development cooperation (SAIDC), *ten out of twenty-one Slovak volunteers were immediately withdrawn from the mission in March-April 2020, the others followed later. Slovak IVCOs used big part of granted financial support from SlovakAid agency for the repatriation flight tickets*⁴⁴⁶. For example, *three out of the four volunteers (samples erko1, erko2, erko3 sent abroad by Christian Children Communities Movement – eRko thanks to the support of SlovakAid) were withdrawn earlier from the mission in mid-March 2020. The entire communication between sending and host organizations, volunteers, and the donor was done remotely. SAIDC responded to the electronic request for early termination of the volunteer stay very quickly – within 48 hours of the request, the donor had electronically approved all the changes and eRko could buy flight tickets. The subsequent reduction of the granted budget and the return of unused funds to the agency went without a problem*⁴⁴⁷.

443 Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "Adaptation of Slovak NGOs and their partners operating in the Middle East to the COVID-19 situation (Meeting Minutes from Focus Group)," Bratislava: Ambrela. (unpublished). ; Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "COVID-19 pandemic,"

444 Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "Adaptation of Slovak NGOs and their partners operating in the Middle East to the COVID-19 situation (Meeting Minutes from Focus Group)," Bratislava: Ambrela. (unpublished). ; Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "COVID-19 pandemic,"

445 Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "Adaptation of Slovak NGOs and their partners operating in the Middle East to the COVID-19 situation (Meeting Minutes from Focus Group)," Bratislava: Ambrela. (unpublished). ; Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "COVID-19 pandemic,"

446 N. Nálepková 2020, "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sending SlovakAid volunteers abroad in 2020," (E-mail communication) (unpublished).

447 J. Magda, 2020, "eRko's insight: Slovak development volunteering in the COVID-19 / post- COVID-19 era," (E-mail communication) (unpublished).

Organisations were able to continue some of their originally planned activities, but not all of them. *They were forced to shift their educational programs or counselling programs to an online environment*^{448, 449}. *One particular organisation created COVID-19 hotline, another got volunteers to provide guidelines that were sent by UN agencies: WHO, UNHCR.* It has proven important for the organisations to keep in touch with their beneficiaries in this way⁴⁵⁰. Research results show two (not entirely new) approaches as the best ways for international volunteers to continue supporting communities – online volunteering and support to local, community-level volunteers.

Several story patterns of logistical feats, communications under the pressure and stressful departure back home due to COVID-19^{451, 452, 453}, came to the fore during the rereading and analysis of the data obtained from three qualitative research methods. For example, one female respondent (sample adra1) worked as support staff in the educational project for the children of Syrian refugees at host organisation ADRA Lebanon⁴⁵⁴ in Beirut at the turn of 2019 and 2020. She helped in writing project applications to the various donors' grant calls to gain funding for a full renewal of the training centre. She also *prepared a vocational course for young people from poorer backgrounds, who had experienced difficulties finding employment or paying for university education. However, she was not able to experience the implementation of this project due to her early departure to Slovakia (related to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020)*⁴⁵⁵. Lebanon had gone through a civil war and a conflict with Israel in the past, has a population of only 6.8 million. Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country experienced a political, financial and refugee crisis, all at the same time⁴⁵⁶. Three female volunteers (samples caritas1, caritas2, caritas3) experienced similar situation in Uganda during the project implementation of Caritas Slovakia. They should *work at the Center of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for HIV pos-*

448 People in need Slovakia, 2020, "Coronavirus and Our Projects Abroad," [In Slovak language]. accessed September 19, 2020, <https://clovekvochrozeni.sk/koronavirus-a-nase-projekty-v-zahranici/>; People in need Slovakia, 2020, "The Increasing Fear, Poverty and Children's Grief. What Does the Life of Families on the Run in Lebanon Look Like During the Pandemic?," (Survey results) [In Slovak language]. accessed September 19, 2020, <https://clovekvochrozeni.sk/zivot-v-libanone-v-case-pandemie/>

449 A. Hruboňová, 2020, "ADRA Slovakia's insight: Slovak development volunteering in the COVID-19 / post- COVID-19 era," (E-mail communication) (unpublished).

450 Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "Adaptation of Slovak NGOs and their partners operating in the Middle East to the COVID-19 situation (Meeting Minutes from Focus Group)," Bratislava: Ambrela. (unpublished). ; Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "COVID-19 pandemic,"

451 SAVIO 2020, "Salesian Missionary Volunteering – Tanzania: We are home in quarantine (SAVIO volunteers' update)," [In Slovak language]. accessed September 19, 2020, <http://dobrovolnici.saleziani.sk/2020/03/19/sme-doma-v-karantene/>; SAVIO, 2020, "Salesian Missionary Volunteering – Kenya: And now what? Or: A human aims, the coronavirus changes," (SAVIO volunteers' update), [In Slovak language]. accessed September 19, 2020, <http://dobrovolnici.saleziani.sk/2020/03/18/a-co-teraz-alebo-clovek-mieni-korona-meni/>

452 SAVIO 2020, "Salesian Missionary Volunteering – Tanzania," ; SAVIO, 2020, "Salesian Missionary Volunteering – Kenya,"

453 Christian Children Communities Movement – eRko, 2020, "Dobrá novina united against coronavirus in Africa," [In Slovak language]. accessed 19 September 2020, <https://www.dobranovina.sk/s-dobrou-novinou-proti-koronavirusu-v-afrike/>

454 ADRA MENA, 2020, "ADRA Lebanon," accessed September 19, 2020, <http://adramena.org/office/lebanon/>

455 Božena Markovič Baluchová, "In the multicultural Turkish metropolis," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "A volunteer stay in Lebanon," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Activities of Slovak Development Volunteers," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Examples of Humanitarian Aid Projects,"

456 Božena Markovič Baluchová, "In the multicultural Turkish metropolis," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "A volunteer stay in Lebanon," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Activities of Slovak Development Volunteers," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Examples of Humanitarian Aid Projects,"

itive children as educators and project assistants for six months, but it was possible for them to stay in the country only for two months.

After five months, the Salesian missionary voluntary service of SAVIO volunteers was interrupted by the coronavirus strike⁴⁵⁷. Two girls were withdrawn from Don Bosco Seminary in Mafinge, Tanzania⁴⁵⁸ (samples savio1, savio2) and one girl from Bosco Boys Langata centre in Nairobi, Kenya (sample savio3)⁴⁵⁹. They experienced a complicated transfer from Tanzania and Kenya to Slovakia and a mandatory state quarantine.

However, there were also a few volunteers who have decided to stay⁴⁶⁰ in their host countries (e.g. samples adra2, adra3, adra4). They wanted to continue in project management and to provide counselling to local people in online regime wishing that the global COVID-19 pandemic does not slow down the well-started social change in their beneficiary communities^{461, 462}. They felt devoted to find means of supporting their target groups: people currently affected by additional emergency situation.

The pandemic affected volunteers' experience primarily at individual level. Most of the participated volunteers professionally fulfilled their motivations and desire to get an insight into the world of humanitarian and development work, learnt how non-profit organisations operate abroad and how projects are prepared and adjusted in practice. Some of returned volunteers are open to the idea that they would travel out again and finish their missions when the situation of the global COVID-19 pandemic calms down a bit⁴⁶³.

Occurrence of internal issues within the nonprofits (IVCOs)

All participating organisations in volunteer management have taken various measures to adapt to the new COVID-19 situation and they had to manage communication towards beneficiaries, donors and towards their own staff in addition. This required immediate introduction of new approaches and changes in their regular work as well as the communication with their beneficiaries. Nonprofits IVCOs are reimagining their models and pivoting to new ways of working. All organisations are reporting higher workload and increased communication traffic with less

457 Š. Kormančík, 2020, "SAVIO's insight: Slovak development volunteering in the COVID-19 / post- COVID-19 era," (E-mail communication) (unpublished).

458 SAVIO 2020, "Salesian Missionary Volunteering – Tanzania," ; SAVIO, 2020, "Salesian Missionary Volunteering – Kenya,"

459 SAVIO 2020, "Salesian Missionary Volunteering – Tanzania," ; SAVIO, 2020, "Salesian Missionary Volunteering – Kenya,"

460 Božena Markovič Baluchová, "In the multicultural Turkish metropolis," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "A volunteer stay in Lebanon," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Activities of Slovak Development Volunteers," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Examples of Humanitarian Aid Projects,"

461 A. Hruboňová, 2020, "ADRA Slovakia's insight: Slovak development volunteering in the COVID-19 / post- COVID-19 era," (E-mail communication) (unpublished).

462 Božena Markovič Baluchová, "In the multicultural Turkish metropolis," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "A volunteer stay in Lebanon," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Activities of Slovak Development Volunteers," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Examples of Humanitarian Aid Projects,"

463 Božena Markovič Baluchová, "In the multicultural Turkish metropolis," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "A volunteer stay in Lebanon," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Activities of Slovak Development Volunteers," ; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Examples of Humanitarian Aid Projects,"

immediate or visible outputs⁴⁶⁴. IVCO—employees/volunteers relations at interpersonal level have been affected.

The need of the nonprofits to respond immediately to the emergency issues resulted in a various adaptation towards their own team. Immediate measures had to be taken for health and safety reasons (obtaining hand sanitizers, wearing face masks, working during restricted office hours, reducing or stopping field work, working from home) or learning new skills (online lectures, online counselling). The workload has increased and the staff had to deal with loads of stressful issues and pressure. Many activities were not financially covered, so people worked for free or with reduced pay although the workload was the same or more.

To help vulnerable communities, the organisations adopted various strategies, e.g. vouchers for beneficiaries. Due to their poor financial situation, the beneficiaries needed elemental assistance to cover their fundamental survival needs and to get sanitary products. They could use the vouchers to purchase basic items like food. The organisations also purchased mobile phone credit to enable the beneficiaries to join remote education programs. Some organisations were able to receive smaller funding for emergency response. Some organisations were unable to use existing funds as they had to cancel planned activities⁴⁶⁵ due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Some of the organisations have a contingency plan mainly for implementation of education activities few weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic situation started or use existing support of UNICEF especially in WASH programs. While others have no crisis management plan in disposal for such specific situation, partially due to difficult conditions in which they are providing assistance (e.g. in Syria or Lebanon). They need to adapt on daily basis not only the implementation of projects but also internally, e.g. organisation of work, communication within the nonprofit⁴⁶⁶

As nonprofits (IVCOs) pivot to new online volunteering models, they are also tackling the challenges of getting volunteers back into the field and of helping volunteers navigate social-distancing restrictions so that they can do their jobs and make an impact. Organizations will need to cooperate and share intelligence on risks, travel, and visa restrictions to make this work⁴⁶⁷.

Recent pandemic hit hard the volunteer management and volunteering project cycle for the period 2020–21. For example, SAVIO conducted the preparation of ten new candidates for the Salesian missionary volunteering online. None have traveled yet, because even the host organizations in low-income countries are not sure about the whether they could accept volunteers at all. Therefore SAVIO didn't apply for funding to SlovakAid due to constant changes related to COVID-19. At the turn of December and January the first two candidates might be able to travel to Kenya or Tanzania⁴⁶⁸. Caritas Slovakia published an open call for six new volunteers for their

464 Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "Adaptation of Slovak NGOs and their partners operating in the Middle East to the COVID-19 situation (Meeting Minutes from Focus Group)," Bratislava: Ambrela. (unpublished). ; Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "COVID-19 pandemic,"

465 People in need Slovakia, 2020, "Coronavirus and Our Projects Abroad," [In Slovak language]. accessed September 19, 2020, <https://clovekvozhrozeni.sk/koronavirus-a-nase-projekty-v-zahranici/> ; People in need Slovakia, 2020, "The Increasing Fear, Poverty and Children's Grief. What Does the Life of Families on the Run in Lebanon Look Like During the Pandemic?," (Survey results) [In Slovak language]. accessed September 19, 2020, <https://clovekvozhrozeni.sk/zivot-v-libanone-v-case-pandemie/>

466 Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "Adaptation of Slovak NGOs and their partners operating in the Middle East to the COVID-19 situation (Meeting Minutes from Focus Group)," Bratislava: Ambrela. (unpublished). ; Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "COVID-19 pandemic,"

467 J. O'Brien, "Opinion: The future of volunteering",

468 Š. Kormančík, 2020, "SAVIO's insight: Slovak development volunteering in the COVID-19 / post- COVID-19 era," (E-mail communication) (unpublished).

centers in Rwanda and Uganda; People in need Slovakia is looking for three volunteers willing to travel to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova and Lebanon; St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Work is planning to send abroad at least six volunteers. ADRA Slovakia didn't get funding from SlovakAid for their volunteers to be sent abroad⁴⁶⁹, so its focus has been shifted on the volunteer management under the EU Aid Volunteers brand.

It is more difficult to get funding from donors for educational projects, nonprofits are not sure whether new funding will be available. However, activities such as child protection, psychosocial support or educational projects are still very important for beneficiaries.

Discussion

All young people (Slovak development volunteers participated in the research) worked in very diverse, international teams. They could communicate with their colleagues effectively mainly thanks to having studied and understanding the context from which their counterparts came and in which they lived. All of them attended pre-departure training with focus on intercultural sensitivity and verbal and non-verbal communication in order to successfully implement their volunteer activities and build relationships in the new communities – professional as well as personal⁴⁷⁰. However, nobody prepared them for the pandemic scenario. For some volunteers, COVID-19 has meant returning to their home country if there was time to leave before the borders closed and flights ceased. For others, it has not been possible to return and these volunteers have stayed in host country, working in online regime. The adaptation to COVID-19 measurements, safety restrictions and constant changes caused a lot of pressure on all the actors of volunteer management. In the past few months, all those people have made the switch to working from home as countries have gone into lockdown. And this is not a unique situation only for Slovakia.

The Peace Corps (volunteer program run by the United States Government) conducted its largest mass evacuation of more than 7,300 American volunteers from 61 countries in mid-March 2020, as nations closed their borders and international airlines canceled flights. The agency had completed regional and country evacuations before, such as during the Iraq War and the Ebola outbreak, but had never withdrawn all of its volunteers at once⁴⁷¹.

Because volunteers are part of the communities they support, they develop a deep understanding of local needs and the challenges. Volunteers, and the in-country teams that support them, are uniquely placed to gather and share intelligence with head offices and home governments as to how foreign nations, businesses, and civil society partners are faring during the health crisis and what support they need⁴⁷². Therefore, they need to be placed in the field.

However, many international volunteers sent abroad by European IVCOs (e.g. VSO) are now 'working remotely', giving online support to vital projects around the world, despite having had

469 SAIDC 2020, "Sending Volunteers and Expert Volunteers,"; SAIDC, 2020, "Annual report of SAIDC,"; SAIDC 2020, "Approved applications,"; SAIDC 2020, "Guidelines for grant recipients to send volunteers,"

470 Božena Markovič Baluchová, "In the multicultural Turkish metropolis,"; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "A volunteer stay in Lebanon,"; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Activities of Slovak Development Volunteers,"; Božena Markovič Baluchová, "Examples of Humanitarian Aid Projects",

471 Amy Lieberman, "After COVID-19 evacuations, volunteers fear for future of Peace Corps," 14 April 2020, accessed September 19, 2020, <https://www.devex.com/news/after-covid-19-evacuations-volunteers-fear-for-future-of-peace-corps-96862>

472 J. O'Brien, "Opinion: The future of volunteering,"

to return home due to COVID-19. Despite these different circumstances facing volunteers, many are still finding ways to make an impact – carry on fighting poverty in spite of lockdown⁴⁷³.

More safety restrictions were imposed to projects' beneficiaries – vulnerable (mostly migrant and refugee) communities in respect to COVID-19 situations. They were more controlled respecting local population, e.g. could not leave informal settlements, high security was deployed⁴⁷⁴. So during the first few weeks of pandemic outbreak, many projects were put on hold and it was virtually impossible to directly access volunteer projects' target groups.

Two approaches are coming to the fore – online volunteering and support to local, community-level volunteers. South-South volunteers may have been a very important part of successful managing the COVID-19 pandemic the Asia-Pacific region. This South-South cooperation and volunteerism will be critical means to chart a pathway for this region's inclusive, resilient and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic⁴⁷⁵.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that even strong ODA agencies can act quickly, flexibly and still effectively. For example, the evaluation of SlovakAid call for a delivery of humanitarian aid took ten days instead of the usual 60-90 days. Moreover, field workers and volunteers from Slovak organizations were able to use their know-how from development cooperation projects also at home. For example, St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Work, People in need, MAGNA, Caritas Slovakia and ADRA Slovakia used their expert experience from foreign missions and transformed them operationally into the fight against COVID-19 in Slovakia^{476, 477}.

Conclusion

Recent pandemic hit hard the volunteer management in Slovakia for year 2020 and it is already impacting the volunteering project cycles for year 2021. The authors of this study are planning to follow similar researches conducted across the Europe and compare the results, as well as the types of impact on relations between main actors of volunteer programs. They are aware that occurred trends described by them can be identified in neighboring countries where similar projects for sending volunteers abroad are running.

Every crisis can be seen primarily as an opportunity for growth and the implementation of change, which would normally be complicated, bureaucratized and long. This also applies to the attempt to improve the Official development assistance (ODA) system in terms of faster remote communication and evaluation of new calls, changes in funding, adapted strategies for work with particular communities, contingency plans for implementation of agreed activities, as well

473 VSO International 2020, "Meet the volunteers fighting poverty from their living rooms," accessed September 19, 2020, <https://www.vsointernational.org/news/blog/meet-the-volunteers-fighting-poverty-from-their-living-rooms>

474 Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "Adaptation of Slovak NGOs and their partners operating in the Middle East to the COVID-19 situation (Meeting Minutes from Focus Group)," Bratislava: Ambrela. (unpublished).; Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "COVID-19 pandemic),"

475 UNV 2020, "Volunteering at the heart of South-South cooperation UNV & UN Office for South-South Cooperation," 18 September 2020 Bangkok, accessed September 19, 2020, <https://www.unv.org/News/Volunteering-heart-South-South-cooperation>

476 Zahraničná Politika (Foreign policy affairs), Bratislava: SFPA, Daniel Kaba, "A pandemic must not stop development cooperation," 30 June 2020. [In Slovak language]. accessed September 19, 2020, <https://zahranicnapolitika.sk/pandemia-nesmie-zastavit-rozvojovu-spolupracu/>

477 Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "Adaptation of Slovak NGOs and their partners operating in the Middle East to the COVID-19 situation (Meeting Minutes from Focus Group)," Bratislava: Ambrela. (unpublished).; Ambrela – Slovak Platform for development organisations 2020, "COVID-19 pandemic),"

as mental health support and wellbeing programs for volunteers and field workers experiencing higher workload and potential burnout. Not only MFEA Slovakia together with SAIDC / SlovakAid, but also other European donors can take the study results into account while making decisions about the next call for grant proposals and planning the budget for future aid interventions.

In May 2020, eighteen applications from six organisations to ten low-income countries were approved and supported by SlovakAid grant⁴⁷⁸. However, in view of the COVID-19 situation, a new guideline was launched in September 2020 regulating the Manual for Sending volunteers and Expert volunteers abroad. The changes concerned grant rules related to date of deployment, signing the contract and potential change of country of volunteer stay⁴⁷⁹. Trained volunteers are very uniquely qualified to support the work with target groups (vulnerable communities), through their language and cultural skills. They can really assimilate and adapt into any environment. Those volunteers do not bring financial assistance with their arrival and stay in low-income countries. However, in addition to determination and expertise, the symbolic and social capital of volunteers is also important and credible.

Together with their sending and host organisations, the volunteers represent their own (direct or indirect) role – to contribute to the Global Goals and to ending global poverty, often linked to human-caused conflicts and subsequent humanitarian crises (including the COVID-19 crisis), which unjustly keep millions of people in need. Slovak development volunteers' future deployments together with other international volunteers' missions will certainly play a crucial part of recovery processes of low-income countries in the post-COVID-19 era. All the actors in volunteer management just need to cooperate and share intelligence on risks, travel, and other restrictions to make this work.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

478 SAIDC 2020, "Sending Volunteers and Expert Volunteers," SAIDC, 2020: "Annual report of SAIDC"; SAIDC 2020, "Approved applications," ; SAIDC 2020, "Guidelines for grant recipients to send volunteers,"

479 SAIDC 2020, "Sending Volunteers and Expert Volunteers," SAIDC, 2020: "Annual report of SAIDC"; SAIDC 2020, "Approved applications," ; SAIDC 2020, "Guidelines for grant recipients to send volunteers,"

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ATTITUDES OF ROMA TOWARDS QUARANTINE AND RESTRICTIONS DUE TO SPREADING COVID-19 AND THEIR IMPACTS ON LIFE IN THE ROMA SETTLEMENT



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Abstract

Background: The study analyses the perception of risks of pandemic due COVID-19 by Roma people living in Roma settlement Žehra and their attitudes to quarantine, emergency actions and vaccination against influenza and their willingness to get vaccinated with the forthcoming vaccine against COVID-19.

Methods: We used quantitative research to collect data at the time of first wave of COVID-19 epidemic in April–May 2020. The sample was consisted of 98 Roma people at the age of 25–60 years old and the data were analysed by descriptive statistics on the path of chi test $p < 0.05$.

Results: The wearing masks is considered and recommended as an effective protection against the spreading of COVID-19; there is significant correlation between internal motivation to wear masks and information about danger of coronavirus ($p = 0.032$) and a government regulation ($p = 0.037$) and state punishments if we refuse to wear the mask on the face in public places (0.028). The level of significance $p = 0.048$ ($df = 14$, $v = 1.12$) confirmed the relationship between the reasons for wearing protective masks and attitudes to emergency measures due COVID-19. To increase motivation of Roma people to follow rules, restrictions and the quarantine is not via financial penalties and threats, but it is important to increase health and information literacy and their trust in authorities. 41.8% of the Roma people use masks due to a government regulation at the places where it is obligatory, not for personal reasons to protect themselves or others. There is significant correlation between poor motivation to wear masks, lack of information and misunderstandings of government restrictions (0.036) in the quarantine. Due to the quarantine Roma living in segregated settlements lost sources of income and economic activity (formal or informal), the rate of unemployment and poverty has been increased in these communities. The quarantine caused problems with e-learning at home (some of them do not have equipment or no ability to learn online due low education of parents and missing internet connection), social distance, increased cases of domestic violence, misunderstandings of restrictions, fear of social insecurity and deeper poverty.

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Conclusion: At the first wave of epidemic COVID-19 the most of Roma returned from countries (UK, Germany, France, Italy), they lost their jobs and faced negative prejudices from other Roma as “returners” to gained benefits from social and health care system. There should be interdisciplinary strategies to solve problems based on health care via public insurance, psychological support via crisis links, street work in communities via non-profit organisations and health and social support via Slovak Red Cross, help with distance education by community centres near Roma settlements, supports rights and living conditions by The Slovak National Centre for Human Rights and municipalities preparing a framework of initiatives financed through the reallocation of resources to eliminate consequences of COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19. Roma people. Attitudes to vaccination. Social impacts of epidemic. Street work with Roma people.

Introduction

The village of Žehra is characterized by a high number of Roma population that live here is connected with high rate of unemployment of Roma women and men, school absenteeism and lack of financial and health literacy of younger and older inhabitants. There are local project supporting street work and helping services for the marginalized people from the village including social workers and assistants, who in the pandemic situation of COVID-19 were contact professionals as an extended hand of helping society towards the marginalized Roma community. In the quarantine this Roma settlement was closed and kept social distance for 50 days. Social workers thus had to deal with a number of complex and exhausting situations, which were the culmination not only of a pandemic situation, but also of the subjective feelings of the Roma population in the situation linked with fear, anxiety and depressions.

COVID-19 epidemic in the Roma settlement Žehra

The village of Žehra can be described as a significantly pronatal village. The level of natality in the last 10 years had an extremely high and relatively unbalanced rate when it ranged from about 20 to 47 ‰. Since 2011, there is a declining trend in its development. The most favorable years were 2007 and 2009, when 89 children were born in the village at the same time, the least favorable year was 2015, when 47 children were born (20.1%). The average value of this indicator for the entire evaluated period, ie for the last 10 years, was up to 36.0%. For comparison, in the district of Spišská Nová Ves, the fertility rate is about 13%, it is 11% in the Košice region and the average fertility rate in the Slovak Republic is about 10%. The year-on-year development of the number of deaths, on the other hand, had a much more balanced rate (but with significantly lower values). The lowest number of deaths in the last 10 years was in 2015 (7 died people) compared to the highest one in 2028 (14 people). The level of mortality thus ranged from 3.0% to 7.1%, while the average for the last 10 evaluated years in Žehra was 5.3%. In the village we can observe a much lower mortality rate than the district of Spišská Nová Ves (7.7%), Košice region (9.4%) and the average of the Slovak Republic (approx. 10.0%).⁴⁸¹

In Slovakia, COVID-19 started to spread since March 6, 2020, when the first case from the Bratislava region was confirmed. The second wave of the pandemic has spread since September 2020.⁴⁸²

481 “Program hospodárskeho a sociálneho rozvoja obce Žehra na roky 2017 až 2023,” 13. accessed September 10, 2020, https://www.obeczehra.sk/e_download.php?file=data/editor/69sk_3.pdf&original=PHSR%20Zehra%202017-2023_v1_final.pdf

482 “O koronavíruse,” accessed September 10, 2020, <https://korona.gov.sk/faq/>

On 12 March 2020, the Government of the Slovak Republic declared an emergency situation due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic all over the world and the first restrictions and government measures were required. At the beginning of the measures, aqua parks and ski resorts were closed, entertainment establishments, children's corners and shopping centers were closed, with the exception of pharmacies, drugstores and groceries. Later, the restaurants were closed. From 13.3.2020, the international transport of buses and trains was suspended.⁴⁸³

Based on the recorded occurrence of 54 cases of pandemic disease COVID-19 in a large marginalized Roma community in the settlement of Dreveník and its surroundings, the municipality of Žehra started to implement emergency tools to stop spreading of coronavirus and the Central Crisis Staff put the inhabitants of Roma settlement in the quarantine. There were 2,932 inhabitants in the quarantine and comprehensive care (health, social, material) was provided for them. The supply was provided through grocery stores that operated in a restricted mode.⁴⁸⁴

The settlement was divided into 3 sectors and the control of obligations for all inhabitants who stayed in the municipality of Žehra, in the Roma settlement Dreveník and in the housing estate Dreveník was tightened. The duty of the population was to undergo increased health surveillance, ie examination, monitoring of health status and sampling of biological material for examination for the presence of the pathogen COVID-19. 15. May 2020, after testing the entire population in the quarantined part of the village of Žehra and moving the people with a positive test result and their contacts to the quarantine town, the restriction was canceled. Several units were deployed to combat the spread of the COVID-19 disease in the community including the Regional Office of Public Health in Spišská Nová Ves, the District Department of the Police Force in Spišské Vlachy, the District Directorate of the Police Force in Spišská Nová Ves, the District Directorate of the Fire and Rescue Corps in Spišská Nová Ves, District Directorate of the Fire and Rescue Corps in Košice, Rescue Brigade of the Fire and Rescue Corps in Humenné, Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, Special Unit MV - CIMIC, enlightenment staff of the Healthy Regions contributory organization, medical staff and volunteers, as well as legal entities and individuals supply of water, food, materials, services, or rental and transport of equipment and automobiles to the quarantine town.⁴⁸⁵

Diary of street social worker in the Roma settlement

The study analyses situation at the coronavirus time in the Roma settlement Žehra by detailed diary of activities and problems solving situation lead by street social worker. We used different statistical tools for analysing the data such as open coding, on the basis of which we define more general categories and further characterize these and put them into dimensions. The social worker wrote the diary from first April to May 2020, while analysing the data there were large number of codes needed to be categorized into the dimensions that are presented in the table 1.

483 "Ústredný krízový štáb pritvrdil opatrenia v boji proti šíreniu koronavírusu," 12. March 2020, accessed September 10, 2020, <http://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy&sprava=ustredny-krizovy-stab-pritvrdil-opatrenia-v-boji-proti-sireniu-koronavirusu>

484 "Vyčísľili boj s koronavírusom v obci Žehra, predbežné výdavky presiahli stotisíc eur," 08. July 2020, accessed August 2, 2020, <https://www.24hod.sk/vycislili-boj-s-koronavirusom-v-obci-zehra-predbezne-vydavky-presiahli-stotistic-eur-cl739530.html>

485 "Vyčísľili boj s koronavírusom v obci Žehra, predbežné výdavky presiahli stotisíc eur,"

Table 1 Open coding - dimensioning of codes

Category - dimension	Code	N	
Quarantine	Social distance, restriction	38	
	home natural environment	25	
	Wearing masks, washing hands and hygiene	40	
	domestic versus state quarantine (fear)	24 - 6	
	discipline, prudence	49	
	fear versus indifference	31	
	Complicated	40	
Subjective feelings	Freedom and right of the personal mobility	33	
	Lack of discipline	42	
	Disharmony and discrepancy	37	
	fear, negative feelings → anger, anger	25	
	Perception of failing down	12	
	Situation	closed community, quarantine	42
		different attitudes and opinions	33
non-compliance with measures		51	
Mitigation plan		29	
non-respect of social workers		9	
Try to escape		14	
your life, grouping and local meetings		11	
Health care	export to community	14	
	Deterioration	35	
	non - compliance with rules, drape, disinfection	40	
	missing diapers, baby milk	8	
	communication with doctors	24	
	distribution of medicine and pills	18	
	disease simulation	35	
	abuse of the emergency line	26	
	Refusal of hospitalization	11	
	transports for examination	17	
	reporting positive cases of COVID-19	17	
	Rights (from 12.4.)	human rights	30
		right of movement, to gather in public	30
		Panic	12
general nervousness		38	
they determine their own rules		29	
anger, passion, scream, violence		26	
Negotiation		25	
Support	Patience	44	
	social benefits	3	
	help the army, police	8	
	Discipline	42	
	fatigue scale enough ...	12	
	Complicated	35	

Table 1 shows the open coding based on the time sequence that we identify in the text for the mentioned period. In the statements of the social worker were not only objective measurement indicators (amount of food worth euros, amount of medicines worth euros, disinfection, drapes, population in domestic quarantine, number of tests, ...) but also subjective feelings and expressions that contribute to clarity situation that occurred during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the **Quarantine** dimension we analysed examples of social worker statements: “people visiting the community do not observe quarantine, discipline improves every day, importance of quarantine, Roma people do not want to wear the masks, if the quarantine took a longer time the less willingness of Roma people to accept restrictions were occurred, there were daily alert, worse discipline, difficult situation to solve...”.

In the **Subjective feelings** dimension, we have identified the following statements with open coding: “citizens take measures lightly, lack of hygiene prevention and poor motivation to wear masks, lack of information and no understanding why they are closed, lack of communication between relatives, the occurred myths and thinking of Roma such as we are in daily contact with the positive and with the army, police and we are not able to stay it any more, ... our working hours are currently 24 hours, as we are in constant contact with residents, consultations with street social workers, statement : Roma do not want the crown to the house organized an event where they drank with a positive from one bottle to shake hands people are frightened and undisciplined accommodated in a kindergarten as home insulation was inconsistent ...”.

The **Situation** dimension creates a picture of a situation at the time of quarantine: “people are mostly illiterate, they do not understand general restrictions in the community, they gather to communicate, they still do not follow measures - wearing a mask and hygiene rules, there are different views on the restrictions and the importance of the quarantine, trivialization Roma with no critical thinking about health risks, coronavirus consequences and lack of respect to restrictions and emergency situation, lack of respect of social worker on the street, looking for the chances to escape, go for shopping, travelling or visiting public places.

Health care dimension includes codes and statements: “they misuse the emergency line, simulate various diseases, and if they succeed and get out of the community within the ambulance, get to the hospital where they then escape and we have to deal with the subsequent transported back to the natural environment, emergency transports, mother with children, children had high fevers, lack of food security to the community and medicines, we contacted the Hospital in Krompachy, but also in Košice, the situation became more complicated at Easter to provide health care and food supplement, the situation is difficult and not all needs and requirements could be met ...”.

The **Rights** dimension (from 12 April) points to the repetition of codes in the social worker’s statement in chronological order: “the situation in the community changes from minute to minute, which is really very difficult and complicated, it is necessary to address the diversity of the situations, attitudes to human rights, the right to move and the right to assemble in public what is being addressed on a daily basis .. we explain to people that the whole world is closed ...”.

In the **Support** dimension, we identified codes, for example: “On April 16, the community paid out benefits, disciplined and followed the instructions given to them by the military, everyone will get their benefits and no one will be cut by anything, at the border in the afternoon the Roma people came from Košice, who in the first place supported all the Roma to persevere, to be tolerant and to follow the instructions, to bring food aid, everyone received the same ...”.

In the statements of the participant - social worker, the study identified at the beginning of the quarantine in the Roma community the negative attitude of the marginalized Roma community

towards rules, adherence to safety and hygiene rules and later attempts to escape, rebellion and warnings of non-respect of basic human rights. However, all these constraints, regulations and guidelines that street social workers had to deal within pandemic situation led to the better acceptance of government measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020.

Methods

The method of quantitative research was used for data collection via short questionnaire to analyse the situation connected with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in a Roma settlement in the village of Žehra. The research aim was to figure out the attitudes of Roma to quarantine measures required due to COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection took place at the time of the declaration of the emergency situation of the Government of the Slovak Republic from April to May 2020.

The aims of the research were:

- Find out the attitudes of the inhabitants of the Roma settlement to emergency measures in order to eliminate the spread of the epidemic COVID-19 and the degree of willingness to respect these measures declared by Central Crisis Staff.
- Analyse the activities of street social workers in period of emergency due to COVID-19 comparing to daily agenda in Roma Settlement before epidemic.
- Analyse Roma attitudes towards health, prevention and vaccination against influenza and possible vaccination against COVID-19.

The research sample consisted of Roma living in the village of Žehra in a total sample of 98 respondents. The total sample consisted of 98 Roma from the village of Žehra at age of 25-60 years old, of which 62.2% were women and 37.8% were men. 71.4% completed primary education, 24.5% passed secondary education and 4.1% achieved university degree. 8.2% were Roma at age of up to 25 years old, 17.3% were Roma under 30 years old, 30.6% were Roma from 31 to 40 years old; 23.5% of Roma people were at age from 41 to 50 years old. In the category of 51-60 years old were 20.4% of Roma people. The Roma showed a strong positive attitude towards the faith, which was confirmed by 68.4% of the Roma. More than a third of them 31.6% are non-believers.

We were interested in how many Roma children are raised in the household on average and at what age a woman gave birth to her first child, the results are presented in the table below. On average, the women from a Roma settlement in Žehra, have 3 children from our sample, while her first birth is on average aged 17-19. A woman, who gives birth to first child later, has an average of 2 children. The number of children in Roma family decreases with increasing age of the first-born. The sample included 4.1% of women who were first-born at the age of 17. Roma women, who currently have three children, have their first child and gave birth at the age of 17-19, which was confirmed by 58.3% of women. 35.3% of Roma women gave birth to their child at the age of 17-19 and had no more children.

In the sample, 17.3% of women gave birth to one child. 34.7% of Roma women gave birth to two children. 36.7% of women care for three children and 11.2% of Roma women have 4 or more children.

Table 2 Number of born Roma children

Age of first birth a Roma woman of 1st child		Number of born children				Total
		1 Child	2 CH	3 CH	4 and more	
15 -17	Count	1	4	0	0	5
	%	5,9%	11,8%	,0%	,0%	5,1%
17-19	Count	6	14	21	5	46
	%	35,3%	41,2%	58,3%	45,5%	46,9%
20-25	Count	6	11	12	4	33
	%	35,3%	32,4%	33,3%	36,4%	33,7%
26-29	Count	4	4	2	2	12
	%	23,5%	11,8%	5,6%	18,2%	12,2%
30-35	Count	0	1	1	0	2
	%	,0%	2,9%	2,8%	,0%	2,0%
Total	Count	17	34	36	11	98
	%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Results

We figured out attitudes of Roma people to health. 23,5% agreed that they feel healthy, 45,9% expressed that they do not care about their health. 30,6% suffer from any chronic disease and take the pills regularly.

We analyse attitudes of Roma to COVID-19. 29,6% agreed with statement: "COVID-19 is a serious threat to health and life". 15,3% think that COVID-19 is a disease of the common flu that people also die from. 19,4% express opinion that COVID-19 is a purposefully and artificially created virus for higher political and economic interests. 23,5% COVID-19 is abused to cause fear in humans and misinformation/disinformation. 12,2% agreed with the statement: "COVID-19 is a consequence of global and climate change".

The wearing masks is considered and recommended as an effective protection against the spreading of COVID-19, that's why we were focused on the level of the observance of wearing masks in Roma settlements. 24,5% of Roma people agreed that masks can be useful protection of themselves and others against spreading epidemic. 33,7% think that wearing masks doesn't protect against COVID-19 properly. 41,8% of the Roma people use masks due to a government regulation at the places where it is obligatory.

We asked for the reasons why it is important to wear the masks and what is their motivation to do so. 27,6% of total sample wear masks due personal and family protection (24,6% of women and 32,4% of men). 12,2% use masks to protect others (11,5% of women and 13,5% of men). 19,4% of total sample is afraid of a fine for not wearing a mask (18,0% of women and 21,6% of men) 17,3 of total sample do it for policy regulation and the public interest (11,2% of women and 7,6% of men). 23,5% of total sample trusted the Central Crisis Staff (30,4% of women and 9,4% of men). The level of significance $p=0.016$ ($df\ 4, v=1.98$) confirmed the relationship between gender and the reasons for wearing protective masks. It means that women are more open for wearing masks comparing to men.

The level of significance $p=0.047$ ($df\ 16, v=1.32$) confirmed the relationship between age and the reasons for wearing protective masks. It means that older Roma people between 40-

60 years old are more open to accept masks regulation comparing to younger generation up to 30. Younger Roma people up to 30 are less afraid of consequences (financial, social, personal, health) of not wearing masks than older Roma people over 40.

The level of significance $p=0.048$ ($df\ 14, v=1.12$) confirmed the relationship between the reasons for wearing protective masks and attitudes to emergency measures due COVID-19. Roma people with negative attitudes to wearing masks are less likely to accept government recommendation and obligations in the context of global epidemic.

Social and health services in Europe face the challenge of delivering care to risks groups. In the fact, all countries across the Europe come up with the regulations and obligation to take a COVID-19 under a control. In the research, the Roma expressed their perception of quarantine measures in terms of restrictions on personal freedom, or as tools to protect public health. The results of the research has shown less willingness of Roma people to follow restrictions and regulations due COVID-19 while it takes more than 3 months ($p=0,028, df=8, v=1.87$).

Compared to the April wave, in May 2020 fewer Roma fully or partially agreed with the statement that "the government has the right to restrict the free movement of people in order to stop the spread of the coronavirus". While in April more than half of the Roma fully or partially agreed with this statement, in May it was only a 30% of respondents ($p=0,010; df\ 8; v\ 1.42$). 43,9% of Roma did not agree that government should regulate personal freedom; 37,8% think it is important to take a COVID-19 under a control. 18,4% fully accepted the negative consequences of the COVID-19 linked with restrictions and regulations on freedom.

In April 2020, with the statement that "it is in the public interest of politicians to monitor and control citizens more during a pandemic", 56,8% fully or partially agreed in these statement compared to 39,6% of Roma who disagreed ($p = 0.024; df\ 12; v=0.72$).

Comparing April and May, the measures restricting personal freedom were somewhat more agreed by those respondents who were more satisfied with the government's actions so far during the pandemic. Furthermore, those respondents who trusted the government and the central crisis staff and accepted the wearing of masks as a common part of the current pandemic agreed with them more. The feeling of being endangered by coronavirus had only a very weak connection with the consent to measures restricting personal freedom.

We analysed how Roma perceive quarantine measures that regulate their daily lives and at the same time what is the level of following regulations in a practice. Almost a third (28,1% of Roma) fully or rather agreed that they would follow the recommendations of the authorities in all circumstances, and that they would follow them even if they did not agree with them (16,4%). 37,8% of Roma agreed with the statement that they would follow the recommendations of the authorities only if they thought they make a sense and the restrictions are useful. Those who were satisfied with the government's actions during the pandemic, Roma who trusted the Central Crisis Staff, and even more so those who perceived that most people in Slovakia followed the rules were more willing to follow the government recommendations in all circumstances. The perceived risk of coronavirus exposure had only a weak relationship to attitudes towards compliance with government recommendations ($p = 0.036; df\ 14; v = 1.38$). 24% of the Roma expressed that these restrictions and regulations does not make a sense for them.

28,6% of the Roma agreed that quarantine measures greatly restrict personal freedom comparing to 26,5% who think that quarantine measures did not bring expected results in slowing the spread of COVID-19. 24,2% agreed the quarantine measures are necessary for public and health protection. 20,7% think quarantine measures divided the inhabitants into two groups with positive and negative attitudes to restrictions and regulations made by Central Crisis Staff and government headed by the Prime Minister Igor Matovič.

There is no significant relationship ($p = 0.348; df\ 12; v = 0.48$) between the attitudes to quarantine measures and perception of the COVID-19 (see table 3).

Table 3 Impact of restrictions and regulations during quarantine

		quarantine measures				Total
		Limit personal freedom	Protect public health	Did not match expectations and results	Divide population into 2 groups	
COVID-19 is a serious epidemic affecting health	Count	5	0	6	4	15
	%	33,3%	,0%	40,0%	26,7%	100,0%
COVID-19 can be compared to influenza	Count	6	2	2	9	19
	%	31,6%	10,5%	10,5%	47,4%	100,0%
COVID-19 purposefully created virus	Count	9	2	7	5	23
	%	39,1%	8,7%	30,4%	21,7%	100,0%
COVID-19 is used to make a fear and disinformation	Count	7	5	7	10	29
	%	24,1%	17,2%	24,1%	34,5%	100,0%
COVID-19 is consequences of global problems	Count	1	3	4	4	12
	%	8,3%	25,0%	33,3%	33,3%	100,0%
Total	%	28,6%	12,2%	26,5%	32,7%	100,0%
	Count	28	12	26	32	98

53.1% of Roma people confirmed there is low motivation to accept and follow the rules linked with the quarantine to opposite opinion of 36.7 of the Roma who think that the regulations are followed enough. 10.2% of them underestimate the risks due to COVID-19. There is no significant relationship ($p = 0.424$; $df 8$; $v = 0.905$) between the attitudes to quarantine/discipline and perception of the COVID-19 (see table 4).

Table 4 Acceptation of the quarantine and restrictions in Roma settlements

		Discipline and acceptance of quarantine and restrictions or rules			Total
		low willingness to comply with the measures	sufficient discipline of the Roma	trivialization of quarantine	
COVID-19 is a serious epidemic affecting health	Count	12	2	1	15
	%	80,0%	13,3%	6,7%	100,0%
COVID-19 can be compared to influenza	Count	11	6	2	19
	%	57,9%	31,6%	10,5%	100,0%
COVID-19 purposefully created virus	Count	11	10	2	23
	%	47,8%	43,5%	8,7%	100,0%
COVID-19 is used to make a fear and disinformation	Count	14	11	4	29
	%	48,3%	37,9%	13,8%	100,0%
COVID-19 is a serious epidemic affecting health	Count	4	7	1	12
	%	33,3%	58,3%	8,3%	100,0%
Total	Count	52	36	10	98
	%	53,1%	36,7%	10,2%	100,0%

At the second part of the research we analyse the perception of information published in media about COVID-19 and we asked the question: “*What impact published information on coronavirus has on you?*” and it was also focused on the attitudes of Roma people to vaccination.

Results has shown that 53,1% have psychosomatic problems and family problems (67,3%), low income (48%) and 57,1% agreed the COVID-19 information makes me feel negative, depressed and anxious. 39,8% expressed they feel like being manipulated by the government compared to 60.2% who disagreed. 43,9% agreed compared to 56,1% disagreed with the statement: “I’m misinformed, I don’t know what to believe”.(see table 5).

Table 5 Impact of published information about COVID-19

I have psychosomatic problems				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulat.%
I agree	52	53,1	53,1	53,1
I disagree	46	46,9	46,9	100,0
There are greater disharmonies in Roma families				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulat.%
I agree	66	67,3	67,3	67,3
I disagree	32	32,7	32,7	100,0
I feel like we are being manipulated by the government				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulat.%
I agree	39	39,8	39,8	39,8
I disagree	59	60,2	60,2	100,0
It makes me feel negative, depressed and anxious				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulat.%
I agree	56	57,1	57,1	57,1
I disagree	42	42,9	42,9	100,0
I owe more, my income has decreased				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulat.%
I agree	47	48,0	48,0	48,0
I disagree	51	52,0	52,0	100,0
I'm disinformed, I don't know what to believe				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulat.%
I agree	43	43,9	43,9	43,9
I disagree	55	56,1	56,1	100,0
Total	98	98	100,0	100,0

We analysed attitudes of the Roma to influenza vaccination. 64.3% confirmed they did not get vaccinated against influenza regularly compared to 35.7% who pass the vaccination schedule in-time. More than half of the Roma (56.1%) are likely to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and 43.9% did not trust the upcoming vaccines and they would refuse the vaccinations against coronavirus. According to the Roma parents, 43.9% of Roma children get vaccinated and follow vaccination schedule as it is valid in Slovakia. 29.6% Children get vaccinated only some of vaccines due different reasons, mainly health risks or problems. 26.5% of Roma children did not get vaccinated at all.

There is significant relationship ($p = 0.00$; $df 4$; $v = 1.76$) between the attitudes to influenza vaccination and age (see table 5). Roma people at younger age up to 40 are more likely to get vaccinated against influenza compared to older generation over 50.

There is no significant relationship ($p = 0.440$; $df 4$; $v = -1.08$) between the attitudes to vaccination against COVID-19 and age (see table 5). We analysed if the Roma people would

decide to pass the vaccines against COVID-19. Younger people up to 30 are more likely to get vaccinated compared to Roma people over 30 who disagreed with the vaccines against coronavirus.

Table 6 Attitudes to influenza and COVID-19 vaccination

		Influenza vaccination				COVID-19 vaccination	COVID-19 vaccination
Age		I agree	I disagree	Age		I agree	I disagree
Up to 25	Count %	7 87,5%	1 12,5%	Up to 25	Count %	7 87,5%	1 12,5%
26-30	Count %	11 64,7%	6 35,3%	26-30	Count %	11 64,7%	6 35,3%
31-40	Count %	6 20,0%	24 80,0%	31-40	Count %	6 20,0%	24 80,0%
41-50	Count %	6 26,1%	17 73,9%	41-50	Count %	6 26,1%	17 73,9%
50-60	Count %	5 25,0%	15 75,0%	50-60	Count %	5 25,0%	15 75,0%
Total	Count %	35 35,7%	63 64,3%	98 100,0%	Total	Count %	35 35,7%

Discussion

The September increased number of coronavirus cases confirmed that the threat of a coronavirus epidemic is not taken lightly by the Slovak public even after half a year. The continued high level of disincentives to potentially risky activities, such as going to the public event or taking a plane trip on holiday, shows that people remain convinced of the importance of complying with measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. On the other hand, they are less careful in wearing masks in public places and wear masks only out of duty. Radková highlights the important role of non-profit sector to increase awareness about health risks, self-protection and public health measures in the context of COVID-19 and shows that the non-profit sector has a positive impact on the positively activate local community and volunteering activities to help vulnerable groups.⁴⁸⁶

The crisis highlights a sense of common group identity, solidarity, cooperation and adherence to standards within society. However, unless people perceive themselves as part of a group and identify with its goals, they are unlikely to back down from their individual interests. Research has shown that people prefer personal protection over collective protection, so masks began to be worn mostly to protect their own families, but only secondarily to protect public health. It was also possible to observe civic initiatives that brought people together to sew a mask for Roma settlements.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the discipline of the Slovak population in adhering to quarantine measures was repeatedly emphasized. In the research, we also focused on finding gen-

486 Libuša Radková, et al. *Dobrovoľníctvo a problémy súčasnej spoločnosti* (Fakulta zdravotníctva a sociálnej práce TU Trnava, SpoSolntE, Trenčín 2011). 44.

eral attitudes to the recommendations of the government and the crisis headquarters, which we followed on a scale from 1 strongly agree and up to 5 totally disagree in the statements in all circumstances I would follow the recommendations of the authorities. I followed only if I thought they made sense and I would follow the recommendations of the authorities even if I did not agree with them.

More than 60% of the Roma fully or earlier agreed with the statement that the responsibility of the individual in complying with the rules will help the country to successfully fight the pandemic. One third of Roma (36.2%) fully or earlier agreed with the statement that together we are able to fight the coronavirus. The importance of individual compliance with the rules was emphasized mainly by respondents older than 45 years (32.2%) and those with children (18.3%). On the other hand, a third of Roma felt that they were being manipulated by the government (39.8%) and that quarantine measures had not produced the positive expected results (57.2%) and they feel depressed about this situation.

Studies confirmed negative impact of quarantine on mental health and well-being at personal and Roma community level. Imposed mass quarantine applied by nationwide lockdown programs can produce mass hysteria, anxiety and distress, due to factors like sense of getting cornered and loss of control.⁴⁸⁷ Losing jobs makes people crazy and they feel like being lockdown to poverty, the frustration, depression and mental anguish has increased rates of psychological problems, they start to believe in negative perspective and that COVID-19 had threatened their existence.⁴⁸⁸

Study has shown that Roma people felt disoriented in the wage range of information. They were afraid of death caused by COVID-19 in combination with chronic disease, as the most Roma people over 50 years old suffer from chronic disease and diseases of civilization. Study⁴⁸⁹ reported a higher incidence of chronic diseases in the Roma population, especially diseases such as ischemic heart disease, high blood pressure, gastrointestinal diseases, diabetes, respiratory diseases, cancer, mental retardation and diabetes.

The health status of the Roma population is as unfavourable comparing to others. According to demographic forecasts, the average life expectancy is significantly shorter than in the rest of the population (in Slovakia the difference is 7.5 years for men and 6.6 years for women to the detriment of the Roma).⁴⁹⁰

In March 2020, Mortality rates due to coronavirus depend on the age of patients, underlying risk factors, and the denominator definition – hospitalized cases, all symptomatic cases, only moderate to severe cases, etc. In a study of adult patients (mean age 59.7 y; 40% with chronic illnesses) with SARS-CoV-2 pneumonia admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU), 61.5% died

within 28 days⁴⁹¹. Mortality is highest in older persons, with a median age of 59–75 years in China⁴⁹².

The COVID-19 pandemic is related with high overall mortality mainly in high risk and vulnerable groups such as elderly and multiple organ failure patients.⁴⁹³ The Roma people did not feel threatened by the coronavirus because they believed in God's protection and the correctness of government measures (17.3%).

We estimated an R0 of approximately 2.2, meaning that on average each patient has been spreading infection to 2.2 other people. In general, an epidemic will increase as long as R0 is greater than 1, and control measures aim to reduce the reproductive number to less than 1.⁴⁹⁴

With the declining number of confirmed cases of coronavirus in May 2020, the number of those willing to restrict their personal freedoms also declined. They agreed that the government had no right to restrict personal liberty even if it was in the public interest. As in April and May 2020, the degree of willingness to comply with the measures and recommendations of the authorities was related to satisfaction with the government's actions and trust in the government, which was at a good level at the time of the emergency. More than a third of the Roma said they wore the masks because they trusted the measures of the Central crisis staff. However, trust in authority is not immutable, it can be lost or gained depending on how leaders serve the group they lead and how they contribute to the fulfilment of its goals. Trusting is also linked to citizens' willingness to be heard. The research has found that 43.9% did not trust the upcoming vaccines and they would refuse the vaccinations against coronavirus.

COVID-19 not only affects the economy and the global market, but also the lives of many families who find themselves in difficult life situations. The specific cases are foster care families. There are more than 7.000 children in institutional care that has been affected by emergency actions due to epidemic.⁴⁹⁵ The research has shown there were family and partnerships problems occurred during the emergency actions by the government and Central Crisis Staff as people were staying at home, learning and teaching children at home or lost their jobs due economy crisis.

People with high health anxiety also tend to engage in a variety of other maladaptive safety behaviours. In the context of viral outbreaks, this may include excessive hand washing, social withdrawal, and panic purchasing. It is noteworthy that all of these behaviours are consistent with public health recommendations for managing epidemics and pandemics; however, in the case of those with high health anxiety, they are taken to an extreme that can have negative consequences to the individual and their community. For example, the false sense of urgency for various products needed for self-quarantine may lead the health anxious person to over-spend on stockpiling unneeded resources (e.g., hand sanitizer, medications, protective masks). This can have a rippling detrimental impact on a community in

491 Xiaobo Yang, et al., "Clinical course and outcomes of critically ill patients with SARS-CoV-2 pneumonia in Wuhan, China: a single-centered, retrospective, observational study," *Lancet Respiratory Medicine* 8, no. 5, (May 01, 2020): 475-481. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600\(20\)30079-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600(20)30079-5)

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489 I. Bertková and D. Petrášová, "Chorobnosť ako jeden z ukazovateľov zdravotného stavu rómskej populácie," *Slovenský lekár* 14, no. 11-12, (2004): 332-334.

490 Štefánia Moricová and Miroslava Raučínová, "Rómsky asistent a spolupráca v komunite," *Časopis Slovenská zdravotnícka univerzita* no. 4, (2006): 31-34.

need of these resources for other purposes, including normal medical care.⁴⁹⁶ In Slovakia, we could see the irrational behaviour of Roma people who bought enormous package of food, disinfections, alcohol and cigarettes in the first wave of the epidemic COVID-19 to make the stock in times of crisis. One Roma family bought 50 kg flour, 40 l milk or 20 l disinfections compared to whose Roma families in poverty that could not afford to buy amount of food, they were waiting for protective masks or hygienic packs as they lost the possibilities to earn money or live in the edge of the poverty.

Effects such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have been reported, symptoms of which have been positively associated with the duration of quarantine⁴⁹⁷. Post quarantine psychological effects may include significant socioeconomic distress and psychological symptoms due to financial losses⁴⁹⁸. Another very important aspect is stigmatization and societal rejection regarding the quarantined cordon in forms of discrimination, suspicion and avoidance by neighbourhood, insecurity regarding properties, workplace prejudice, and withdrawal from social events even after containment of epidemics. Mass fear of COVID-19, rightly termed as "coronaphobia"⁴⁹⁹, is likely due to the uncertain character and unpredictable course of the disease, intolerance of uncertainty, perceived risk of acquiring the infection etc and can generate negative psychological responses including maladaptive behaviors, emotional distress and avoidance reaction among common people.⁵⁰⁰

China study involving 53,000 respondents reported that 35% of the study-population experienced psychological distress ranging from mild to moderate (>29%) and severe (>5%) levels; using the COVID-19 Peritraumatic Distress Index (CPDI) score, which incorporates information namely 'frequency of anxiety, depression, specific phobias, cognitive change, avoidance and compulsive behavior, physical symptoms and loss of social functioning' etc⁵⁰¹. Psychological distress levels have also been influenced by the huge amount of information presented in social media.

Research has shown negative aspects of quarantine due to spreading of COVID-19 reported by government in April-May 2020. In the general Roma people have a lack of health and prevention awareness, their physical activity is very low and, in the quarantine, they used to life unhealthy lifestyle without sports, physical activity or rehabilitation or active citizenship. The Roma people agreed that they put on weight, spent free time passively and did not care about food nutrition. On the other hand rehabilitation can be prevention to disease and it is necessary for good health and well-being.⁵⁰² The prevention plays key role for the people at any age, especially for the elderly, whose mobility is limited, to keep good health

496 Gordon J.G. Asmundson and Taylor Steven, "Coronaphobia: Fear and the 2019-nCoV outbreak," *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 70, (March 2020): 102196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2020.102196>

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501 Jianyin Qiu, et al., "A nationwide survey of psychological distress among Chinese people in the COVID-19 epidemic: implications and policy recommendations," *General Psychiatry* 2020;33:e100213. doi: 10.1136/gpsych-2020-100213

502 Jerzy Rottermund and Janusz Nowotny, *Terapia zajęciowa w rehabilitacji medycznej Podręcznik dla studentów i terapeutów* (wyd. 2, Bielsko-Biała: Alfa-Medica, 2016).

and physical activity prevent immunity collapse.⁵⁰³ Other negative aspects were shown in negative feelings, increased number of depressions and anxiety in Roma settlement linked with the quarantine, loss of income and lack of possibilities to get a job or no critical thinking about published information about COVID-19 in the media.

The COVID-19 epidemic causes negative psychological deprivation not only Roma people, but especially affect people in frontline. Low levels of health anxiety can also have negative impacts on health behaviour⁵⁰⁴, including public health strategies for managing epidemics and pandemics. To illustrate, during the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, people who viewed themselves as having a low risk of infection were less likely to wash their hands⁵⁰⁵ and less likely to seek vaccination⁵⁰⁶. People who view themselves as being at low risk of infection will also be unlikely to change their social behaviour and disregard recommendations for social distancing. Failure to adhere to even the simplest recommendations, such as washing one's hands and social distancing, can have significant negative impacts on any efforts to mitigate viral spread.⁵⁰⁷

The strongest predictor of current general distress, as assessed with the PHQ-4, was beliefs about the dangerousness of COVID-19 (medium effect) followed by age (small effect) and past year mental health condition (small effect). Likewise, the strongest predictor of distress during self-isolation was beliefs about the dangerousness of COVID-19 (strong effect) followed by age (small effect) and past year mental health condition (small effect). It is plausible that those who feel COVID-19 poses the greatest threat to themselves and their loved ones (i.e., over-responders) are generally anxious in the face of the many unknowns associated with the pandemic, worry that things are out of their control, and are specifically distressed by the process of self-isolation.⁵⁰⁸

The results have shown that the situation of Roma people in Slovakia is getting worst and their living conditions are decreasing, not only due to spreading epidemic of COVID-19, but also due to lack of a sustainable social system for people on the margins of society to lead life in good standards. The positive aspect of the declaration of an emergency due epidemic had an impact on the more active involvement of the civil sector in helping others especially for the elderly and people in Roma settlements.

The perception of the situation during the spread of COVID-19 was very difficult and problematic not only for the marginalized Roma community, but also for the social workers themselves. They had to deal with various complex situations that occurred during the day, but which they had to anticipate both on the basis of their own experience with the Roma community and on

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504 Gordon J.G. Asmundson et al., "Should health anxiety be carved at the joint? A look at the health anxiety construct using factor mixture modeling in a non-clinical sample," *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 26, 1, (January 2012): 246-251 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2011.11.009>

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the basis of experiences that were current in a pandemic situation. Through an interview with a social worker, which we conducted in the Roma community in Žehra, we identified a number of codes, which we dimensioned into categories named by me. Based on these findings, we can say that together, on the basis of the guidelines, but also the amount of patience, explanation and especially the support of the population, the pandemic situation in the first wave was managed at an excellent level.

Spreading epidemic COVID-19 has achieved global aspects and it is related to disinformation and negative emotions that Roma people are not able to selected and negative consequences of the coronavirus directly or indirectly affect the way of Roma living, thinking and also their attitudes to future perspective.

Conclusion

This study points out if the emerging situation come up with infectious diseases, the actual behavior and perceived efficacy of protection measures have a great impact on their implementation in daily life, we have to be aware of diversity of population and Roma people, their attitudes to restrictions, health care and literacy. The study highlights that public trust is a crucial determinant of vaccination behavior and efficiency of prevention campaigns if the epidemic occurs. This also applies to the introduction of testing, restrictions or quarantine. Trust in state health institutions also predicted perceived efficacy of officially recommended protection measures (vaccinations against influenza or COVID-19, wearing a mask, keeping social distance or sneezing into the elbow), Roma people trust doctors (usually) but there is low trust in politics and public authorities, so it is important to know threat and vulnerability perceptions if we want them to follow protection measures.

Interestingly, the present results indicate a seemingly paradoxical finding in that both belief that the COVID-19 threat has been exaggerated and beliefs about the dangerousness of COVID-19 were linked to the disregard for social distancing, albeit with small effects.⁵⁰⁹

People who are more afraid of COVID-19 are more likely to experience anxiety and depression during the pandemic and they are more open to accept self-isolation, and are more likely to engage in restrictions and protection measures, on the other hand, the longer situation full of restrictions last, the people are less likely to follow them, especially Roma people have to share realistic beliefs about consequences of the disease, to encourage health recommendations regarding vaccination, proper social distancing or government restrictions due to the epidemic.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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KNOWLEDGE OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASE SURVEILLANCE AND NOTIFICATION BY COMMUNITY HEALTH VOLUNTEERS AND HEALTHCARE WORKERS BEFORE AND AFTER THE EDUCATIONAL TRAINING AS CRUCIAL TOOL IN COVID-19 OUTBREAK IN KWALE COUNTY, KENYA



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Abstract

Background: Reporting of communicable diseases in Kenya is mandatory within the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) system. Based on the qualitative analysis of notified data in the year 2015-2017 from selected health facilities in Matuga sub-county, Kwale county, Kenya, the training needs of community health volunteers and healthcare workers in the notification of communicable diseases were identified and trainings were implemented in accordance with national guideline and needs assessment evaluation. knowledge on communicable disease reporting by pre/post-test evaluation methods before and after the educational trainings.

Results: In the pre-test, community health volunteers (from the maximum possible score 28 points) received an average score of 17.0 points, which means average level of knowledge at 61%. For 78% of community health volunteers, this was a first training at all. After the training, there was a significant increase in average of points reached in the post-test, to 25.5 (p 0.021). Healthcare workers (from the maximum possible score 20 points) had an average score of 9.1 points in the pre-test, which means average level of knowledge at 46%. After the training, there was a significant increase in average of points reached in the post-test, to 17.0 points (p 0.036).

Conclusion: The present study's research demonstrated the necessity to achieve the expected outcome of the training's implementation to increase the knowledge and skills of community health volunteers and healthcare workers in disease reporting and improving the quality of surveillance in general. Based on this outcome, we can expect timely preventive measures in case of infectious disease outbreaks from existing and re-emerging threats (HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and sexually transmitted diseases), and especially from new diseases such as acute respiratory syndromes (SARS-CoV-2, the pathogen causing COVID-19) and viral haemorrhagic fevers.

Keywords: COVID-19. Surveillance. Community health volunteers. Healthcare workers. Kenya.

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Introduction

Communicable diseases are the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in Africa. A strong and effective surveillance system is critical for communicable disease control. A well-functioning surveillance system provides data useful for early warning, outbreak detection, following trends of endemic diseases to set priorities, and to plan and evaluate public health program. Disease surveillance is critical for public health since it provides essential information for control, prevention, and health care.⁵¹¹

To provide a framework for strengthening disease surveillance and response capacities in African countries, the World Health Organization Regional Headquarters for Africa developed Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) aimed at improving national surveillance and the laboratory system network. A major goal of IDSR is to strengthen district-level surveillance capacities for detecting, confirming and responding to priority diseases that afflict African communities. In the IDSR implementation framework, epidemiologic surveillance is linked with laboratory support in order to produce relevant information for taking public health actions.⁵¹²

The integrated disease approach to the surveillance of communicable disease envisages all surveillance activities in the country as a common public service, performed using similar structures, processes, personnel and other resources. These activities comprise of core surveillance function: case detection and registration, case confirmation (epidemiological and laboratory), data reporting and feedback, data analysis and interpretation, and a resulting action (outbreak investigations, appropriate case management, community prevention activities, programmatic adjustment). The support functions that enables effective surveillance are: the availability of appropriate surveillance standards and tools, training, supervision, communication, adequate and appropriate resources, and laboratory support.⁵¹³

Disease-specific guidelines provide robust recommendations to create laboratory networks but not always include guidance on how to organize, mobilize and integrated the essential resources, procedures, and policies for creating strong surveillance system with trained health workers.⁵¹⁴

Existence of poor health information tools and a shortage of skilled manpower affects the timely and accurate flow of surveillance information, impinging negatively on response to public health threats.⁵¹⁵ In the whole process of surveillance and data flow healthcare workers who make

511 WHO, "Disease and injury regional estimates for 2004-2008," accessed January 11, 2020, http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/estimates_regional_2004_2008/en/; WHO, Weekly epidemiological reports. 76, (2001): 9-16. accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.who.int/docstore/wer/>; J. Weinberg, "Surveillance and control of infectious diseases at local, national and international levels," *Clinical Microbiology and Infection* 11, supplement 1, (January 1 2005): 12-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-0691.2005.01083.x>

512 WHO Africa, "Technical guidelines for Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response in the WHO Africa Region," accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.hsd.org/?view&did=826527>; WHO, Regional Office for Africa, "Integrated Disease Surveillance in Africa: A Regional Strategy (1999-2003)," accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2017-06/ids-strat-99-03.pdf>

513 WHO, "Weekly epidemiological reports," 75 (2000): 1-8. <https://www.who.int/docstore/wer/>; WHO, "Communicable disease surveillance and response systems: Guide to monitoring and evaluating," accessed January 11, 2020, https://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/surveillance/WHO_CDS_EPR_LYO_2006_2.pdf?ua=1

514 Senait Kebede, et al, "Strengthening system for communicable disease surveillance: creating a laboratory network in Rwanda," *Health Research Policy and Systems* 9, 27, (24 June 2011): doi: 10.1186/1478-4505-9-27; John N. Nkengasong et al, "Strengthening laboratory services and systems in resource-poor countries," *American Journal of Clinical Pathology* 131, 6, (June 2009): 774.

515 Public Health Practise. "African one health e-surveillance initiate," accessed January 11, 2020, <http://publichealthpractice.com/>

the first contact with patients play a crucial role. Surveillance systems rely on the detection of communicable disease in the patients and disease notification.⁵¹⁶

The study objective was to find if there was a progress in level of knowledge after the educational trainings, which took place in 2017-2019, for community health volunteers and healthcare workers within Kwale county, Kenya.

Methods

This study was done in three phases: prephase based on needs assessment, trainings implementation phase, and data analysis phase.

a) Prephase- needs assessment

In 2015, we conducted a qualitative analysis of notified data from selected health facilities in Matuga sub-county, one of four sub-counties in Kwale county, Kenya. There were found such gaps in diseases notification as: time delays in reporting, duplicate cases notified and also errors in data completion, so reporting was not easy to understand. Then, needs assessment of community health volunteers and healthcare workers in communicable disease surveillance was conducted. The needs assessment took part in Matuga sub-county. As the data collection tools were used interviews and questionnaires (based on EpiSouth-net project questionnaire).⁵¹⁷ The aim of the questionnaires was to evaluate the level of community health volunteers and healthcare workers' knowledge on communicable disease reporting. The questionnaires were completed by a random sample of community health volunteers and by the health worker in facility responsible for reporting communicable diseases incidence. They were selected systematically and they all agreed to participate. The first author together with clinical officer from the Ministry of Health moderated the personal interviews and questionnaire completions due to translation into Swahili. Data for needs assessment were collected in all 21 health facilities in Matuga sub-county Kenya, in March 2015.

Then, in accordance with these findings, with Technical Guidelines for Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response in the African Region⁴ and focus group with sub-county surveillance coordinators and specifically by current epidemiological situation of communicable diseases, curriculum of two educational trainings was set.

b) Trainings implementation

Trainings were implemented in following order: Matuga sub-county (2017), Msambweni sub-county (2018), Lungalunga sub-county (2018) and Kinango sub-county (2019). Named sub-counties form Kwale county, one of 47 counties of Kenya republic.

First, there was a training for community health volunteers. The training was aimed at list of priority diseases (epidemic prone diseases and diseases targeted for elimination and eradication); disease symptoms, transmission and prevention; personal hygiene, hygiene of dwelling and sanitation; vaccinations campaigns; advocacy and communication methods. Facilitators

516 Dean T Jamison et al, *Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries* 2nd ed. (Washington (DC): The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank; New York: Oxford University Press; 2006) ; Michael G. Baker and Fidler, P. David, "Global Public Health Surveillance under New International Health Regulations," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 12, 7, (2006 July): 1058–1065. doi: 10.3201/eid1207.051497 ; Cécile Souty et al. "Improving disease incidence estimates in primary care surveillance systems," *Population Health Metrics* 12, 19 (26 July 2014) DOI: 10.1186/s12963-014-0019-8

517 C. Savalescu et al, "EpiSouth Project Report of Training Needs Assessment in Countries Participating in the Epi-South Project," accessed January 11, 2020, http://www.episouth.org/outputs/wp5/WP5-survey_Report_v_Fin.pdf.

used tools such as lectures, role model situations, individual and group assignments and field work. Training lasted 5 days. In Kenya, community health volunteers are organised into community units where a single unit consist of 10 volunteers with community health extension worker as a supervisor, mainly public health officer. We trained a total of 24 units: 2 units in Matuga sub-county, 7 units in Msambweni sub-county, 8 units in Lungalunga sub-county and 7 units in Kinango sub-county. It means 240 trained community health volunteers totally. For purpose of training sustainability, one community health extension worker per each unit was also trained. Because a community health extension worker can follow and supervise community health volunteers in appropriate way in the field after the training, when both sides have the same expert skills and knowledge.

Second, a training specifically for healthcare workers was implemented. The training was formed by two sessions. First session comprised of lectures, individual and group assignments focused on priority diseases and public health events, disease reporting, role of laboratory in surveillance, data analysis and interpretation, outbreak investigation, preparation to respond, communication of health risks. Second session was aimed at disease reporting by weekly, monthly and quarterly reporting tool meeting standard case definition. One healthcare worker per each health facility took part in the training. Totally, 123 healthcare workers have been trained, 21 from Matuga sub-county, 35 from Msambweni sub-county, 32 from Lungalunga sub-county and 35 from Kinango sub-county. Training was organised into 10 days.

c) Data analysis

We followed the level of community health volunteers and healthcare workers' knowledge on communicable disease reporting. The knowledge level was compared before and after the training by pre/post-test evaluation method. The same version of test was fulfilled at the beginning and the end of training. The test was formed by set of questions focusing on volunteers and workers' duties and roles in communicable disease surveillance and its data flow. In the test, maximum score for community health volunteers was 28 points and 20 points for healthcare workers. For the participants to be considered as successful in the training, they were expected to have a minimum of 75% of the score points in the post-test. We used descriptive methods and McNemar's test to find significant difference in proportions of community health volunteers and healthcare workers with level of adequate knowledge before and after the training. Level of significance was set as p-value less than 0.05 in R program, version 3.4.3 2017.

Results

Knowledge level of community health volunteers before and after the training

The study group consisted of a total of 240 (100%) community health volunteers. From all community volunteers, 64% were women and 36% were men, with an average age of 53.7± 2.4 years. Primary education level completed 72%, secondary education level 28% and none of them completed higher level such as certificate, diploma or university degree. In the pre-test, community health volunteers (from the maximum possible score 28 points, 100%) received an average score of 17.0 points, which means average level of knowledge at 61%. The maximum score was 22.0 points (86% of knowledge) and the lowest score was 4.5 points (16% of knowledge). In this evaluation, 9% of community health volunteers reached level knowledge of 75% which was set as a level of minimum skills for field work. None of the community health volunteers demonstrated communicable disease surveillance knowledge at the level of 100% before the training. For 78% of community health volunteers, this was the first training they have ever had on disease surveillance.

After the training, there was a significant increase in average of points reached in the post-test, to 25.5 (p 0.021). We also found a significant increase in proportion of community health volunteers who achieved knowledge level of 75% after the training (72%) compared to 9% before the training by McNemar's test (p 0.001) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Knowledge level of community health volunteers before and after the training, n=240.

Level of knowledge	before the training	after the training	statistical significance
average	17.0± 6.3 points	25.5± 2.1 points	p .021; t -10.820
range	4.5- 22.0 points	17.0- 28.0 points	
75% knowledge level reached	9% (21)	72% (173)	p .001; χ ² 13.821

p- p value; t value of paired t-test; χ² value of McNemar's test.

When assessing challenges in community health volunteer's knowledge in disease surveillance before the training, we found following results. Out of total community health volunteers, 62% were not familiar with the list of priority diseases which are targeted for elimination and eradication in Kenya as well as those diseases which are epidemic prone. Also 64% were not sure about each disease symptom and how to recognize individual infectious disease by its symptom when seeing a suspected case. In close connection with previous finding, 67% community health volunteers were not clearly sure about disease transmission and communicable disease prevention, especially in terms of vector-borne diseases. Vaccine schedule for children and adults in Kenya and the list of vaccine preventable diseases were the most severe challenge (in 78%). Community health baseline was challenge for 48% and 83% were not able to provide advocacy in terms of critical situation during a real field work, especially in these two cases- seeking for a medical help in a natural healer (so called "shaman") and in case when there is a sick person who needs to be transferred to a health facility but family cannot afford to pay a travel fee.

After the training, community health volunteers reported significant improvement in all challenge areas (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Challenges of community health volunteers in disease surveillance and notification before and after the training, n=240.

Challenge areas	before the training	after the training	statistical significance
list of priority diseases	62% (149)	11% (26)	p .001; χ ² 36.111
disease symptoms	64% (154)	9% (22)	p .001; χ ² 37.926
disease transmission	67% (161)	13% (31)	p .005; χ ² 20.945
vaccine schedule	78% (188)	11% (26)	p .05; χ ² 8.667
community health	48% (115)	16% (38)	p .001; χ ² 46.436
advocacy techniques	83% (199)	26% (62)	p .05; χ ² 4.281

p- p value; χ² value of McNemar's test.

Knowledge level of healthcare workers before and after the training

The study group consisted in total of 123 (100%) healthcare workers. Out of total number, 55% were men and 45% were women. From all healthcare workers responsible for diseases notification ("IDSR focal person position") in the health facilities, 55% of them worked as a nurse, 25% as a clinical officer and 20% worked as a public health officer. The grade of a certification was achieved by 35% with the field of nursing or community health, 20% achieved specialized diploma and 45% achieved university bachelor degree from public health or clinical medicine.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the average pre-test score of healthcare workers (from the maximum possible score 20 points, 100%) was 9.1 points, which means the average level of knowledge at 46%. The maximum score was 14.0 points (70% of knowledge) and the lowest score was 6.0 points (30% of knowledge). In this evaluation, 6% of healthcare workers reached level knowledge of 75% which was set as a level of adequate skills for field work. Again, none of the healthcare workers demonstrated knowledge of communicable disease surveillance at the level of 100% before the training.

After the training, there was a significant increase in average of points reached in the post-test, to 17.0 points (p 0.036). We also found a significant difference in proportion of healthcare workers who achieved knowledge level of 75% before the training (6%) and after the training (67%) by McNemar's test (p 0.016).

Figure 3: Knowledge level of healthcare workers before and after the training, n=123.

Level of knowledge	before the training	after the training	statistical significance
average	9.1± 4.1 points	17.0± 3.1 points	p .036; t -12.320
range	6.0- 14.0 points	17.0- 20.0 points	
75% knowledge level reached	6% (7)	67% (88)	p .016; χ ² 5.838

p- p value; t value of paired t-test; χ² value of McNemar's test.

One of study aims was to follow changes in healthcare workers' knowledge and skills in disease reporting before and after the training. As illustrated in Figure 4, 11% of healthcare workers were not able to identify a list of mandatory diseases, it means which are targeted for elimination and eradication in Kenya, which are epidemic prone and which are obligatory for reporting and 38% of them were able to answer partly correct. After the training, there was significant change to 93% of workers who answered fully correctly the list mandatory diseases (p 0.006).

Out of total number of healthcare workers, 19% were not at all while 37% were only partly able to define standard case definition of mandatory diseases before the training. This was one of the most difficult tasks for healthcare workers before the training. In this area, we found significant improvement after the training (to 89%) who were fully able to define standard case definitions (p 0.001).

Workers, 9% were not at all sure while 22% were only partly sure about time to send the weekly, monthly and quarterly reporting forms and about data entry and fulfilling the reporting tools before the training. After the training, 98% were fully able to describe using of reporting forms correctly (p 0.001).

Protocol of outbreak detection (whether there is a reporting tool for outbreak detection and the way how to use the protocol in specific conditions) were not able to define 44% and 26% only partly before the training. Healthcare workers (81%) were able fully correctly answer about the protocol for outbreak detection after the training (p 0.043).

Figure 4: Healthcare workers' knowledge of disease reporting before and after the training, n=123.

	before the training	after the training	statistical significance
List of mandatory diseases			
not correct	11% (14)	0% (0)	p .006; χ^2 16.051
partly correct	38% (47)	7% (9)	
fully correct answer	51% (62)	93% (114)	
Familiar with standard case definitions			
not correct	19% (23)	0% (0)	p .001; χ^2 46.158
partly correct	37% (46)	11% (14)	
fully correct answer	44% (54)	89% (109)	
Reporting forms using			
not correct	9% (11)	0% (0)	p .001; χ^2 42.556
partly correct	22% (27)	2% (3)	
fully correct answer	69% (85)	98% (120)	
Protocol of outbreak detection			
not correct	44% (54)	7% (9)	p .043; χ^2 10.448
partly correct	26% (32)	12% (14)	
fully correct answer	30% (37)	81% (100)	

p- p value; χ^2 value of McNemar's test.

As showed in Figure 5, 38% of healthcare workers were unable while 40% were partly able to describe the process of reporting and its individual steps. After the training, there was significant decrease in these proportion to 12% and 19%. Data analysis were not clear at all to 56% and partly to 28% healthcare workers before the training. To define epidemic thresholds with their alert and action level for mandatory diseases were not able to answer correctly at all 63% of healthcare workers and 14% only partly before the training. After the training, there was a decrease to 17% in those healthcare workers who were not able to answer correctly. In terms of priorities and objectives of the surveillance system, 94% were able to answer partly correctly and 6% fully correctly before the training. After the training, we found out significant change in the proportion of healthcare workers who were able to answer fully correctly to 28%. Before the training, 72% of workers knew the surveillance contribution to public health and the reasons they should do reporting tasks partly correct and 11% knew this area fully correctly. Out of total number after the training, 23% knew this area fully correctly.

Figure 5: Healthcare workers' knowledge of surveillance system before and after the training, n=123.

	before the training	after the training	statistical significance
Process of reporting			
not correct	38% (46)	12% (15)	p .018; χ^2 5.660
partly correct	40% (50)	19% (23)	
fully correct answer	22% (27)	69% (85)	
Data analysis process			
not correct	56% (69)	38% (47)	p .414; χ^2 0.668
partly correct	28% (34)	31% (38)	
fully correct answer	16% (20)	31% (38)	
Epidemic thresholds			
not correct	63% (78)	17% (21)	p .628; χ^2 0.478
partly correct	14% (17)	55% (68)	
fully correct answer	23% (28)	28% (34)	
Surveillance objective and priorities			
not correct	0% (0)	0% (0)	p .001; χ^2 70.412
partly correct	94% (116)	72% (89)	
fully correct answer	6% (7)	28% (34)	
Surveillance contribution to public health			
not correct	17% (21)	3% (4)	p .078; χ^2 10.782
partly correct	72% (89)	74% (91)	
fully correct answer	11% (13)	23% (28)	

p- p value; χ^2 value of McNemar's test.

Discussion

Surveillance of infectious diseases is fundamental to public health decision-making and practice. Surveillance data are crucial for monitoring the health status of populations, detecting diseases and triggering action to prevent illness, and containing public health issues.⁵¹⁸ Most traditional global disease surveillance systems target specific diseases, infrastructure and support is relatively weak for the more difficult tracking emerging and re-emerging diseases. This is true especially in low-income countries, where human and material resources do not cover even routine surveillance tasks.⁵¹⁹

In Kenya, reporting of communicable diseases is mandatory within the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response for 36 public health conditions. The responsible person for diseases notification is a staff worker in charge of the health facility (clinical officer, public health officer or nurse) in the scope of individual health facilities to sub-county coordinator. Reporting is set to be done weekly, monthly and in the case of epidemic within IDSR technical guidelines by using tools: forms of the IDSR system and of the Ministry of Health forms.⁵²⁰

518 "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Developing Surveillance and Health Information Systems," accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/countries/kenya/what/surveillance.htm>

519 "Improving infectious diseases surveillance. Bulletin of atomic scientists," accessed January 11, 2020, <https://thebulletin.org/2008/04/improving-infectious-disease-surveillance-2/>

520 "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Developing Surveillance and Health Information Systems," accessed January 11, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/countries/kenya/what/surveillance.htm>

The challenges of the surveillance system in Kenya relate to the epidemic of cholera, measles, viral haemorrhagic fevers, yellow fever, influenza, malaria, and tuberculosis which are also leading causes of deaths. Main challenges for surveillance system improvement are as follows: healthcare staff knowledge and dedication to reporting, weak reporting and communication system from health facilities to sub-counties surveillance units, diagnosis capacity and confirmation, lack of quarantine and adequate isolation facilities^{18,19}.

Personnel that contribute to the national surveillance and response system are the most valuable part of the system. Each individual plays an essential role in ensuring that the system is functional, appropriate, timely and responsive. Experience has shown that the human factor is more important than the design of surveillance system.⁵²¹

One of results of this study indicates that 78% of community health volunteers carry out notifications for health facilities without any appropriate surveillance training. There was a similar situation found from an assessment of core activities in the IDSR system in Nigeria. Out of total, 95.5% of community health volunteers responsible for diseases notification in communities never participated in any surveillance training.⁵²²

Aim of our study was to determine if there was progress in level of knowledge before and after educational training in surveillance for community health volunteers and healthcare workers in Kwale county. Training took place in 2017-2019 gradually in all 4 sub-counties of Kwale county and separately for community health volunteers and healthcare workers.

Statistically significant increase (p 0.021) was observed in average of points reached in the post-test after training in compare with the knowledge level before training in the pre-test. Knowledge level of 75% significant increased (p 0.001) from 9% before training to 72% of community health volunteers after the training. A similar finding was observed in Nigeria by Bawa (2005), where there was a statistically significant difference in the mean of pre/post-test (p<0.05) before and after surveillance training. He observed an increase of awareness of disease surveillance reports from 35.6% at the baseline to 91.9% after training.⁵²³ This increase in knowledge level indicates that training structure was well established included adequate allotted training time, facilitators were knowledgeable of surveillance topics and training materials were appropriate for all participants. In our study, challenges of community health volunteers in disease surveillance and notification significantly reduced especially in knowledge of reportable diseases (p 0.001) and case identification practice (disease symptoms p 0.001 and disease transmission p 0.005). In Malawi and Uganda⁵²⁴ at the community level, participants of the surveillance training

significantly improved in the same areas as in our study. Mentioned studies indicate that lack of knowledge seems to be a major challenge of disease recognition and notification.

Healthcare workers according to results of our study significantly increased knowledge level in the post-test (p 0.036). Statistical significance (p<0.05) was set in similar study in Nigeria where was evaluated effect of training on knowledge of IDSR for healthcare workers²⁵. One of our study's aims was to find out the level of healthcare workers knowledge about disease reporting. We found that 31% of workers were not sure which reporting tool they were required to use when reporting. They are usually confused if they should use the Ministry of Health forms or the IDSR forms, or both. A similar situation was revealed in Nigeria; only 33% of health care workers were aware of IDSR forms. Generally, knowledge about using forms of the IDSR system is very low, in spite of the fact that they are available at each health facility.⁵²⁵ Seventy percent of healthcare workers did not know correctly whether there is a reporting tool for outbreak detection, and how to use the protocol for data entry processes and reporting to the relevant authority. Phalkey et al. (2013) found that 59% of healthcare workers understood the situation of outbreak detection and reporting with appropriate tools.⁵²⁶ Healthcare workers (78%) were not able to describe properly the process of reporting, 28% understood partly correct the process of data analysis, and 94% were partly correct familiar with surveillance objectives and priority diseases which were set to be eradicated. In a similar study with main aim to evaluate surveillance system in India, 24% of healthcare workers were able to do basic data analysis and only 6% were able to calculate incidence and prevalence of diseases.⁵²⁷

The reason for significant improvement of disease reporting and surveillance system knowledge level in healthcare workers was widespread of information sources among healthcare workers, adequate surveillance materials, practical exercises with reporting tools (communication technology) and exercises in statistical data analysis to understand how to work with collected data.

There are some limits in our study. Authors of this study with sub-county surveillance coordinators saw a need of post-training supervision in the health facilities to discuss further real field problems of community health volunteers and healthcare workers in diseases notification and reporting. In terms of community health volunteers, we were not able to cover training costs for all community health units, so only some of units were selected and involved in the training. Therefore, we cannot generalize our study results. We did not conduct comparison between trained and the untrained community health volunteers.

521 Jean-Paul Chretien and Sheri Lewis Happel, "Electronic public health surveillance in developing settings: meeting summary," *BMC Proceedings* 2 (Suppl 3): S1 (14 November 2008) doi: 10.1186/1753-6561-2-s3-s1 ; Tenser Goodwin Veenema and Joanna Töke, "Early detection and surveillance for bio preparedness and emerging infectious diseases," *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing* 11, 1:3. (2006 Jan 31) https://ojin.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/ANAMarketplace/ANAPeriodicals/OJIN/TableofContents/Volume112006/No1Jan06/tpc29_2c16059.aspx

522 Samuel Bitrus Bawa and E.A. A. Olumide, "The effect of training on the reporting of notifiable diseases among health workers in Yobe State, Nigeria," *The Nigerian postgraduate medical journal* 12, 1, (2005): 1-5. accessed January 11, 2020, <https://europepmc.org/article/med/15827587>

523 Bawa and Olumide, "The effect of training," accessed January 11, 2020, <https://europepmc.org/article/med/15827587>

524 Tsung-Shu Joseph Wu et al, "Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) in Malawi: Implementation gaps and challenges for timely alert," *PLoS One* 13, 11, (2018 Nov 29.) <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0200858> ; Lydia Nakiire et al, "Healthcare workers' experiences regarding scaling up of training on integrated disease surveillance and response (IDSR) in Uganda, 2016: cross sectional qualitative study," *BMC Health Services Research* 19, 1, 117 (13 February 2019) doi: 10.1186/s12913-019-3923-6

525 Chinomso C. Nnebue et al, "Awareness and knowledge of disease surveillance and notification by healthcare workers and availability of facility records in Anambra state, Nigeria," *Nigerian Medical Journal* 53, 4, (2012 Oct-Dec): 220-225 doi: 10.4103/0300-1652.107557

526 Revati K Phalkey et al, "Assessment of the core and support functions of the Integrated Disease Surveillance system in Maharashtra, India," *BMC Public Health* 13, 575, (13 June 2013) DOI: 10.1186/1471-2458-13-575

527 Anindya Sekhar Bose et al, "Case Based Measles Surveillance in Pune: Evidence to Guide Current and Future Measles Control and Elimination Efforts in India," *PLoS One* 9, 10, (October 7, 2014) <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0108786>

Conclusion

We conclude that the training increased knowledge and skills of community health volunteers and healthcare workers in disease surveillance, reporting data and using communication technology as a condition for providing information in timely and efficient way for all surveillance stakeholders. Increase knowledge level of communicable disease occurrence and spread will be used not only in already existing threats to public, but also as a universal and versatile tool to cover future threats such as acute respiratory syndromes as COVID-19 or viral haemorrhagic fevers. Participants from our study expressed the need for on-going education and training in disease surveillance. The priorities for education training include computer knowledge, data entry and reporting with using appropriate reporting tools and forms according to the standard case definition. The following part of the training could be general surveillance system introduction and also its contribution to public health. To compare, in a study conducted in Morocco, physicians and nurses expressed the following gaps they felt in disease notification: data analysis, outbreak detection, and surveillance system working and computer skills²⁹. The health workforce is one of the key building blocks for strengthening health systems. It is very important to take surveillance staff views and experiences into account, since listening to their opinions can enhance their motivation for better performance within the system, and can provide them with appropriate training, feedback and motivation to work.⁵²⁸30.

In our study, we evaluated the most recommended form of intervention from World Health Organisation in terms of increasing public health capacities. After implementation the best practise for enhancing public health system, community health volunteers and healthcare workers provided better quality of reported data. This is crucial premise to cover public health threats. However, we recommend to further research of factors influencing level of health staff knowledge such as: previous trainings by different organisations, place of work (to compare Coastal province with Central Kenya).

Monitoring of health staff knowledge followed by appropriate form of intervention should be an ongoing process with developing of national standardised practise on regular basis.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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528 Robin A Weiss and McMichael, J Anthony, "Social and environmental risk factors in the emergence of infectious diseases," *Nature Medicine* 10(12 Suppl):S70-6. (December 2004) DOI: 10.1038/nm1150

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON THE LABOUR MARKET AND GENDER SEGREGATION WITH REGARD TO HELPING PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL SERVICES



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Abstract

Background: Gender segregation is a prevailing feature of European labour markets, which has led to the ratification of European policy action plans addressing labour market desegregation. Gender inequality is justified by arguments claiming that men and women tend to work in different occupations with different salary levels. The contribution provides an overview of the persistent gender segregation in the labour market in regards to both job positions and financial compensation.

Methods: The main method employed within the theoretical framework was the analysis of the situation in the labour market as regards gender segregation. Mapping was employed as a quantitative research strategy, using a questionnaire as the main tool for obtaining information in three fields, namely: the perception of male and female roles in society, labour-market prospects, and financial compensation. The aim of the questionnaire survey was to find out the respondents' views on gender segregation in everyday family life, and on integration in the labour market.

Results: The division of labour is perceived as a natural feature of society that differentiates the roles of men and women in various areas of social life. Slovakia, as a small country in Central Europe, represents an environment characterised by an ongoing transformation of its economy and market economy but, as a result of COVID-19, the process of catching up with the most developed economies has been interrupted. The pandemic slowed down labour markets in these economies as well, resulting in a significant disparity between labour and labour supply. This discrepancy can also lead to gender segregation as a result of the very low creation of new jobs. The results of the quantitative research, which took place prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, present the respondents' opinions on the status of men and women in the labour market. The univariate analysis of a sample of 243 respondents aged 18–60, employed as helping professionals in the field of social services living in Eastern Slovakia, confirmed having noticed gender segregation in several areas of family and working life.

Conclusion: The current situation declaring gender discrepancy in labour-market prospects and financial compensation paves the way for a broader dialogue on the topic of gender equality, which is also supported by the document drawn up by the Council of Europe entitled Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. The results of the survey also pointed out persistent gender inequalities in terms of wage and women's labour-market prospects in the field of social services.

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New forms of work arrangements and working time should be accompanied by a wide range of social and pro-family measures supporting both men and women. It is clear that, during the ongoing epidemiological crisis and the accompanying economic crisis caused by COVID-19, the realisation of the principle of gender equality in all areas will be a major challenge not only for government agencies but also for trade unions and professional organisations representing female-dominated occupations.

The present study also opens the door for thought-provoking scientific and professional reflections in the field of gender segregation in the labour market for the general international scientific and professional public.

Keywords: COVID-19. Gender Equality. Gender Segregation. Equal Opportunities. Labour Market.

Introduction

There is currently a great deal of scientific evidence that the disparities between men and women are caused by many differences of a natural character.⁵³⁰ However, we can only view them in a positive light if they complement each other and benefit the needs of individuals, their families and the development of the common good, but only if they do not discriminate against either gender.⁵³¹ Likewise, the area of application and field of respect for human rights requires that everyone be equal before the law, and even in the process of integration in the labour market. In spite of these facts, however, it is possible to notice gender-based inequalities in the labour market. Therefore, these inequalities provided the incentive for a specific study written by the authors of the article dealing with the issue of gender segregation in the labour market. Research shows that the Slovak environment has its own characteristics and circumstances that may currently be affecting the solution to this problem, including the real, ongoing pandemic and its effects on the labour market, the availability of job positions, and their financial compensation. As part of its research, the present study also gives room to the specific area of opinions expressed by one of the helping professions on the issue at hand.

Specific aspects

The gender-based division of labour is perceived as a natural feature of society that differentiates the roles of men and women in various areas of social life, and it is necessary to accept this fact. Nevertheless, the ever-increasing industrialisation, computerisation and automation of many, if not all, forms of occupation allow each individual to choose a job not only on the basis of traditions, their place of residence, or the possibilities under the current situation (for example, the impact of the current pandemic on both social and economic life), but also based on their own specific interests and their right to choose their occupation and employment.⁵³² The aforementioned influences or conditions need to be monitored, but also evaluated and implemented into labour market policies and measures.

530 See: Róbert Lapko, *Family and marriage in the book of Tobit: sociological and anthropological aspects* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Karmelitów Bosych, 2011); See: Róbert, Lapko, Worthy, Edmund, *The good news of the family. Theological and pastoral applications* (Brno: Tribun EU, 2017).

531 See: Juraj Feník, Róbert Lapko. "Vino zachované až na túto chvíľu: analýza a návrh prekladu Jn 2,10," *Slavica Slovaca* 54, no. 2, (2019): 142–148.

532 See: FRA. European union agency for fundamental rights, "EU Charter of Fundamental Rights," <https://fra.europa.eu/sk/eu-charter/article/15-slobodna-volba-povolania-pravo-na-pracu>; See: *Zákon č. 311/2001 Z. z. Zákonník práce v znení zmien a doplnkov.*

In the Slovak environment specifically, the fact that the Slovak economy is still undergoing restructuring also has a negative impact on the whole issue. The process of gender equality in the labour market is also influenced by the political and ethical reconstruction of public life. The society is constantly struggling with the remnants of a post-socialist understanding of power, professing that politicians and the related economic structures are allowed to carry out activities that regular citizens are prohibited from, all with impunity and in the spirit of democracy. In Slovak society, which has for years been detached from the natural social development of relationships and social roles, the state of gender norms and roles is viewed as a certain protection of personal rights and freedoms of individuals from coercive and totalitarian forms of indoctrination, socialisation, and education.

The perception of the impacts affecting the labour market and gender segregation in the Slovak labour market is also influenced by the situation and impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Although the pandemic affects all economies and countries, the fact remains that each country has been impacted idiosyncratically, due not only to the economic strength and social stratification of people in the labour market but also because of the cultural and ethical differences.

The situation in Slovakia in the midst of the pandemic measures implemented by the government is specific due to the fact that the measures have disproportionately affected various areas of the economy and, as a result, the labour market. Despite the closure of many large establishments and strong areas of the economy with diverse employment opportunities for men and women, the fact remains that the areas and segments of the economy and the labour market dominated by women have been the most exposed and burdened. These areas include health care⁵³³, social services, wholesale and retail establishments, and grocery stores. In these work areas, the companies put the highest pressure on female employees, in the vast majority of cases. As the history of the Slovak nation shows, and as is confirmed by the current pandemic-related state of emergency, it is necessary to have the situation in the given work area under control at all times. The labour market itself, as well as the conditions of the state of emergency in the society, can unequally affect the employment of men and women, their workload, and their remuneration level regarding wages or deserved benefits within the wage policy framework.

Official Requirements

Gender equality is an important aspect of all policy areas at national, European, and international levels around the world, and in the United Nations.

At the international level, the gender perspective began to apply after 1995, when it was included in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Its application is binding for all UN Member States.⁵³⁴ The importance of this new approach was also confirmed at the conference entitled *Gender Mainstreaming: A Step into the 21st Century* that took place in Athens in 1999 and was organised by the Council of Europe. It emphasises the importance of this method, which is perceived as a new approach to the ap-

533 As regards the healthcare sector, it is worth noting that this is precisely an area that is female-dominated, particularly in the positions of healthcare professionals and nurses. This is evidenced by many Slovak statistics, both past and present. More detailed information can be found in the documents, statistics, and yearbooks of the National Health Information Centre in Slovakia. (See: *Health Statistical Yearbook, 2018*. http://www.nczisk.sk/Documents/rocniky/2018/Zdravotnicka_rocnika_Slovenskej_republiky_2018.pdf)

534 See: Marcela Ondeková and Očenašová, Zuzana, *Čo ste chceli vedieť o rode a nemali ste sa koho opýtať. Príručka pre rozvojovú prax* (Bratislava: Nadácia Pontis, 2012).

plication of the principle of equality in social life. Practically speaking, gender equality means “gender mainstreaming”.⁵³⁵

At the level of the Council of Europe, the new Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 has been adopted, identifying working methods, key actors and partners, as well as the measures necessary to enhance the visibility of results. The Informal Meeting of Ministers for Gender Equality in October 2018 adopted a declaration entitled *Gender Equality as a Priority of the European Union today and in the future*⁵³⁶ aimed at reasserting the principle of gender equality as a priority of the European Union.

Several authors argue that EU documents show lower participation of women in the labour market compared to men in all EU countries, and the common feature of successful countries is their ability to fully use the potential and talent of the entire working age population to meet the economic growth needs of their respective country.⁵³⁷ The European Union considers gender segregation to be a problem and is, therefore, implementing measures to reduce both types of segregation, the so-called desegregation of the labour market.⁵³⁸

All international agreements and measures apply to Slovakia. In connection with its membership in the European Union, the Slovak Republic has a responsibility to participate in the elimination of discrimination, which is why it adopted the Anti-Discrimination Act in 2005.⁵³⁹ Despite laws aimed at ensuring non-discrimination and equal treatment, analyses and statistics show that women continue to be at a disadvantage in terms of employment opportunities and career development.⁵⁴⁰ This information is summarised annually by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and published in the Report on Gender Equality drawn up by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic.⁵⁴¹ The Institute of Financial Policy also issued an accompanying commentary on the report *Women Still Can't Have It All: Barriers to Higher Maternal Employment*. The digital publication developed by Eurostat in cooperation with the national statistical institutes of the EU Member States also draws attention to the differences between the treatment of men and women.⁵⁴²

535 Sylvia Porubánová, *Aktuálne výzvy a očakávania európskej agendy rodovej rovnosti* (Bratislava: IVPR, 2009) 6.

536 See: European Commission. “Questions and Answers: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025,” https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/cs/qanda_20_357

537 See: Christina Boll et al., *Magnitude and impact factors of the gender pay gap in EU countries* (Luxembourg: European Union, 2016); See: David Cuberes and Teignier Marc, “Aggregate Costs of Gender Gaps in the Labor Market: A Quantitative Estimate,” *UB Economics Working Papers E14/308* (February 10, 2014) <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2405006>; See: Arnaud Vaganay, *Esther Canónico and Emilie Courtin, Challenges of work-life balance faced by working families: review of Costs and Benefits* (Brussels: European commission, LSE Evidence Review, 2016).

538 See: Margita Barošová, *Monitoring rodovej segregácie na trhu práce – analýza dopadov transformačných zmien: záverečná správa VÚ č. 2120* (Bratislava: IVPR, 2006) 21.

539 *Zákon č. 364/2005 Z. z. o rovnakom zaobchádzaní v niektorých oblastiach a o ochrane pred diskrimináciou a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov (antidiskriminačný zákon)*, Čl. I, §6, od. 3.

540 See: Dušan Šlosár and Lichner, Vladimír. et. al. *Teórie sociálnej práce a vybrané klientske skupiny*. (Košice: UPJŠ Košice, 2017).

541 Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR, “Súhrnná správa o stave rodovej rovnosti na Slovensku za rok 2018,” accessed May 4, 2020, https://www.gender.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SSRR_2018-final.pdf.

542 Ministerstvo financií SR, Inštitút finančnej politiky, “Women Still Can't. Have It All . Barriers to Higher Maternal Employment in Slovakia (May 2018),” accessed May 4, 2020, <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/financie/institut-financnej-politiky/publikacie-ifp/ekonomicke-analyzy/48-women-still-cant-have-it-all-barriers-higher-maternal-employment-slovakia->

The Most Common Argument

The entry of women into paid employment has played an important role in perceiving their role and ability to become independent individuals. According to Professor Kathi Weeks, an expert on the issue of feminism and gender studies,⁵⁴³ employment in modern society represents “an opportunity to transform subjects into independent individuals”.⁵⁴⁴

According to the author, occupational gender segregation is most often backed up by citing physical differences between men and women, and its most striking manifestations include:

- horizontal gender segregation,
- vertical gender segregation,
- sectoral gender segregation, resulting in women being generally more present in the public sector and men in the private sector.⁵⁴⁵

Horizontal segregation represents the occupational distribution of men and women within the overall labour market, where opportunities for women tend to be more limited than those for men. Vertical segregation “refers to the representation of men and women in certain positions within one category of occupation (the higher and more responsible a job position is, the fewer women hold it).”⁵⁴⁶ Horizontal gender segregation affects both genders, but is far more disadvantageous for women, as the designation “woman’s job” carries negative connotations.⁵⁴⁷ We are talking about a gender pay gap, which sums up the differences in the remuneration of men and women.⁵⁴⁸

In this context, it should be noted that the sources cited by the authors of the article are relatively old (from the 2000s). It is also necessary to acknowledge that everything evolves in the social environment, which, however, does not mean the objectivity of information at a given time should be dismissed. From the point of view of other social studies, it is necessary to accept the socio-political developments within Slovakia and the entire European Union. On the other hand, it is necessary to recognise the impact of the as-yet-unfinished socio-political reform of Slovakia decades after the end of socialism, as well as the proliferation of excessive bureaucracy, which is rooted in the society due to the fear of losing one’s job. This phenomenon occurs mainly in the state administration and is associated with the personal and professional incompetence of an individual holding a certain position, who is of the opinion that “disapproving or rejecting an application or request will do no harm” and, by doing so, gets to keep their job.

Effective measures and tools need to be applied to set up measures to improve the situation in these areas. One such appropriate and relevant tool is the ability to trigger public interest, and at the same time the ability to open up a public discussion. For the reasons outlined above and to better illustrate the continued presence (or absence) of these persistent phenomena in Slovak society, the authors of the article conducted a survey at the end of 2019 to find out to

543 See: Duke University, Kathi Weeks. <https://scholars.duke.edu/person/kweeks>

544 For detailed information see: Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 8.

545 In addition to the aforementioned factors, the issue of motherhood and family must also be taken into account. Despite the fact that this issue is relatively strongly influenced by the current situation and is enshrined also in Slovak legislation, i.e. that the so-called maternity leave, or parental leave, can apply to both men and women, the fact remains that women are more affected by motherhood compared to men. Especially in the case of risky pregnancies or during childbirth, women are temporarily excluded from employment. And the fact remains that there is always a stronger emotional bond between mother and child, which can be a strong stimulant and motivator to carry out a certain activity, as well as an obstacle and incentive to lose concentration at certain times.

546 Margita Barošová and Perichtová, Beata. *Rodová rovnosť vo svete práce* (Bratislava: IVPR, 2007), 27.

547 See: Claire M. Renzetti and Curran, Daniel J. *Ženy, muži a spoločnosť* (Praha: Karolinum, 2005), 281.

548 Jarmila Filadelfiová, „Rodová priepať“, *Aká práca, taká pláca?* (Bratislava: Aspekt, 2007), 13.

what extent, if at all, the perception of gender inequality in the Slovak labour market changes according to the selected category of respondents, where women are the most often employed gender within Slovak society.

Public Discussion

The public discussion regarding the issue of gender inequality, which resonates in Slovak society, was the central motivation and the basis for mapping the views of professionals working in the field of social services in Slovakia, specifically their attitudes towards the issue of gender segregation in the labour market. The aforementioned facts are entirely characteristic for Slovakia and their roots go back further than the recent history of the Slovak nation and its distinctive cultural and ethical standards created within the societal environment. It is, therefore, truly remarkable to discover how the real and current picture of gender equality in the labour market will be perceived by respondents linked by certain common features, albeit with varying education levels and practical experience.

Although the methodology of the study does not build on similar research abroad, Slovakia, as part of the European Area and the European Union, is, at the same time, the creator and the recipient of common principles and legislation. The study in question, therefore, calls for the implementation of other interesting and compatible studies focused on gender equality, especially in the field of employment and employment opportunities of social workers.⁵⁴⁹

Methods

The objective of the present research was to find out the respondents’ views on gender segregation in everyday family life, and integration in the labour market.

Research tool. In fulfilling the research objective, we chose a quantitative research strategy. Due to the fact that no standardised questionnaire on this important topic existed, a new research tool – a special questionnaire – was created for research purposes. Its creation was based on the theory of gender roles, which attributes different values, duties and responsibilities to men and women, as well as different job positions in the labour market. The questions were construed using knowledge from research conducted abroad and in Slovakia, primarily by the European Values Survey.

The issue of gender segregation is relatively extensive and can be examined from several aspects. The questionnaire, with regard to the present research, took into account the following relevant areas:

- perception of male and female roles in society,
- attained education and employment opportunities in the labour market,
- financial compensation and career advancement.

The questionnaire consisted of three identifying questions concerning age, gender and attained education, and eleven closed-ended questions in the form of statements. The choice of the research tool took into account the time aspect and the tool’s ease for obtaining a large amount of data in a relatively short time period.

The questionnaire included a rating scale (Likert scale) used by the respondents to express the degree of their agreement or disagreement. The respondents used the 5-point scale to con-

549 In this context, it is worth mentioning that the employment of many Slovak citizens abroad is often of a similar nature to, for example, the field of social services. To better illustrate, a specific example is provided. These citizens have long worked as personal assistants for the elderly, personal assistants for young people with disabilities, or as au pairs, or have been carrying out other similar activities in the field of social services. Their main motivation for carrying out these occupations is the possibility of getting paid a higher financial compensation compared to the one they would otherwise receive in Slovakia.

firm their agreement with a statement by choosing the following options: *I strongly agree* and *I strongly disagree*, and in order to confirm their disagreement with a statement, they chose the options: *I strongly disagree* and *I somewhat disagree*.

The questionnaire was evaluated as a percentile. Each item was evaluated separately in order to find out the degree of importance the respondents attach to the individual values.

A proportional (rationed) stratified selection of respondents in terms of age and gender was chosen, to which the following *selection criteria* were set:

- age of respondents: 18–60 years,
- occupation in the field of social services: helping profession,
- minimum attained education: secondary education,
- region: Eastern Slovakia.

The data collection took place in September and October 2019. To ensure the highest possible response rate of questionnaires, the distribution and collection of questionnaires were carried out in person at the Offices of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, at community centres and local governments that are involved in the field of on-site social work.

Research sample

The research sample consisted of 243 respondents. Their distribution by gender and age is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Distribution of respondents by gender and age

Gender	Men		Women		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age						
18–30 years	31	26.27	34	27.20	65	26.75
31–40 years	30	25.42	32	25.60	62	25.51
41–50 years	29	24.58	30	24.00	59	24.28
51–60 years	28	23.73	29	23.20	57	23.46
Combined	118	100	125	100	243	100

Source: (the authors of the article)

118 men and 125 women were involved in the research (48.56% and 51.44% respectively). In terms of age, the largest group was formed by respondents aged 18–30 years (65 respondents – 26.75%) with a slight predominance of women (34 women and 31 men). All four age categories were balanced in terms of the number of respondents (from 57 to 65 respondents).

Table 2 Distribution of respondents by gender and education attained

Gender	Men		Women		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Education						
Secondary education without school-leaving examination	9	7.63	7	5.60	16	6.58
Secondary education with school-leaving examination	27	22.88	41	32.80	68	27.98
Higher education at undergraduate level	29	24.58	33	26.40	62	25.52
Higher education at graduate level	53	44.91	44	35.20	97	39.92
Combined	118	100	125	100	243	100

Source: (the authors of the article)

From the point of view of education, respondents with higher education at the undergraduate or post-graduate levels formed a significant part of the sample (159 respondents – 65.44%). The least represented were respondents with secondary education without school-leaving examination (16 respondents – 6.58%). The sample of respondents consisted of social workers with completed higher education at undergraduate level or higher education at post-graduate level, as well as social workers and field workers with secondary education.

Research limitations. The use of a questionnaire as a research method undoubtedly has a number of advantages but, on the other hand, we also took into consideration the limitations during its application, These primarily consisted of: a lower number of respondents due to the predetermined selection criteria, efforts to ensure the same number of men and women, and the significant reluctance of respondents to participate in the research, which was justified by the enormous workload in the social field in direct contact with clients.

Analysis and interpretation of research results

The data obtained from the questionnaire survey were evaluated based on the predetermined areas.

Area No. 1: The perception of male and female roles in society. In the first examined area, we focused on the role that, according to gender stereotypes, women have in society, namely the “role of mother” – a woman taking care of the household”. Gender is currently considered a very dynamic construct as it represents a set of characteristics and behaviours formed in society, and is associated with the image of a woman or a man in a particular society. According to Čermáková, family roles in each society are⁵⁵⁰ given by cultural customs and traditions, where a society with entrenched gender roles expects women and men to fulfil different social roles.

550 Marie Čermáková et al., *Podmínky harmonizace práce a rodiny v České republice* (Praha: Sociologický ústav Akademie věd ČR, 2002).

Table 3 The woman’s role is to care for the household (including children) and the man’s role is to make money

Gender	Men		Women		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I strongly agree	27	22.88	22	17.60	49	20.16
I somewhat agree	33	27.97	28	22.40	61	25.10
They have the same role	34	28.81	49	39.20	83	34.16
I somewhat disagree	13	11.02	17	13.60	30	12.35
I strongly disagree	11	9.32	9	7.20	20	8.23
Combined	118	100	125	100	243	100

Source: (the authors of the article)

In relation to the statement “*The woman’s role is to care of the household (including children) and the man’s role is to make money*”, the respondents stated that both genders have the same role, as 34 men (28.81%) and 49 women (39.20%) selected this option. Male respondents more often agreed with this statement – up to 60 respondents (50.85%), compared to 50 (40.00%) women who agreed with this statement. There were no significant differences among the respondents who disagreed with the statement. 24 men (20.34%) and 26 women (20.80%) selected the option “I somewhat disagree” and “I strongly disagree”.

Area No. 2: Education, employment in the labour market. In social policy, gender equality is understood in terms of equal opportunities. According to the EU, all opportunities are available to everyone in the same way without any restrictions that would result from gender roles. These opportunities involve not only obtaining an education, but also employment in the labour market. In the second examined area, we focused on the respondents’ views related to equal access to the labour market from the perspective of gender.

Table 4 The education obtained should ensure equal access of men and women to employment

Gender	Men		Women		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Equal access						
I strongly agree	12	10.17	37	29.60	49	20.17
I somewhat agree	19	16.10	34	27.20	53	21.81
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	38	32.20	28	22.40	66	27.16
I somewhat disagree	32	27.12	15	12.00	47	19.34
I strongly disagree	17	14.41	11	8.80	28	11.52
Combined	118	100	125	100	243	100

Source: (the authors of the article)

In relation to the statement “*The education obtained should ensure equal access of men and women to employment*”, up to 38 men (32.20%) selected the evasive option “Sometimes yes and sometimes no”. 28 women selected the same option (22.40%). 31 men (26.27%), but as many as 71 women (56.8%), selected the option “I strongly agree” and “I somewhat agree”. In contrast, 49 men (41.53%) and only 75 women (20.80%) disagreed with the statement.

Table 5 Both women and men have the same chances when applying for a job in the labour market

Gender	Men		Women		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Chances of employment						
I strongly agree	24	20.34	17	13.60	41	16.87
I somewhat agree	42	35.59	24	19.20	66	27.16
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	31	26.27	38	30.40	69	28.40
I somewhat disagree	15	12.71	27	21.60	42	17.28
I strongly disagree	6	5.09	19	15.20	25	10.29
Combined	118	100	125	100	243	100

Source: (the authors of the article)

In the absence of gender segregation in the labour market, the statement “*Both women and men have the same chances when applying for a job in the labour market*” should be valid.

Respondents are of the opinion that sometimes this is true and sometimes not (69 of all respondents – 28.40%). With this option, we did not notice any significant difference between the genders (26.27% of men and 30.40% of women). 66 men (55.93%), but only 41 women (32.80%), agreed with the statement and selected the option “I strongly agree” and “I somewhat agree”. Disagreement with the same chances when applying for a job was expressed by 46 women (36.80%), which was 19.00% more than men (21 men – 17.80%).

Table 6 There are no differences between women and men during regarding dismissals

Gender	Men		Women		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dismissal and gender						
I strongly agree	31	26.27	12	9.60	43	17.70
I somewhat agree	36	30.51	21	16.80	57	23.46
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	25	21.19	28	22.40	53	21.81
I somewhat disagree	15	12.71	33	26.40	48	19.75
I strongly disagree	11	9.32	31	24.80	42	17.28
Combined	118	100	125	100	243	100

Source: the authors of the article

Even with the statement “*There are no differences between women and men regarding dismissals*” the opinions of the respondents differed significantly from the point of view of gender. 66

men (56.78%) and 33 women (26.40%) agreed with the statement, which is 30.38% less women than men. In the indecisive alternative “Sometimes yes – sometimes no” there were no significant differences between genders as it was chosen by 25 men (21.19%) and 28 women (22.40%). Disagreement was expressed by 26 men (22.71 %) and 64 women (51.20 %).

Area No. 3: Financial evaluation and career advancement. Analyses from several studies show that women in Central and Eastern European countries earn less than men in the same occupational positions. The questions in the third area were focused on this fact.

Table 7 Women and men employed in the same occupation receive the same wage for their work

Gender	Men		Women		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I strongly agree	31	26.27	14	11.20	45	18.52
I somewhat agree	38	32.20	25	20.00	63	25.93
Sometimes yes and sometimes no	29	24.58	36	28.80	65	26.75
I somewhat disagree	13	11.02	29	23.20	42	17.28
I strongly disagree	7	5.93	21	16.80	28	11.52
Combined	118	100	125	100	243	100

Source: (the authors of the article)

In relation to the statement “Women and men employed in the same occupation receive the same wage for their work”, a total of 65 respondents (26.75%) stated that sometimes this is true and sometimes not. 29 men (24.58%) and 36 women (28.80%) were indecisive. 69 men (58.47 %) and 39 women (31.20 %) agreed with the statement, which is 27.27 % less women than men. 20 men (16.95%) and up to 50 women (40.00%) agreed with the negative connotations of the statement.

Table 8 Both women and men have the same opportunity to reach a higher managerial position

Gender	Men		Women		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I strongly agree	36	30.51	14	11.20	50	20.58
I somewhat agree	35	29.66	26	20.80	61	25.10
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	27	22.88	35	28.00	62	25.51
I somewhat disagree	12	10.17	27	21.60	39	16.05
I strongly disagree	8	6.78	23	18.40	31	12.76
Combined	118	100	125	100	243	100

Source: (the authors of the article)

In relation to the statement “Both women and men have the same opportunity to reach a higher managerial position”, 71 men (60.17%) expressed agreement while only 40 women (32.00%) did, which was 28.17% less than men. Women selected an indecisive option more frequently (35 women – 28.00%) than men (27 men – 22.88%). Disagreement with the statement was expressed by 20 men (16.95 %) and 50 women (40.00 %).

Discussion

Perception of male and female roles in society

The results of the research confirmed that there is a prevailing view among the sample respondents that the role of women is to be mothers and take care of the household. 50.85% of men and 40.00% of women from the sample agreed (selected the options “I strongly agree” and “I somewhat agree”) with the statement that “The woman’s role is to care for the household (including children) and the man’s role is to make money”.

Blau and Kahn conducted research concluding that the differences in gender roles and gender division of labour remain important, and experimental evidence-based research clearly indicated that discrimination cannot be ruled out.⁵⁵¹ Mytejova et al.⁵⁵² emphasize that one of the significant trends in the Slovak Republic is working abroad due to the possibility of better financial remuneration. However, a problem in this context may be the fact that not only men but also women and mothers tend to find employment abroad, while their children remain under the care of wider family members. This trend significantly changes overall family behaviour and brings about negative consequences.

Education, employment in the labour market and career advancement are important issues to indicate the degree of gender segregation. Male respondents strongly agreed with the statement that “Both women and men have the same chances when applying for a job in the labour market” (55.93% of men), but in the following statement they denied it, as only 26.27% of respondents (men) expressed the opinion that “The education obtained should ensure equal access of men and women to employment”.

Female respondents were not optimistic in their views on entering the labour market and gaining equal opportunities in the work process, as they selected alternatives with negative connotations (40.00%) and expressed disagreement with equal opportunity to reach a higher managerial position. In this context, we agree with the opinion of Petr Pavlík, who claims that the representation of men increases in direct proportion to the increasing level of governance, not only in the labour market but also in all areas of social life. In his opinion: “in fact, the highest positions in most social hierarchies and equally in the economic sphere are occupied by men”.⁵⁵³ Geldikli’s study of gender segregation in employment in Turkey also concluded that the level of inequality associated with gender segregation was significant, with a negative impact on women. Women were more likely to be employed in low-income positions that were lower in the overall stratification structure, while men were employed in more favourable positions in terms of wage levels and occupational positions in the social hierarchy.⁵⁵⁴ Hunt’s research, which focused on

551 See: Francine D. Blau and Kahn, Lawrence M. “The Gender Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations,” in *Journal of Economic Literature* 55, no. 3 (2017): 789-865. DOI: 10.1257/jel.20160995

552 Alena Mátejová and Tománek, Pavol. “Family and current social-legal measures for its members in the Slovak Republic,” in *Mocna rodina fundamentem zdraveho spoleczestva* (Krakow: Uniwersytet Papiieski Jana Pawla II. w Krakowie, 2019) 70.

553 See: Petr Pavlík, “Gender a trh práce,” in *Gender ve škole*, eds. Irena Smetáčková and Klára Vlková (Praha: Otevřená společnost, 2005) 36.

554 See: Cigdem Gedikli, “Occupational Gender Segregation in Turkey: The Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions,” *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 41 (2020): 121-139. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-019-09656-w>

technical and natural science university graduates, suggests that the higher relative rates of early school leaving were motivated by dissatisfaction with future income and problems with possible promotions. At the same time, it was found that family-related limitations and dissatisfaction with working conditions were rather secondary factors.⁵⁵⁵ In their research carried out in Sweden, Gonäs et al. found that the proportion of women in highly qualified occupations in the male-dominated job category is increasing in the country.⁵⁵⁶ The findings of Kunze and Miller suggest that policies increasing the representation of women in company management may bring benefits to women in lower positions.⁵⁵⁷ Matsa and Miller found a positive association between the proportion of female company managers in the previous year and the proportion of female managers in the following year.⁵⁵⁸

Financial evaluation. It is known that the careers of women and men are not being developed at the same pace. It is also known that there are feminized occupations and occupations with a large predominance of men. Differences, sometimes referred to as gaps, are identified also in the area of remuneration. The opinions of the respondents on this issue also showed a difference in view among men and women. 8.47% of male respondents agreed with the statement "Women and men employed in the same occupation receive the same wage for their work", while in the case of women it was only 31.20%.

Such perception of gender segregation points to the representation, composition, and distribution of men and women throughout the whole spectrum of occupations and is often accompanied by different financial remuneration.⁵⁵⁹ Men are more frequently employed as executives or managers and women reach rather lower managerial positions. Considering the two types of segregation outlined, the vertical type, where women's remuneration and prestige is concerned, is more significant.⁵⁶⁰ Zahorčaková also draws attention to the differences in occupational positions and claims that men who have a university degree are employed in better occupational positions. This phenomenon is also related to the willingness of women to accept job positions that are not as prestigious or do not require a university degree.⁵⁶¹ According to Goldin, the gender pay gap would be significantly reduced and could disappear completely if companies did not have the motivation to disproportionately reward individuals...⁵⁶² In his research, Ludsteck came to some interesting conclusions that women working in work teams with a small proportion of women show above-average individual abilities. He also came to the conclusion that women experience a greater reduction in wages than men following the entry of other women into work

555 See: Jennifer Hunt, "Why Do Women Leave Science and Engineering?," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 69, no. 1, (2016): 199 – 226. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24810300>

556 See: Lena Gonäs and Wikman, Anders et al., "Changes in the gender segregation of occupations in Sweden between 2003 and 2011," *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health* 47, no. 3, (2019): 344 – 347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1403494819831910>

557 Astrid Kunze and Miller, Amalia R. "Women Helping Women? Evidence from Private Sector Data on Workplace Hierarchies," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 99, no. 5, (2017): 769 – 775.

558 See: David A. Matsa and Miller, Amalia R. "Chipping Away at the Glass Ceiling: Gender Spillovers in Corporate Leadership," *American Economic Review* American Economic Association, 101, no. 3, (May 2011): 635-639. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29783820>

559 Margita Barošová, *Monitoring rodovej segregácie na trhu práce – analýza dopadov transformačných zmien: záverečná správa VÚ č. 2120* (Bratislava: IVPR, 2006), 22.

560 Pavlík, "Gender a trh práce," 34-35.

561 See: Anna Zahorčaková, „Prekážky v profesionálnom postupe žien – rodové aspekty“, in 4. študentská vedecká konferencia, eds. Jozef Šipko et al. (Prešov: PU, 2009) 456.

562 See: Claudia Goldin, "A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter," *American Economic Review* 104, no. 4 (2014): 1091-1119.

teams.⁵⁶³ Hensvik's results point to a negative but statistically significant correlation between the proportion of women in managerial positions and women's remuneration.⁵⁶⁴ Cohen's research showed that occupational segregation is an important aspect of gender inequality in income and also contributes to other forms of inequality.⁵⁶⁵ Hirsch came to the opposite conclusion in his research, which showed that a 10% increase in the proportion of women in first-line management reduces the unexplained difference in the remuneration of women and men in employment by 0.5 log points.⁵⁶⁶ Tate and Yang also found that, in companies where women are in managerial positions, there are smaller pay gaps between men and women.⁵⁶⁷ Interesting results from Cardoso and Winter-Ember's research suggest that women benefit more from higher wages in companies with women in managerial positions than in companies with men in managerial positions.⁵⁶⁸

Conclusion

Even today, the prevailing view is that the priority role of women should be to care of the household and children, and the role of men is to support the family materially and financially. These are common ideas about the functional division of the roles of men and women in covering the material and emotional needs of the family. The stereotypical perception of women's and men's roles in society is the source of other inequalities.

The results of the research carried out among a selected sample of respondents employed in helping professions in the social field in Slovakia pointed to persistent gender differences in all three examined areas. Respondents attach considerable importance to the position of women in the role of a mother taking care of the household. According to the results of the research, the education achieved does not mean the same opportunity to get a higher managerial position for both genders. Female respondents declared a significantly greater financial discrepancy between the genders in the same job position.

In practice, we see the following solution for gender segregation in the labour market and long-term lower female employment:

- part-time work, especially for mothers of minor children;
- one option is to focus on reconciling work, family, and private life.

In the field of empirical research, there is an open space for re-investigating the issue of gender equality focusing on helping professions with a predominance of women on a national scale and with a larger representation of respondents.

The role of gender equality is to help women gain a foothold in the labour market due to their education, as well as to help men to open employment paths for women. Gender equality is intended to help both genders get rid of the stereotypes that have prevailed in society for centuries. New forms of work organization and working hours should be accompanied by a wide range of social and pro-family measures, supporting not only women but also men. Another important

563 Johannes Ludsteck, "The Impact of Segregation and Sorting on the Gender Wage Gap: Evidence from German Linked Employer-Employee Data," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 67, no. 2 (2014): 362-394.

564 See: Lena E. Hensvik, "Manager Impartiality: Worker-Firm Matching and the Gender Wage Gap," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 67, no. 2 (2014): 395-421.

565 Philip N. Cohen, "The Persistence of Gender Segregation at Work," *SocArXiv. Preprint: Sociology Compass* 2013 711 889-899 (2011): 17.

566 See: Boris Hirsch, "The Impact of Female Managers on the Gender Pay Gap: Evidence from Linked Employer-Employee Data for Germany," *Economic Letters* 119, no. 3, (2013): 348-350.

567 Geoffrey Tate and Yang, Liu "Female Leadership and Gender Equity: Evidence from Plant Closure," *Journal of Financial Economics* 117, no. 1 (2015): 77-97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfineco.2014.01.004>

568 See: Ana Rute Cardoso and Winter-Ebmer, Rudolf, "Female-led Firms and Gender Wage Policies," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 64, no. 1, (2010): 143-163.

aspect is the strengthening of diversity and an inclusive approach in the workplace and in the working environment, regardless of gender.

According to estimates by the International Labour Organization, the COVID-19 pandemic could cause the loss of almost 25 million jobs globally, and, according to the experts, this may lead to 130,000 unemployed in Slovakia. For now, there are only approximate estimates regarding the sectors that will be most affected, but the current situation in Slovakia, where automotive factories are closing, will primarily affect men in various job positions. On the other hand, there is an enormous demand for workers employed in helping professions, not only in the field of health care and psychology, but also in social work and pedagogy. Especially in the field of pedagogy, parents and mostly women are currently in a situation in which they are forced to work via "home office" while at the same time mastering the position of "home teacher" of their children, including housekeeping. In such circumstances, the gender perspective is no longer a priority, as it is primarily a matter of family harmony, its material security, and good functioning.

It can therefore be concluded that the global COVID-19 pandemic has brought about fundamental changes to the functioning of everyday private, family, and professional life. It has significantly affected the possibilities of re-entering the labour market following the loss of employment. According to estimates by the International Labour Organization,⁵⁶⁹ we expect the most significant decline in hours worked in Europe and America to be more than 12% compared to pre-crisis levels.

The gradual opening of the economy after many weeks of the so-called lockdown has brought some hope, but the second wave of the pandemic brings further challenges and challenging times for the economy, for helping professions and parents with children, especially women, who usually care for their children during on-line learning, as well as for employers and employees, vulnerable people in the labour market and the labour market itself, etc.

One of the most significant consequences of the pandemic, which may arise from gender segregation, is the widening of the income gap between men and women. In relation to the issues of labour market and gender segregation and in connection with the ongoing epidemiological crisis gradually escalating into an economic crisis, this study also opens up further opportunities for interesting and beneficial in-depth international and national research in the field of establishing economic incentives to secure the labour market primarily from the perspective of gender segregation in the case of the helping professions.

The study also provides a relevant space for stimulating scientific and professional reflections for a broad international scientific and professional public. In further national and international research, and its subsequent application in practice, these reflections should focus on:

- the possibility of using the workforce without practising overt or covert gender segregation, especially for women or for other vulnerable groups in the labour market, as well as for the helping professions, both at national and international levels;
- intensification of open and effective social dialogue focused on the socio-ethical dimension of important societal issues, as well as on topics that fundamentally affect countries, including Slovakia;
- at the national and international level – positively strengthening open labour markets with open relations that promote equal opportunities;
- positively strengthening the position of women in the labour market and making greater efforts to increase the representation of women in managerial positions with regard to the benefit of women in lower occupational positions.

569 See: ILO, "Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work," 3rd Edition, (29 April 2020), accessed May 4, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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INTERNATIONAL TEAMS AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AS RELATED TO THE NEWLY EMERGED COVID-19 PANDEMIC*



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Abstract

Background: the author examines the educational needs of workers included in international teams. The subject was chosen in view of the fact that the process of globalization obviously requires long-lasting intercultural cooperation. The countries of the world are becoming increasingly interdependent and the world is growing more and more integrated. The nations are engaged in intercultural communication and the individuals are confronted with a multitude of worldviews and their interpretations.

Methods: The empirical part of the survey applied these methods: study of literature; case studies; objective descriptions; and a special case study of an existing organization. The latter case study depicts intercultural cooperation; management of teams; and the process of educating and developing skills of workers in view of their educational needs. This case study aimed to answer one major research question: Does the cultural diversity of international teams create any special educational needs of their members? In answering the question, the author employed these methods: (1) analyses of documents and (2) semi-structured interviews.

Results: Arranged into several sections, the paper presents a few areas to which the relevant organizations should pay attention when they try to meet educational needs of multicultural work teams.

Conclusion: If different nations and cultures are to cooperate successfully, they will need to develop the skills of team cooperation and leadership, while adequately motivating their team members and providing them with ample scope for education and personal advancement. Managers will have to be trained so that their leadership qualities are more effective and their cultural awareness more keen. Leading a team that is culturally diversified and therefore prone to conflicts is an uphill struggle for every manager. Concurring with Leblanc (2007), this paper's author believes that people working internationally should be particularly tolerant of diverse and specific features they may encounter in persons from other countries; they should be able to accept their differences and adjust themselves to local conditions; and they should be effective in processing and interpreting information. The effects of further theoretical and empirical research, as well as special scientific reflections at the international and multicultural level, should be directed toward a more detailed mapping of specific attitudes and situations in the case of international and/or multicultural work teams.

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Introduction

Intercultural competencies

The competencies are split into „hard skills“ and „soft skills“. The hard skills cover knowledge and faculties acquired in a specific job. The soft skills encompass properties and abilities of each person as they derive from his or her personal characteristics. These abilities determine the individual behavior. In addition, the soft skills tend to enhance the effectivity of working. They can include communicative competencies; problem-solving aptitude; interpersonal skills; moral integrity; leadership abilities; and customer orientation.⁵⁷¹

It is hard to say which soft skills can be generally considered most important for working in an international environment. Each of us has a range of competencies, and practical situations will invoke just some of them. The soft skills will affect primarily the form of cooperation, i.e. the personal and generally human levels. There a host of factors will be at work: how we feel; how we think; what values we hold; what motives we have; what needs we feel, etc. Besides the interpersonal level, the soft skills include also self-reliance and organizational abilities. The last group of the skills is typical of competency in handling tasks, in solving problems and in processing information effectively.⁵⁷²

As regards the managers of international teams, the intercultural competency is one of their essential qualities. No less important is the competency for all those whose job brings them into contact with people of different cultural backgrounds. The term of „intercultural competency“ implies the ability of coping with multicultural and intercultural situations while understanding the social interactions at work within the existing cultural dimensions. The managers must learn to approach and tackle their tasks in consideration of the different cultural dimensions - it is the process of intercultural learning. Such learning can assume the form of intercultural training focused on gaining a deeper and more complex insight into cultural standards.⁵⁷³

Teamwork is not easy, it is influenced by the willingness of team members to cooperate and how team members are perceived by the target group. The team leader must be aware of these factors, and it is his responsibility to combine understanding and leadership, coordinate all activities so as to benefit the target group as much as possible.⁵⁷⁴

The intercultural competencies comprise also interpersonal skills - team members must be aware of differences in communicative and interactive habits of people from foreign cultures; they also must show flexibility in settling disputes. Another factor at play here concerns the efficiency of team cooperation - the manager or the leader of a multicultural team must demonstrate empathy for the team members and must be able to communicate to them clearly the team targets, roles and norms. Interculturally sensitive situations will require patience, tolerance and empathy. The team members should be aware that the perception of difficulties claimed by their colleagues

571 František Horník, *Rozvoj a vzdělávání pracovníků* (Praha: Grada, 2007). 176.

572 Stefan Mühleisen and Oberhuber, Nadine, *Komunikační a jiné měkké dovednosti. Soft skills v praxi* (Praha: Grada, 2008). 21.

573 Ivan Nový and Schroll-Machl, Sylvia, *Interkulturní komunikace v řízení a podnikání (česko-německá)* (Praha: Management Press, 2007). 34.

574 Michaela Šullová, „Vybrané přístupy a metody sociální práce s lidmi s duševními poruchami,“ *Sociální práce s osobami s duševními poruchami*. (Ružomberok: Verbum, 2019). 55.

from alien cultures is neither good nor bad - it is simply different. Such situation gives a chance of seeing things from different angles and different perspectives.⁵⁷⁵

The intercultural education and training should support and enhance the intercultural competencies of people who are already members of an international team or still in preparation for a work assignment abroad. Such education & training will also come in handy for all those who have to cooperate with people from alien cultures. The intercultural competency rests chiefly in seamless blending of three aspects: personalities, attitudes and working practices. The process should minimize misunderstandings possibly caused by intercultural interactions, and it is supposed to reduce the undesirable effects of culture shock.

„The term ‘intercultural competence’ depicts the capability of entering intercultural and/or multicultural situations, comprehending them, coping with them and tackling the tasks that they entail. Intercultural competencies can be acquired through intercultural learning or possibly intercultural training.”⁵⁷⁶

Currently, the work of international teams is globally complicated by the Covid-19 disease. Different cultures differ also in their hygiene-mindedness and the care that their members exercise in protecting individual health.

Intercultural training

Intercultural training is an advanced technique, effective in developing competencies in intercultural relations. It is utilized for both a team members and its leaders and managers. Nový divides such trainings according to their objectives and approaches as follows:

- training aimed to provide information (data and facts about countries);
- training focused on culture (case studies; analyses of typical behavior of people from different cultures);
- training centered around communication and interaction (direct contact with alien culture, practical exercises);
- training of team cooperation (tackling real-life tasks, problems and conflicts);
- culture assimilator (combining information, commentaries and the diagnostics of cultural competencies achieved in participants).⁵⁷⁷

Tarique and Calligiri, authors engaged in educating foreigners, recommend that educational programs be organized in steps listed below:

First and foremost the types of tasks to be performed abroad will have to be identified; educational needs (with a cultural bias) analyzed; educational targets and their cognitive and emotional criteria defined; program covering both general and specific cultural aspects established; and finally the acquired education evaluated.⁵⁷⁸ Hofstede mentions two types of training: one centered on expertise in a specific culture, the other aimed at understanding and the general awareness of

575 Steven W. Congden, et al., “Cross-cultural Communication and Multicultural Team Performance: A German and American Comparison,” *Journal of Comparative International Management* 12, no. 2, (2009): 73 – 89. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCIM/article/view/18202>

576 Ivan Nový, *Interkulturní komunikace v řízení a podnikání* (Praha: Management Press, 2001). 34.

577 Nový, “Interkulturní komunikace,” 35-39.

578 Michael Armstrong, *Řízení lidských zdrojů* (Praha: Grada, 2007). 109.

cultural differences.⁵⁷⁹ The training itself concerns primarily the personal (i.e. mental) software of individuals and also the features in which they differ. Such training does not focus on any specific country or culture, since the persons thus trained is supposed to use their skills and knowledge in any foreign culture. It must be kept in mind that the process of learning is culture dependent. The greater part of intercultural trainers have adopted western, chiefly American, practices - a decision counterproductive especially for the Asian trainees.

Geert Jan Hofstede devised a method of collective training which consists in surveying cultural diversity. The method will suit many different trainees and many practical purposes. It owes a lot to the ideas of Paul Pedersen, an American counselor, and to the five-dimensional model of Geert Hofstede.⁵⁸⁰ Based on one artificial culture chosen out of ten, the method leads the trainees to identify themselves with the culture of their choice. The cultures are fictitious and respond to the extremes of the different dimensions. Then, when confronted with a simulated problem, the trainees are expected to play a role corresponding to the culture they elected. Acting as described, the trainees refine their intercultural skills and learn from experience.

Strategy of corporate multiculturalism

Nový and Schroll-Machl contend that identifying the generally positive achievements of international teams is an uphill struggle, but still there are strategies able to handle the corporate multiculturalism.⁵⁸¹ In pursuing the strategies, one or more national cultures are approached through direct intercultural communication and cooperation. There are four such basic strategies available:

- (1) Dominance and adaptation - the team will adopt customs & habits of one group of several. The process can follow an agreed rule, or it may be an expression of power;
- (2) Combination and joint actions - typical of dividing labor and making most of culturally specific advantages;
- (3) Integration and mutual contingency - typical of applying the lessons learned about cultural distinctions and rearranging them into new procedures. This is where compromises will be inevitable;
- (4) Innovations and synergies - typical of formulating new rules tailored specifically to a specific team.

These strategies raise some questions, specifically - what impacts foreign cultures can have, and to what extent we can accept and respect them. If one party is to accept cultural standards of the other, then the cultural differences will have to be properly considered.⁵⁸²

Empirical section

The empirical section of the paper tries to find out whether or not the international staffing of a work team affects the educational needs of its members. The relevant case study aims to answer this principle research question: Does the cultural diversity of international teams create any specific educational needs of their members?

579 Hofstede Geert, et al., *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (3rd edition McGraw-Hill Education, 2010). See also: Hofstede Geert, “Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context,” *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 2, no.1, (2011) <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>

580 Geert Hofstede, et al., *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (3rd edition McGraw-Hill Education, 2010). See also: Geert Hofstede, “Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context,” *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 2, no.1, (2011) <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>

581 Nový and Schroll-Machl, “Interkulturní komunikace,” 39.

582 Nový and Schroll-Machl, “Interkulturní komunikace,” 40.

The principle research question of the case study was broken into partial questions covering partial goals, specifically: Do the team leaders consider in team interactions the different cultural patterns of the team members? Do the team leaders consider special cultural features in managing their teams? Are the special cultural features reflected in the organization's educational activities?

The research questions will be answered by analyzing the current situation and stumbling blocks, if any, will be identified. The analysis itself will be supported by a structured interview with three team leaders who represent the national cultures of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, Great Britain, Canada, Serbia, India, and Poland. A list of relevant topics has already been compiled. The realization of the research was January - March 2020.

Results

This case study aimed to answer one major research question:

Does the cultural diversity of international teams create any special educational needs of their members?

The answer is quite unambiguous: yes. The educational needs of international team members concentrate primarily around communication, intercultural cooperation and team interactions. Factors of special importance are empathy and a well developed ability to tolerate others. The cultural diversity also requires that teams are managed effectively and the style of management is adjusted to the situation, i.e. situational coaching and the art of motivating.

In consequence, the team leaders and team members will have to comprehend different cultural patterns and the influence that the patterns may have on individual behavior. The educational needs following from the cultural diversity of international teams are of particular interest to educational specialists who are supposed to carefully consider the unique cultural features in their programs of education. The educational needs of trainees should ideally be identified as early as during the process of their adaptation in the organization, and the investment in the process should be understood as an investment in the future.

The case study has also produced partial research questions that cover partial goals and are tackled in the individual chapters, specifically:

Do the team leaders consider in team interactions the different cultural patterns of the team members?

This question can be answered, with some reservations, in the affirmative. Some leaders think about the patterns more, others less, in dependence on their experience in the workings of international teams. The leaders appreciate the importance of proper understanding the special cultural features, but currently they feel uncertain about how to work with them. They are aware of communication problems and conflicts that occasionally emerge. By and large, however, the leaders maintained that their teams operated well. Their answers lead us to believe that they are interested in instruction which could help them get a better insight into the issues.

Do the team leaders consider special cultural features in managing their teams?

Yes, but just partially. In managing their teams, some leaders experienced situations where their method of management proved to be ineffective, and they had to modify it or apply another. Unfortunately, such modification sometimes proved to be a stiff job. Some of them spoke about how they noticed in coaching their team the cultural patterns of the staff, and how the staff members accepted their coaching. All managers claimed using the participating and delegating leadership, but during the adaptation process they might tend to apply a more directive style. Each manager strives to motivate their staff for better performance. Not everyone, however, considers strong performance so important - motivation factors, too, are affected by the special cultural features, and this fact should be kept in mind.

Are the special cultural features reflected in the organization's educational activities?

This question can also be partially answered in the affirmative, but the special cultural features are far from being common in today's educational activities. An improved process of identifying and analyzing the educational needs of workers in international teams would certainly help set the sights on the cultural issues and include the needs in the educational efforts.

Interviews held with the heads of teams clearly indicated that new team members were subjected to the directive form of leading. When convenient, however, the directive leadership was also applied in other, specific situations, e.g. when an urgent task had to be completed in good time, or when the epidemiological situation demanded that the operations be quickly reduced and/or the ways of working modified. This kind of leadership proved especially efficient in extreme cases when a prompt response was of the essence. Whenever a team member performed very well for a prolonged period of time, his or her manager switched to the participative style of leading. In such a case the managers endeavor to keep communication with their staff as lively as achievable and to let them express their views. Our research participants intuitively preferred only one style of leadership and coincided in opinion that they felt uneasy about employing any other.

Discussion

Before everything else, people have to be taught how to effectively communicate and cooperate in international environment. In addressing this task, the main stumbling block is not the incompetence in so-called corporate language. Most of the people can communicate in it on at least the basic level. In multicultural environment the ineffectiveness of communication translates itself into a lack of tolerance for differences, limited understanding and insufficient open-mindedness. That is why the workers should be instructed on the differences in cultural patterns no later than during the process of adaptation, taking into account also the national culture of each individual. Greater attention should certainly be focused on the new recruits and their cultural patterns. Each of us is happy about something else, and each of us has one's own cultural patterns that should be honored.

Recommendations: the summary included below describes several areas that should be addressed explicitly, since they are closely related to the educational needs of multicultural work teams:

- the educational needs of workers in international teams should be identified and analyzed in greater detail, and the results should be given meticulous attention;
- the intercultural training should concentrate on interactions typical of international teams and on the character of their internal cooperation; moreover, the training should also target effective communication and it should analyze conflicts in international teams - such effort would then offer a holistic view of the cultural issues;

- the employees should attend language courses designed to make them able to understand and properly interpret meanings of words in different languages;
- the trainees should be encouraged and motivated for self-improvement in cultural issues so that they develop sensitivity about differences between themselves and their colleagues as regards their native national cultures;
- the adaptive developmental activities should target educational needs derived from special cultural features, and support any follow-up educational & developmental activities.

Conclusion

Global business and development require international and intercultural cooperation, and the cooperation translates itself into increasing demand for skilled and diversified workforce. Foreign studies have confirmed that the cooperation of international and multicultural teams and their satisfactory performance are the key factors of success in their organizational pursuits. The ever stronger interest in this theme manifests itself in an effort to understand and to develop the teams' capabilities despite their inherent cultural differences. Future researches could investigate the international and/or multicultural teams in view of their specific attitudes to their members' appearance for work as affected by health considerations and by anti-Covid provisions; what are their opinions on face masks and respirators?; do they see them as a nuisance and obstacle to work? We believe that Asian workers (who are inured to wearing the masks and respirators because of the climate and frequent smog alerts in their countries) will not find using the equipment on the job so inconvenient as workers from countries where such provisions have not been customary yet.

Ethnic consciousness, nationalistic fervor and greater emphasis put on the defining national features may lead to ethnic and nationalist conflicts. Hence it is important that an integration process is in place to foster coexistence and to build multicultural society then capable of respecting diversity, tolerating otherness and making the coexistence of different cultures as easy as possible. This will require not only cultural awareness and language competence but also specific behavioral skills, e.g. empathy and the ability of fighting anxieties and

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The mentioned author significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, the author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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HISTORY OF THE NEAR FUTURE – SEVEN POTENTIAL SCENARIOS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE VARIED CONSEQUENCES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



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Abstract

Background: The Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic has been changing the world. Most countries will become severely indebted and their economies significantly weakened (especially in the services sector, which represents more than half of the economic performance in developed countries). Therefore, it is advisable to consider further development in the form of alternative scenarios.⁵⁸⁴ On an international level, such scenarios have been created, for example, by the Millennium Project⁵⁸⁵ or the Club of Rome.⁵⁸⁶ This article presents a brief analysis relevant for the future given the plethora of negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, analysing seven potential scenarios for the development of human society. After the pandemic is over, some countries will definitely try to restore the pre-pandemic state, to maintain the status quo. However, this may turn out to be impossible. Therefore, in the context of the current situation, we need a brave vision for the future, which we can offer by analysing seven potential scenarios. However, apart from a vision, even more importantly, we need sufficient will to implement the vision into practice.

Conclusion: A description of these scenarios will help us make more qualified decisions related to the near future. In addition, this study also opens up space for further research in this area and interesting scientific discussions and reflections for a wider international scientific and scholarly public. Further research and international, inspirational scientific and scholarly reflections are currently highly relevant, as the future will always surprise us, but we should nevertheless be interested in it on a scientific and research level as well as on a human level, because we will live it for the rest of our lives.

Keywords: Long-term sustainable development. Sustainable retreat. New technologies. COVID-19. Societal collapse.

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584 Scenarios are descriptions of potential futures or a way of gathering many statements on the future which may materialize under certain circumstances. They are chains of information to demonstrate potential future developments on the basis of logical connections between consecutive partial, yet crucial, events. High-quality scenarios must be credible, consistent and sufficiently interesting, and inspiring enough to influence decision-making.

585 For more information, please visit: www.millennium-project.org

586 For more information, please visit: www.clubofrome.org

Introduction

Let us start by looking at the recent past. Half a century ago, there was no internet, no world wide web, no personal computers and no mobile phones. We did not know anything about the insidious HIV virus and there were almost no discussions among the general public on the opportunities and risks of globalisation and genetically modified organisms.

The world was divided into two opposing blocks (capitalist and socialist), and many people were rightfully afraid that a nuclear war would destroy the planet.

More than half a century ago (21 July 1969), man landed on the Moon, but we have not returned there since 14 December 1972. At that time, after the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies, the Cold War was culminating. However, even in such difficult times, the World Health Organisation successfully managed to eradicate smallpox. Czech epidemiologist Karel Raška and many other Czech and Slovak doctors in the field significantly contributed to this success. However, we have not managed to destroy any other infectious diseases since then.

Fifty years ago, there were four billion people on this planet; today there are almost double that amount. Even then, experts were aware that our actions harmed the ecosystems, and today environmental damage is obvious to anyone who has not completely lost the ability to see what is going on around them.

Natural resources are more depleted and ecosystems are more destroyed than they were half a century ago. On the other hand, thanks to science and human knowledge in general, our possibilities to develop our creativity and live our lives meaningfully are richer than they used to be.

We can learn our lessons from the last five decades, but we cannot change them. In contrast, we cannot predict the future, but we can influence it with our actions. What will the next fifty years look like? How will we respond to the increase in human population, reduced biodiversity, climate change, regional water shortages, destroyed land, etc.? Let us now think about seven potential scenarios showing different roads which the world might (and might not) take in the near future, especially in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, a desired vision would be a scenario of long-term sustainable development, i.e. the second scenario. The concept of sustainable development was first established more than thirty years ago; however, we have not made much progress on our journey to sustainability. It might be a challenge which is currently beyond our power. The third scenario represents an idea of sustainable retreat (stagnation) as formulated by the author of the Gaia hypothesis, British physicist James Lovelock. Many people rely on science and new technologies to lead us out of current problems. This is possible, but we should not rely blindly on science and technology. A precautionary approach would be more advisable. Thanks to human creativity and scientific knowledge, we could – but do not necessarily have to – find a suitable solution to today's thorny problems in time. The fifth scenario, a meeting with an extra-terrestrial civilization, is a „wild card“, a very improbable event which has the potential (if it happens) to change our development in a significant manner. The sixth scenario deals with a collapse of society (especially within Western civilization) and its gradual transformation and regeneration. Many civilizations and powerful empires collapsed, so there are lessons to be drawn. The seventh and final scenario is inspired by the Biblical revelation to St. John. We are still unable to interpret his apocalyptic prediction reliably as it is a „sealed“ prophecy. Nevertheless, it could be inspirational

for us if we look at it as a warning, which we can hopefully influence with our current behaviour, at least to some extent.

Scenario No. 1: Business as usual

Current trends will persist and there will be no significant changes. After each partial crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, people will want to get „back to normal“ and political representatives longing to win in future elections will do their best to please them. Problems will be underestimated, trivialized, ignored. Negative trends will escalate and we will lose the most precious limited and non-renewable source – time. Until now, we have been following this scenario.

There are several important megatrends⁵⁸⁷ that can be identified and that will gradually escalate:

- 1, *Climate change and biodiversity destruction.* As far as climate change is concerned, we are performing a global-scale experiment with unknown results and we will not be able to influence its consequences. A major extinction of plant and animal species will be devastating for vital ecosystems.
- 2, *Lack of energy and increasing prices thanks to oil fraction and a lack of fossil fuels in general.* Transferring to renewable resources will be slow due to the unwillingness of citizens and politicians to go through with this transformation and due to a lack of infrastructure for a massive use of renewable resources.
- 3, *Lack of food as a result of insufficient energy, land and water.* Today, we are wasting food and, on a global scale, we have more food than we need. However, modern agriculture is absolutely dependent on fossil fuel energy. If its price increases, the price of foodstuffs will increase as well. This will be enhanced by gradual degradation of agricultural land and regional water shortages.
- 4, *Mass migration from poor (developing) regions to richer countries.* This is caused by insufferable environmental conditions (e.g. increasing desertification, rising ocean levels) or social conditions (conflicts, collapsing states).

These factors will drive each other in synergy and they will be strengthened by other global problems – the spread of infectious diseases, degradation of the environment, political instability in developed countries given their large debt and „democracy deficit“ (typical for uncontrollable corruption levels and growing populism), organized crime, terrorism, etc.

In the event of a cumulative effect of these threats, we are at risk of the so-called „perfect storm“. ⁵⁸⁸ A perfect storm occurs when a very unusual combination of events results in dramatic escalation of the situation. The synergic and cumulative effect of the above-mentioned factors, and potentially even other factors, can result in the energy of people and countries being absorbed in a struggle for resources and survival.

Czech historian and Egyptologist Miroslav Bárta identified seven civilization laws which capture the potential consequences of the „business as usual“ scenario:

.....
587 Megatrends are significant and extensive changes in development which can change the entire society in many areas, e.g. politics, economics, technologies, values and social relations. Megatrends can be created by strong contradicting trends which can influence each other. A disadvantage of megatrends is the fact that they are often too general. (J. Naisbitt, *Megatrends* (New York: Warner Books, 1984)).

588 S. Junger, *The Perfect Storm* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).

- 1, Each civilization is limited in time; its development usually starts and ends with a conflict.
- 2, Resources and technologies have a significant impact on the development of any civilization.
- 3, The Heraclitus law – the factors responsible for the rise of a particular civilisation or culture are usually the same as those which, in the end, instigate its crisis and fall.
- 4, Civilizations are connected through shared values and symbols; thus, a non-functioning social contract represents a major problem.
- 5, Excessive consumption is a road to ruin.
- 6, Climate change significantly changes a civilization's development.
- 7, Collapse does not equal destruction and significant changes occur in leaps.⁵⁸⁹

Scenario No. 2: Long-term sustainable development

This is a desirable scenario. We will try to actively influence and change today's negative trends and start to enforce an alternative, positive and democratic vision of development which was first formulated thirty years ago, a vision of long-term sustainable development.⁵⁹⁰ This would require at least four general conditions being fulfilled:

- a, We will gradually change our values from anthropocentric to biocentric.
- b, We can create and implement economic tools promoting sustainable development (e.g. carbon tax, environmental tax reform imposing higher taxes on resources, and lower or zero tax on human labour.)
- c, We can create technologies which are energy-efficient. The aim is to mirror the functioning of ecosystems, where there is no waste or waste created in one process can be used as a raw material in another process.
- d, We can create functional and efficient state and self-governing units at local and regional levels, and we can agree on the basic principles of international or global governance.

In the long run, sustainable development implementation would mean significant transformation of society based on the following requirements (principles):

- Requirement for all people on Earth to have their (at least basic) needs fulfilled.
- Requirement for the right of future generations to have their needs fulfilled (at least to the same extent as we can fulfil our needs and use natural resources to do so).
- Requirement to respect the adequate rights of other living creatures.
- Requirement to learn from the future (learning based on predicting the potential consequences of current activities).

Despite wonderful proclamations, this concept has not been largely supported by politicians or the general public. Why? Because habit is second nature and we are afraid of losing our comfort. Only when we lose our comfortable life will we dare to take a step forward.

Scenario No. 3: Sustainable retreat

The concept of sustainable retreat was created in 2006 by the well-known British physicist and author of the Gaia hypothesis, James Lovelock. In his book *Revenge of Gaia*, he says that it is too late for sustainable development. Instead, we should aspire to achieve sustainable retreat:

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589 M. Bárta, *Sedm zákonů. Jak civilizace vznikají, dosahují vrcholu a upadají* (Brno: Jota, 2020).

590 United Nations Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

„It is much too late for sustainable development; what we need is sustainable retreat. Fans of sustainable development and free trade share an error, which is the belief that further development is possible and that the Earth will continue, more or less as now, for at least the first half of this century. To expect sustainable development or a trust in business as usual to be viable policies is like expecting a lung cancer victim to be cured by stopping smoking.“

James Lovelock sees the biggest danger in climate change, which can no longer be stopped, only mitigated:

„I am old enough to notice a marked similarity between attitudes over sixty years ago towards the threat of war and those now towards the threat of global warming. Most of us think that something unpleasant may soon happen, but we are as confused as we were in 1938 over what form it will take and what to do about it. It is strange that the Kyoto Agreement⁵⁹¹ was uncannily like that of Munich⁵⁹², with politicians out to show that they do respond but in reality only playing for time.“

According to Lovelock, today's society is dependent on fossil fuel energy like a drug addict is addicted to drugs:

„We as a civilization are all too much like someone addicted to a drug that will kill if continued and kill if suddenly withdrawn.“

Lovelock compares our present situation to Napoleon's advance on Moscow in 1812:

„In September of that year, when he reached the Russian capital, he had already gone too far, and his precious supplies were daily being consumed while he consolidated his capture. He was unaware that the irresistible forces commanded by General Winter were siding with the Russians, allowing them to counter-attack and regain their losses. The only way he could have avoided defeat was an immediate and professionally executed retreat so that his army could remain intact to fight another time. The quality of generalship is measured in military circles by the ability to carry through and organize a successful retreat. The time has come when all of us must plan a retreat from the unsustainable place that we have now reached. Far better to withdraw now while we still have the energy and the time.“⁵⁹³

The problem is that sustainable retreat is still politically unacceptable and for citizens very difficult to absorb from the psychological perspective.

Scenario No. 4: New technologies win

Man has an incredible ability to create and find new solutions. This is our hope. Human creativity has no limits, it is our most important treasure. Human creativity is our renewable and limitless resource.⁵⁹⁴

591 The Kyoto Protocol is a protocol of the UN Framework Agreement on Climate Change. Industrial countries agreed to decrease their greenhouse gas emissions by 5.2% before 2012.

592 The Munich Agreement was signed by Germany, Italy, France and Great Britain on the cession of the Czechoslovak border territory to Germany. It was concluded in September 1938.

593 J. Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*. (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

594 J. Simon, *Největší bohatství* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2006).

This technological and optimistic variant is possible in theory, but definitely not predestined by fate. Therefore, it is good to do our best to achieve it; however, it is not reasonable to rely on it. For example, we have been trying to achieve atomic fusion that would provide sufficient energy to ten billion people on this planet since the second half of the 20th Century. Experts were convinced that it would be commercially available sometime in the early 2000s. Today, experts say that it may be commercially available forty or fifty years from now. Our estimates are the same as they were seventy years ago. A precautionary approach⁵⁹⁵ is key, without relying on something which we still do not have.

In addition, technologies are just like a knife or nuclear energy – they can be used well, but also seriously misused.

In the area of scientific research and technological development, the following are the most promising areas:

- Synthetic biology – rewriting and creating new genetic codes.
- 3D printers – printing biological organs, weapons, houses, etc.
- Artificial intelligence – autonomous and continuous software modification based on feedback from global network sensors.
- Robotics – building robots and cyborgs almost identical to people; the issue of conscience remains a major unknown (under what circumstances can robots and cyborgs develop conscience, if at all).
- Production processes on the level of atoms and other nanotechnologies.
- Decreasing prices of renewable energy resources.
- Emerging „civilization nervous system“ (information technologies and information networks interconnect the entire humankind, „collective intelligence“ emerges).⁵⁹⁶

In a more distant horizon, the following technologies could be promising:

- Thermal nuclear fusion. It is based on nuclear fusion instead of nuclear fission. Common sea water is used as fuel. For each kilogram of fuel, the fusion releases 10 million times more energy than gasoline (a cup of water equals 500 000 barrels of oil). The main unresolved issue is how to maintain plasma at a temperature of over 100 million degrees Celsius under high pressure for a sufficiently long time.
- Superconductivity and the age of magnetism. Creating superconductors functional at room temperature would allow us to make objects move simply with our thoughts. Superconductivity allows us to eliminate losses in electricity transfer. Superconductors could create stable magnetic fields with enormous power. For example, cars and trains could move without friction. A vehicle would float and compressed air would be used to overcome air resistance and make the vehicle move.
- Manipulation with matter on nuclear level. „The Holy Grail“ of nanotechnology is the ability to manipulate individual atoms and to create a device that would build a desired product molecule by molecule, atom by atom. Manufacturing objects based on individ-

595 A precautionary approach is defined in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration: „Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.“ The Rio Declaration is a non-binding agreement adopted at the UN Conference on the Environment and Development in June 1992.

596 J. Glenn, T. Gordon, E. Florescu, *State of the Future*. (Washington, D.C.: The Millennium Project, 2012).

ual needs at the place of consumption would mean better products, zero waste and savings in transport, shop operation, packaging, etc.⁵⁹⁷

Interaction of matter and consciousness or the ability to control matter through consciousness remains a major mystery to us. Based on thousands of years of experience from diverse cultures, it seems that examination of consciousness could lead us to great evolutionary progress. This mainly concerns altered states of consciousness. They usually result in extrasensory perception of information.

Traditional science has perceived human beings as electrochemical „machines“ which receive information through sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Researchers focused on paranormal phenomena believe that man can use extrasensory perception to overcome the limitations of space and time.⁵⁹⁸

Scenario no. 5: Higher power intervention

Higher power intervention means a meeting with an extra-terrestrial civilization. It is not very probable, but still possible and completely unpredictable.

In our galaxy, there are approximately 150 billion stars (suns) and, in known space, there are 140 billion galaxies. The planets orbiting our Sun are probably not a unique phenomenon. Therefore, it is quite rational to suppose that there could be life somewhere out in space.

As space is almost 14 billion years old and life on Earth has been developing for four billion years, it is possible that there are more advanced forms of life. However, when we try to imagine a more advanced life and a more advanced civilization, we are like a chimpanzee who tries to specify what a human being is (and there is only 35 million years of evolutionary development between us and chimpanzees).

It is possible (although speculative) that aliens are already here, watching us like scientists and environmentalists observe wild animals – observe, study, but do not interfere.

In 1961, radio astronomer Frank Donald Drake tried to calculate the potential number of civilizations in our galaxy which could be able to establish contact with other civilizations:

$$N = R \cdot fp \cdot n_e \cdot fl \cdot fi \cdot fc \cdot L$$

- *N* = the number of civilizations in our galaxy with which communication might be possible
- *R* = the average rate of star formation in our galaxy (at that time it was estimated as one per year)
- *fp* = the fraction of those stars that have planets (0.2 according to estimates at that time)
- *n_e* = the average number of planets that can potentially support life per star that has planets (1 – 15 according to estimates at that time, which is too optimistic from our point of view)
- *fl* = the fraction of planets that could support life that actually develop life at some point (Drake uses the number one)

597 Kaku, M. *Fyzika budoucnosti* (Praha: Argo, Dokořán, 2013).

598 H. Eysenck, C. Sargent, *Objasněné záhady. Tajemství paranormálních jevů*. (Praha: Knižní klub, 1994).

- *fi* = the fraction of planets with life that actually go on to develop intelligent life (estimated at 1: 10,000,000 to 1)
- *fc* = the fraction of civilizations that develop a technology that releases detectable signs of their existence into space (estimated at 0.1 – 0.2)
- *L* = the length of time for which such civilizations release detectable signals into space (highly speculative, between one thousand years and one hundred million years)

According to this equation, there could be twenty to sixty million mature civilizations in our galaxy. Of course, we cannot be certain whether there are other inhabited planets and intelligent beings, nor whether we will ever meet them. However, Drake's old equation shows us quite convincingly that it is rational to assume that we are not alone in space.

Scenario No. 6: Collapse, transformation and regeneration

Jared Diamond defines societal collapse as a decrease in population or political, economic and social connections over a vast area over a long period of time. Just like an individual, societies and civilizations (as well as social institutions, biological species, stars, etc.) go through the stages of youth, adulthood and ageing.⁵⁹⁹

In the past, many civilizations (Sumerian, Egyptian, Minoan...) and empires (Persian, Roman...) collapsed. Nevertheless, unlike with a human being, their destruction is not inevitable, they can transform into a new quality. Western civilization is built on Hellenic civilization (which was based on Minoan civilization) and on the Roman empire, and it has further developed them.

Duane Elgin says:

“Like the inexorable passing of seasons, civilizations also pass through their seasons of growth and decline. A number of industrial civilizations have already passed through their Spring and Summer of growth and have entered their Autumn and Winter decline. Unless creative actions are taken soon to move beyond the industrial era, we will move deep into a harsh Winter of civilizational breakdown. We cannot build a future which we cannot imagine. The first requirement is to create a realistic, convincing and appealing vision of the future which is easily communicated. We need to discover a story that summarizes the next stage of our evolutionary development and works as a catalyst for our energy and enthusiasm.”⁶⁰⁰

American futurist Alvin Toffler said that we are the last generation of the old civilization and the first generation of the new civilization. Today, the basic political question is not who controls the final days of industrial society, but who will create a new civilization which will replace it. Generations which kept the civilization alive will be replaced by generations which create a new civilization.⁶⁰¹

Scenario No. 7: The apocalypse and a new beginning

This is related to the Biblical Revelation to St. John in the final part of the New Testament. A non-Christian and sceptic might see this revelation as the hallucinations of an author who was

599 J. Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking Books, 2005).

600 D. Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That is Outwardly Simple* (New York: Inwardly Rich. Quill, 1993).

601 A. Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980).

probably very old. For Christians, this is a “sealed” book which may be showing us the end of human history on Earth. At the moment, we do not understand it and cannot interpret it correctly.

This apocalyptic prediction, where one catastrophe is followed by another, has a double meaning for us:

- It should tell us that ignoring the Creator together with our expanding possibilities will cause more and more problems and catastrophes.
- It is about hope, not about hopelessness. John’s mystical vision ends with two significant messages: “Behold, I make all things new.” (Rev 21:5). And the second one: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (Rev 22:13)

Let us add that attempts at precise predictions of the “end of the world” are pointless. So far, they have all failed. For Christians, Christ’s message is very strong: “But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” (Mt 24:36)

Some theologians and laymen think (or hope) that John’s Revelation tries to tell us to try and prevent or mitigate a future catastrophe through our behaviour and actions.

We may try to perceive this prophecy and some other Biblical prophecies as a “self-destructive prognosis”. A mysterious and vague image of “the final days” may be a peek into our future which we can change with our actions to some extent.

Whether we are believers or not, we all live on this planet here and now. It is in our common interest to take care of it as well as we can.

Conclusion

It is very tricky to try to understand the “human story” on our planet. Nevertheless, let us try to suggest a possible continuation of the human story, although we will not tie it to a specific timeline.

Viktor E. Frankl says that man’s fundamental interest is his will to meaning (which means that man reaches beyond himself to find meaning). True efforts to find meaning are an important aspect of human nature and self-transcendence. The will to meaning is, according to Frankl, a very specific need which cannot be reduced to other needs.⁶⁰²

Gerald O. Barney claims that the most important event over the last 2000 years since the birth of Christ is the fact that we are starting to know our story – from the Big Bang (creation of the universe) until today, and we even have some hints about the future. God is a creative mystery (a mysterious creative power); all religions agree on that. God makes us co-creators, which means that we are also co-responsible for the creation.⁶⁰³

In search of an answer to the question “where are we heading”, science and faith have come quite close to one another. The only difference is that “faith”, in our case the Book of Daniel, the

602 V. Frankl, *Vůle ke smyslu. Vybrané přednášky o logoterapii* (Praha: Cesta, 2006).

603 G. Barney, J. Blewett, K. Barney, *Global 2000 Revisited* (Arlington: Millennium Institute, 1993).

Revelation to John and some declarations of Jesus Christ, clearly warns us that this will not be a smooth and painless process, and the final victory of good over evil will come in the very final part of the human story on this planet.

A rational scientific approach tends to look at opportunities, while threats are put aside. We see ourselves in a better light and we ignore the risks. However, human nature is disrupted by sin and there is always a risk of misuse. This is what the Bible and historical experience warn us about.

So far everything suggests that, “until the end of time”, each person will have in their heart the ability to become a near-angelic creature, but also a monster. It is still unclear whether our journey towards “the end of history” will be a transformation of human society into a new evolutionary stage or rather a chain of wasted opportunities.

A formulation of these scenarios will allow us to make informed decisions related to the near future. Moreover, this study also creates space for further research in the area of sustainability and development and interesting scientific discussions and reflections for a wider international scientific and scholarly public. Further research and inspirational expert reflections are currently extremely relevant and topical, because the future will always astonish us, but we should still care about it on a scientific and research level and on a human level, because we will spend the rest of our lives living it.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The mentioned author significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, the author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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SELECTED RELEVANT NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOR MARRIAGE AND PARTNERSHIP AND SUGGESTED EFFICIENT SOLUTIONS



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Abstract

Background: This contribution stems from specialised research results carried out by means of specific case studies on the basis of qualitative research by using online interviews to map the consequences of coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic and its impact on married

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couples and cohabitating partners. This research was conducted from late March until mid-October 2020. Three hundred married couples and partners from various countries participated in the research.

Conclusion: Research results can be applied in further analyses as a basis for relevant and beneficial research which can also be expanded in the period of long-term negative consequences of COVID-19 or during similar pandemics and their negative consequences on married couples and partners.

Keywords: COVID-19. Crisis. Partnership. Negative Consequences. Restoring and Relationship.

Introduction

From March until October 2020, a series of case studies was performed on the basis of qualitative research in the form of online interviews for the purpose of mapping the consequences of coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic on married couples and cohabitating partners. Three hundred married couples and cohabitating partners participated in cases studies which took place in Italy, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, UK, Ireland, Poland, Ukraine, Serbia, Romania and USA. Married couples and partners were contacted through various NGOs and international interest organisations focused on providing support to couples and families in a crisis situation. As contact was established through these organizations, participants could rest assured that research authors have been active in this area for a long time and made the contact trustworthy in their eyes. Participating couples had to be older than 37. Prior to the start of the research, focus groups were realized with married couples and partners to ascertain the areas where special attention would be necessary. The aim of this article is to present results of this very specific research. These results can bring relevant and inspiring insights for new and valuable research in the area of helping couples in a crisis, including during similar pandemics as the one affecting us today.

Certain Relevant Consequences of the Coronavirus Pandemic for a Marriage or Partnership

All three hundred couples who participated in this specific online research resulting in a series of unique case studies agreed that during the pandemic, they experienced certain aspects which significantly influenced their relationship, and thus the functioning of the entire family. These aspects can be synthesized into the following areas:

Outburst and continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and subsequent forced isolation surprised these couples just like the rest of the world; when the first wave of the pandemic started, they were scared and confused; in changing and complicated conditions of their everyday family and work lives, they exercised maximum efforts to maintain the functioning of their families. Due to demanding work schedules, with the exception of weekends and holidays, they had often seen each other and their children in the morning before leaving to work and then in late afternoon or in the evening after returning from work – they were not used to spending longer periods of time together in a confined isolated space. During the first days of the pandemic, it seemed that all family members did everything they could to help each other lighten up grim mood created in families and households by monitoring news on the ongoing situation: infections, hospitalized patients, increasing death toll. All this information resulted in a lot of despair. In their home environment, they felt safer and more protected. When the weather was nice, they sat on the balcony or in the garden and watched the sunset together.

Some couples said that their neighbours were very kind to offer shared shopping. They agreed to do the shopping alternatively with the neighbours and shared purchased goods.

When quarantine started, participants' school-going children very much enjoyed the presence of their parents at home, as they spent more time with them than before. For example, they came up with an interesting activity and spent some time together. The first few days of self-isolation were quite calm, however, with quarantine period getting longer, undesirable tension accumulated between married couples or partners, they said that they felt like animals in a cage. Gradually, couples were forced to work predominantly from home, which deepened their problems and quarrels. They admitted that meeting other people during their working time and talking to people outside their home environment was beneficial, it helped them filter out various negative feelings and reduce stress. After they returned from work, it was easier for them to share their everyday lives with family. However, during the first wave, couples had to spend all their time together and this started to turn into a burden. Serious complications appeared even in relationships which before the pandemic seemed more consolidated than the other analysed marriages and partnerships.

In relation to the above-mentioned serious complications, in some cases, infidelity was discovered in an online or personal form. Based on couples' statements, infidelity in a personal form had started even before the pandemic. Both forms of infidelity had a sexual and emotional subtext. This situation was experienced by 65% of the participating couples. Some betrayed partners were shocked by this information and perceived it as a betrayal of their love and shared dreams. In their statements made in the case studies or during later interviews with a therapist, they said that the pandemic for them turned into: „*decline in the partner's morale and values*“, „*major betrayal of love*“, „*deep wound and loss of trust towards the partner*“, „*immense doubts and fears related to the future of the relationship*“, or a „*real pandemonium*“. However, others claimed that pandemic circumstances helped them achieve clarity which they would not have experienced otherwise, as they would not be forced to stay isolated with their partner for a longer time. As if „*closeness with the partner in self-isolation opened their eyes and allowed them to see the partner with different eyes, in more detail and from different perspectives*.“ Case studies have shown that during the COVID-19 pandemic, 41% of couples dealt with a complex phenomenon of impotence. Especially couples who experienced this problem were „*forced to live and operate in extended forced solitude which forced them to modify or even suppress their personal space, which shrank even more*.“ „*The outside space was reduced as well, which intensified marital and partnership disagreements, accusations, communication issues, misunderstandings, doubts, conflicts, frustrations, lack of tenderness and attention*“, „*lack of common interests*“, „*perceived uncertainty in relation to the future*“, „*fear of another or even more severe betrayal*“. Couples also included in this category factors which tend to appear in more fragile or problematic marriages or partnerships during crisis periods, such as: „*coarse approach in conflict situations; criticism; contempt; humiliation; defensive behaviour; feeling of being physically and mentally overwhelmed in conflict situations – one of the partners' heart rate accelerates, he or she feels upset, bad and unable to listen to what his spouse/partner is trying to tell them or to respond. They start to be aggressive and try to escape the communication. In this case, there is a lack of effort to reduce tension in communication and to find balance in mutual helpfulness. Negative memories might get suppressed or lead to a complete change in the marriage story. Presence of these phenomena in a marriage or partnership causes intense alienation, feelings of mutual hatred, anger and hostility, tension and an impression that the other partner is toxic*.“

Couples who participated in the case study repeatedly stressed that the first wave quarantine was an especially difficult period for them. It also helped them realize „*the authenticity of their feelings*“, „*clarify positions within the relationship*“, „*think about their relationship and decide*

whether they want to end it or whether they are able to find motivation to stay together despite difficult situations and newly discovered and insuperable differences and accept mutual compromises.”

Specialised steps to restore the perspectives of a marriage or partnership

Married couples and partners participating in case studies agreed that after overcoming the first wave of the pandemic, it seems that certain measures adopted during the second wave have been helping them restore their marriage and partnership to some extent. For this reason, they were asked to apply the following steps created on the basis of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and counselling in connection to certain relevant, efficient and inspiring principles of logotherapy⁶⁰⁵, with relevant specific aspects from the area of Christian missiology and theology which focus on healing disrupted relationships, traumas and emotional wounds.

Restore and maintain a routine

During this period, it was important for couples to try to reconstruct their life and return it to a state which would be as similar as possible to the relationship they had before the first wave of the pandemic so that they could experience a feeling of continuity with the pre-pandemic period: their task was to dedicate „some extra positive hours per week“ to their relationship. This includes: daily hugs and kisses lasting at least six seconds followed by a conversation to reduce stress which should last more than ten minutes. Partners should express their admiration, appreciation and affection for several minutes per day over the entire week and schedule a weekly „date“ to help them maintain a feeling of closeness, support the mapping of mental space and mutual openness. A relevant element of this step is weekly stock-taking of the relationship. This communication lasts one hour and it includes all positive developments of the given week, mutual exchange of five compliments or appreciation of the other partner which were not expressed during the week, an analysis of potential problems without any quarrels or negativity, using a gentle approach and active listening without defensive actions. Within this step, married couples and partners were supposed to restore their network of relationships and establish contacts with friends and family members, plan various positive events for the future. Their task

605 More detailed information can be found in: Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (New York: Dell Publishing, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub. Group, 1991); Urs Bauman, *Utopie partnerschaft. Alte Leibilder – neue Lebensformen* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1994); Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Was kommt nach der Familie? Alte Leitbilder und neue Lebensformen*. (3. überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2010); Alfred Dubach, Wolfgang Lienemann and Urs Bauman, *Kommentare zur Studie «Jede(r)ein Sonderfall? Religion in der Schweiz»* (2. Zürich: NZN-Buchverlag; Basel: F. Reinhardt Verlag, 1997); Christoph Gellner, (Hg.), *Paar- und Familienwelten im Wandel: neue Herausforderungen für Kirche und Pastoral* (TVZ, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2007); Viktor E. Frankl, „Ärztliche Seelsorge“ (4. Aufl. Verlag, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991); Julie Henkelman and Barbara Paulson, „The client as expert: Researching hindering experiences in counselling,” *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* 19, 2, (2006): 139-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070600788303>; Robert Hettlage, *Familien report: Eine Lebensform im Umbruch* (München: Beck, 1998); Ronald J. Chenail, „Clients’ Relational Conceptions of Conjoint Couple and Family Therapy Quality: A Grounded Formal Theory,” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 38, 1, (28 September 2011) <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2011.00246.x>; Joanna Jurek, „Premature termination in couple therapy as a part of therapeutic process. Cross case analysis,” *Archives of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy* 2, (2014):51-59; Robert J. Manthei, „What Can Clients Tell Us about Seeking Counselling and Their Experience of It?,” *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling* 27, 541-555 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-005-8490-3>; Barbara L. Paulson, „Client perceptions of hindering experiences in counselling,” *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research: Linking research with practice* 1, 1, (2001):53-61; Rüdiger Peuckert, (*Familienformen im sozialen Wandel*) Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012.

was to look to the future and stop concentrating on past traumas or their current consequences. As part of this step, they were supposed to restore disrupted communication and damaged trust between the two partners. The first sub-step was to focus on the partner and their feelings and not his lack of interest in communication. During the communication restart process, the partner should feel understood and believe that their feelings are accepted, only then can they gradually reopen to mutual communication and start healing and restoring their trust.

Maintain one’s private space

To maintain a healthy partnership, it is important to create individual space, place and time for each partner to be alone, both in terms of time and material space. Within this individual space, each partner has a unique opportunity for an existential meeting *in silence and solitude with themselves, with the truth about themselves*⁶⁰⁶ and, last but not least, if they are religious, with the God they believe in or with another strong positive spiritual and religious value they profess. Truth in this remarkable meeting is the one that makes one free. However, this is not an „objective theoretical truth which should make one free.(...) It is truth about yourself, the answer to the question who you really are, and man brings his entire self into the meeting. This teaches him self-discovery and brings a certain kind of fulfilment. It creates a new inner space in which he can accept himself, no matter if he is loved or broken. It is a space where he can accept the truth about himself in inner freedom and humbleness.”⁶⁰⁷ In this inner space, partners have the possibility to ponder upon themselves, their relationship, expectations and wishes related to the relationship, as well as various areas of their life and future.

Redistribute daily tasks

Clear distribution of duties makes daily organisation easier. With new family arrangements related to unpredicted circumstances (difficulties on the road, potential lateness, cancellation of a meeting), roles can change, as well as circumstances that each family member must face, in some cases on a daily basis. The COVID-19 pandemic, especially its first wave, became a special historical event and since then, each family member has felt a new feeling of responsibility. Therefore, all family members should be flexible and ready to accept different or new tasks. Such distribution of duties might turn into an unprecedented challenge, eliminating the usual routine. Working on shared fulfilment of duties ultimately helps restore relationships. Within this step, it is also useful for spouses/partners to create an awareness of fair distribution of household chores. Men should take on a larger amount of household work despite the fact that they do not feel motivated to do so. However, research has shown that couples where man takes on a corresponding share of household chores show much higher satisfaction with their sex life than couples where the woman believes that her partner’s willingness to perform household work is insufficient.

Boost social life

In this step, it is necessary to focus the couple’s attention on increasing mutual tolerance and respect and mitigate or tone down discussions which can easily occur under stressful circumstances and in forced self-isolation. It is necessary for spouses/partners to stop emphasising elements which deepen mutual differences, misunderstandings or feelings of frustration and ultimately induce conflicts. In case a conflict arises, they should stop it as soon as possible. The

606 Mária Šmidová, „Preparation of volunteers engaged in helping professions and working with families in difficult situations,” *Acta Missiologica* 10, no. 2, (2016): 86. <https://www.actamissiologica.com/>
607 Šmidová, „Preparation of volunteers,” 86.

following strategies may be helpful. *Strengthening of a mutual bond, mutual care and common goals.* The stronger these factors are, the easier it is for spouses/partners to reduce conflicts. Another strategy is to *foster the ability not to be drawn into conflict escalation*, which prevents increasing anger of the one who started the conflict. The third strategy is to *maintain mutual care, tender and loving attitude towards the partner*, especially towards an agitated partner who displays negative feelings and emotions. The aim of this step is to create a peaceful oasis with no disruptive emotions in the partnership.

Create space for emotional relaxation and shared free-time activities

For each couple, presence and moments spent together are very important. Therefore, it is essential for couples to find space in which they can experience emotional relief and joy from a time spent together. Especially during a pandemic and forced self-isolation, it is refreshing to rediscover a fun companion in the spouse/partner and to have a chance to do recreational and relaxing activities which they do not have time for with their normal busy work schedules. In this step, coupled received a recommendation to do a mapping exercise of their common goals and potential ways how to meet them. In this step, their task was to focus on creating a deeper understanding of a shared sense. This means that partnership and marriage also have a spiritual dimension in the sense of logotherapy, which is related to the creation of a deeper social life, i.e. with a certain culture with its symbols and rituals and with a life philosophy which should be respected and loved. This culture also includes mutual bonding, appreciation of roles, values and goals which are shared by both partners and which make them understand who they are as a family.

Share emotions

It is important to share emotions and fears with the partner. Realising significant external danger like the pandemic can strengthen the partners' sharing of emotions and subsequent provision of mutual support, encouragement and feelings of safety. In this step, it is important for spouses/partners to feel sufficient attention and love from the other partner, to enjoy small things together and not to let everyday duties or problems overwhelm them. Sharing emotions and fears can be an efficient strengthening strategy which the spouses/partners can use to encourage each other to face future demanding challenges.

Maintain relationships alive, effort to prevent alienation to a maximum extent

During the pandemic, the nature of communication changed. It transformed from a personal form to a remote form through communication channels which are so popular and so frequently used by the young generation. It has replaced precious face-to-face meetings, as well as the possibility to participate in experiences of people we know. During the pandemic, it is necessary for couples to keep interacting with others face-to-face and maintain authentic relationships typical for their uniqueness and unrepeatability, which make them so precious.

Strengthen parental roles during the pandemic

In case spouses/partners have children, it is necessary for them to strengthen the awareness of togetherness and a joint „us“ also in relation to their children. Especially during the pandemic and forced self-isolation, they should focus on mutual friendship and care for their children in an equally active way. It is essential for women to realize that for a proper functional relationship, they need to be more perceptive of the needs of their partners as fathers and show them that they are still important. This approach helps men open up to their wives/partners and provide them with more support. This behaviour also eliminates the husband's/partner's tendency to

hold back or leave the relationship. In addition, men must realise that their wives/partners need rest from childcare and housework and in the interest of maintaining their relationship, they should help them do so.

Suggest possibilities of solving financial problems caused by negative consequences of the pandemic

As we can see, the pandemic can have a negative impact on the economic situation of all family members. As a result of insufficient funds caused by job loss or other related complications which affect employment, various and frequent conflicts can occur between partners. Therefore, it is essential for couples to try to create a list of short-term and long-term financial goals and ways how they could be achieved. This list should include common dreams and intentions in the area of marriage or partnership. In case of financial problems related to the pandemic, the list should also include suggestions for later or other possibilities of achieving these dreams and goals.

Revive sex life affected by the pandemic in a sensitive and respectful manner

In terms of their sex life, spouses/partners should accept and appreciate each other. They should talk about their sexual desires and needs to prevent decrease or total loss of sexual pleasure. Such honest and open communication can significantly help them reveal a problem with impotence in time. Our research has shown that this phenomenon has affected many couples. It is necessary for couples to realise that by discovering this issue, their sex life is not over. There are many ways how to solve the problem and at the same time rediscover mutual emotional and physical proximity and honest self-giving in a shared sex life.

It is also important for spouses/partners not to take it personally when the other partner refuses sex, they should learn how to process it without undesirable impact on their marriage or partnership. In this case, it is recommended to apply a logotherapeutic principle of paradoxical intention. In case the man can accept his wife's/partner's rejection and shows his understanding, she will feel closer to him. Research has shown that when a husband/partner acts this way, the frequency of sexual intercourse significantly increases.

Enhance mutual support in handling the issue of privacy loss threat during the pandemic

During the pandemic, the whole world experienced various restrictions which include tracking of persons and checking phone or email communications. It is necessary to note that *“the right for privacy also means an individual's right to control information about them or the right to decide whether and to what extent their privacy should be disclosed to others.”*⁶⁰⁸ That is why we see global tension and uncertainty caused by serious and real loss of privacy. This situation causes enormous emotional burden caused by fear and stress for everyone, not just for couples. Spouses/partners need to experience a loving presence of their significant other, which can provide them with a feeling of certainty, security and protection, and thus help them achieve the biggest possible sense of control over the situation.

Discussion

Results of work on the above-mentioned steps within the performed case studies have demonstrated that these steps provide married couples and partners with efficient support to rediscover communication in which they teach each other to talk about any problems in a sensi-

608 Eva Fialová, Ján Matejka, Vojen Güttler. *Profílování a automatizované rozhodování (nejen) ve světle lidských práv a základních svobod* (Praha: Ústav státu a práva AV ČR, 2020). 61

tive manner with the aim of reducing tension. Application of these steps in a series of performed case studies has also shown that thanks to this communication, spouses and partners are able to find a compromise more easily and quickly. The basis of efficient intervention in a couple's life affected by COVID-19 pandemic in various areas is for the couple to adopt the right perceptive way of communication. The sooner they are aware of the importance of a new start, their friendship, dominance of positive emotions towards the other partner, as well as correct and sensitive communication, the sooner they can start working on restarting their relationship.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic and many other negative consequences have shown that marriages and partnerships of the new generation are in major danger and they are affected by remote communication, poor morality and reduced ability to handle various crises or similar pandemics, which has severe psychological consequences. Families of these couples have been and will be subject to the labour market and they are considered to be secondary. This results in a high percentage of divorces and break-ups, which is closely linked to insufficient adoption of basic moral values, such as faithfulness, forgiveness and respect. Ending a relationship is a consequence of a dominant position of work, consumerism and selfishness. However, the most common reason for a divorce or break-up is personal immaturity and infidelity. One of the relevant implications for practical work with couples in a crisis to prevent this negative phenomenon is to organise preparatory marriage/partnership courses at schools and youth leisure centres, courses designed to learn how to solve conflicts, respect each other in mutual relationships and in relationships between the two sexes.

As a means of solving partnership misunderstandings, it would be advisable to apply the specified steps designed to help couples in a crisis through virtual reality – for example through communication with therapists or workers engaged in helping professions on the level of scientific and expert research and practical long-standing experience with providing help and support to married couples, partners and families who find themselves in a difficult situation. These steps could also have the form of questionnaires. Output from the questionnaires could help partners to strengthen their relationship and improve its quality.

When solving marital and partnership crises and misunderstandings, priority should be given to efficient prevention, as divorce and break-up initially results in a personality and spiritual crisis, followed by post-divorce or post-break-up psychological trauma which can last for a long time. The phenomenon of break-up or divorce scares many married couples and partners of the new generation. It is a phenomenon of modernity and in reality, the divorce rate has only just started. This contribution opens space for possibilities of further and new interesting research in the area of creating and modifying efficient approaches and services focused on long-term support for married couples and partners which can be used also in the period of pandemics similar to COVID-19 and their various negative consequences.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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NECESSITY OF GLOBAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AND FAMILY STABILIZATION
DESPITE TODAY'S DESTRUCTIVE PROCESSES* – COMMENTED INTERVIEWJan Dacok¹, Carlo Rocchetta², Marek Šmid³, Ladislav Cosontos⁴, Maria Šmidová⁵¹ Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome, IT)² Theological Institute in Assisi (IT)³ The Institute for Legal Aspects of Religious Freedom; Faculty of Law, Trnava University (SK)^{4,5} Faculty of Theology, Trnava university in Trnava (SK)

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Nowadays, we are facing immense challenges which have affected the entire society in a decisive and energetic manner. These challenges represent a global problem. A modern laicized vision of family has been massively supported especially in Europe. Therefore, it is necessary for Church community and its Christian reflections to efficiently respond to these phenomena – in particular within individual Churches, but also jointly as a whole. This should be done by finding new attractive methods presented in an understandable, acceptable and up-to-date form for a person living in today's society. However, these methods should also include the right theological forms and efficient aspirations. With this aim in mind, it is necessary for individual Churches to organize themselves and to start this mission with an organic reflection. From the perspective of the Catholic Church, it is necessary to restore and strengthen pastoral care for families on a national and international level. However, this cannot be done without very serious and rigorous reflections and without theological reflection of the family community. To perform such reflection – which should also be effective in practice – we need to re-discover the basics of theology, to return to the Holy Trinity analogy, to recall the value of marriage and family, the importance of expressing tenderness between husband and wife and their calling to holiness. Furthermore, we need to lead lively international discussions on a scientific, expert and layman level interconnected with serious work on reestablishment of organic, unified, harmonic and lively family pastoration relying on key pillars that will support it, including various stabilization strategies designed to strengthen the perception of family and the importance of its position for the future of the entire global society, the Church community and religions which still respect the value of original/traditional families even in today's modern era and wish to support and maintain them. We discussed these topics with professor Carlo Rocchetta, one of the biggest experts in the issues of marriage and family in the Christian environment, co-founder of the Italian Society for Theological Research (Società italiana per la ricerca

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teologica) and International Academy for Marital Spirituality based in Brussels, lecturer at Theological Institute in Assisi (Istituto Teologico di Assisi) and Centro familiare Casa della Tenerezza, with a lawyer, diplomat and university pedagogue, one of the founders and Emeritus Rector of Trnava University, and President of the Slovak Rectors Conference, Dr.h.c. professor Marek Šmid, who is currently employed as Chairman of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education and with professors Ladislav Cosontos and Mária Šmidová – investigators of APVV 15-0189 project *Selected Pro-Family Strategy Factors and Supporting Stable Family in a Multicultural Environment* at Trnava University, Faculty of Theology, in which they focused on active and efficient support provided to families by using various support strategies. One of these relevant strategies is counselling. Within counselling, scientific, academic and practical environment of Faculty of Theology at Trnava University focuses on supporting families and training experts and volunteers and, in terms of education, on acquiring skills for current and future counsellors.

„Destructive processes in a family community“

We are witnessing many destructive processes in a family community. Of course, these processes are reflected in divorces, separations, cohabitation out of wedlock, as well as many other de-structuralising processes which threaten families and question the entire family process. „For example, just take the importance of conjugal marital procreative act, the union of man and woman in marriage, gender differences, an increasingly threatened identity of marriage and biological offspring, the issue of uterus for rent, homosexual and incomplete family models, gender ideology or disappearing solidarity between generations. As a result of all these elements, various single-parent family models arise, completely excluding one of the main figures, i.e. mother or father. In these models, it is totally sufficient that a person who is single wants to become a father or mother. However, the child's right to have a mother and a father is completely disregarded. We can clearly see the absence of marriage consisting of a man and a woman who are open to life. In the past decades, gender ideology has also started to be more and more prominent.

The Human Rights Commission in Australia claims that there are 17 different sexual orientations. It has also presented 51 family models, so we can no longer speak about a *family* in its singular form, but rather about *families* in plural. Therefore, if someone says that heterosexual marriage is the only marriage possible, he commits something similar to racial discrimination, which is against the law. One needs to talk about parenthood instead of motherhood and fatherhood. We have Parent 1 and Parent 2, because children can now be conceived outside a union of man and woman, for example by means of homologous or heterologous intrauterine insemination. Based on this ideology, one cannot deprive an adult of the right to have a child and there is a legitimate possibility for children to be adopted by a homosexual couple or persons living alone,“ says professor Rocchetta.

„Many problems mentioned by Professor Rocchetta fall under very complex bioethical questions where law plays a significant role. Apart from morality, law is the most significant tool of social regulation. Unlike morality, state power can naturally enforce respect of legal norms, which is often a very motivating factor. Morality has a spontaneous position in the society, while law acts as an agent which can enable targeted modification of social relations in the above-mentioned areas. Morality regulates through the power of social pressure, while law uses the power of the state. Both systems share the idea of justice. It is important to realise that to some extent, the legal system must be aligned with morality or justice or it must be based on a generally known

assumption that it is our moral obligation to conform to law. If morality is excluded from law, it loses its basic value system, which reflects the relationship of morality and law, as moral validity is one of the defining traits of human rights. Professor Rocchetta touched upon the relationship of law, medicine and ethics. We can see that law, ethics and medicine are interlinked. Law as an expression of social consensus for the solution of specific questions should satisfy a majority of the society. Many moral questions do not need to be governed by law, as attitudes in the society vary so much that it is impossible to find a single solution. From this perspective, law can be perceived not as a maximum but rather as a minimum of morality; it handles only the most controversial problems, it forbids ethically reprehensible actions," says Professor Marek Šmid.

In relation to the already mentioned destructive family processes, professor Mária Šmidová says that during the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence has intensified among spouses and partners, as well as child and elder abuse. These facts undermine the value of marriage, family, intergenerational solidarity and enhance processes which try to destabilize the original/traditional family and its global perception by the society.

„Family as a living reflection of God as Trinity of love“

In one of his letters to families, John Paul II prophetically suggested decisive orientation of the perception of family in the sense that it is a living reflection of God as Trinity of love. He says that in light of the New Testament, one can see how to look for the original family model in God himself, in the secret of his Trinity life. God's „We“ represents the eternal model of a human „we“ and this „we“ mainly represents a union of man and woman, which is created in the image of God. When we look at it in more detail from a theological perspective, parenthood is based on eternal fertility of the Holy Trinity, therefore, the bond of a married couple cannot be separated from its fertility. This fertility needs to be viewed in its complete integral sense. Husband and wife need to share, give and receive. The mission of two people who are supposed to become one leads to them becoming three, they are open to a third heart. Based on this, we can say that marriage or marital bond cannot be separated from parenthood, as it has a unifying and procreative meaning. The fact that a man and a woman become father and mother represents an act which highlights their community in unity and unity in community. The fact that they become husband and wife and parents is a single continuum. Their child is a living reflection of their love. It is a permanent sign of their unity. Consequences are clear. The child is a miracle of Trinity love for his parents and the entire world. The human act of being born is an act of external incarnation. *„Parenthood and motherhood represent – especially for today's society globally influenced by the above-mentioned destructive phenomena – a „news“ and immense wealth, because parents are God's collaborators who accept the gift of life and give life to a human being. This human being, their child, as well as all children in the world, are mainly God's children. That is why parents need to perceive them in this way and love them with tenderness sourced from God who is Trinity.“* (C. Rocchetta)

From the perspective of rediscovering the original/traditional family model in Trinity of God, it is necessary for theological reflections and organic family pastoration to repeatedly *confirm radical unity between man, marriage and family and unity of the redeeming and creative God's plan related to a human being, marriage and family.* To be able to make the society, individuals, married couples and families more familiar with the above-mentioned radical confirmation of unity in an understandable way, it is necessary for them to realize that man is a being that needs relationships. This means that men and women are called to love and community. „This community is the realization of their calling to love. It is accompanied by a marriage contract or a marriage agreement between man and woman, which is supposed to be realized and fulfilled every day,

also through forgiveness and mutual help between husband and wife. The married couple needs to understand that their calling in marriage is a calling to holiness and through everyday routine and mutual tenderness, they can rediscover their love again and again. This is a certain form of evangelization. Married couples who experience tenderness in their everyday lives understand the calling to holiness. In relation to husbands' and wives' calling to holiness, Pope Francis often recalls: *a well-experienced family community is a true path to holiness in everyday life and mystical growth, a tool for intimate connection with God.* This is very important. One does not need to look for holiness outside marriage, but through marriage, because in marriage, husband and wife become holy. Marital life should be holy. It is experienced in a human way, but also consecrated by a sacrament. For the married couple, it represents a way to lead their life in mercy. It is a marriage secret. Family should be perceived in this sense as well: as a community of two people who love each other, they are called to holiness, open to procreation and they create the first community of life, and thus create parenthood," says professor Rocchetta.

„Family and family community as a reflection of God's tenderness“

Professor Rocchetta follows up on the position of tenderness in marriage and family life by saying: „Family should be a community of tenderness. Tenderness in family life means that we give joy and the other person feels joy because they feel loved. This is especially visible when we pay special attention to the other person's limits. Tenderness which is mutually present and expressed between spouses and between parents and children is a bond which unites the married couple, as well as parents and children. Tenderness in marital and parental relationships is a daily virtue. It helps overcome many internal and relationship conflicts. It means that a family as a community of tenderness pays attention to its members.“ Professor Šmidová follows up on professor Rocchetta: „Marriage filled with tenderness is a place where one does not feel alone and experiences acceptance. It creates certainty for children coming to the family environment. It is a place of love and also a school of love.“

„I am a marriage counsellor for married couples at Centro Familiare Casa della Tenerezza in Italy and from my experience I can confirm that if married couples discover tenderness, they are happy. I see that when they discover tenderness, they also discover the ability to love. Tenderness is for love and man what soul is for the body. Without a soul, one cannot exist in the body and without tenderness, there is no love. That is why families should foster tenderness in their relationships," adds Professor Rocchetta.

With regards to expressing tenderness between husband and wife, Professor Csontos follows up on Professor Rocchetta: „Expressing tenderness in families sets an important example for children as well. If they see expressions of tenderness between their parents, general atmosphere in the family is different to married couples who do not foster and express tenderness. However, it is important to note that partners can experience injuries in their relationship, and in some cases these wounds are so deep that they prevent them from fostering or expressing tenderness. At the same time, in today's environment, we are used to women being the ones who are tender and for this reason, men often find it difficult to develop tenderness in the relationship or marriage," warns Professor Csontos.

„In today's culture, man must be strong and proud and very rarely one hears about the ways how husbands could foster tenderness in marriage and family. This is a problem, because expressing tenderness in marriage and family is really important and it must be supported. First of all, we need to realize that men and women are tender beings created in the image of God, who is eternal tenderness, and each of them experiences tenderness in a different way. Let us take the

example of deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA, which is unique to each man and woman. From the perspective of relationships and expressing tenderness, we can say that this is a genetic code embedded in each human being, calling them to love...”, says professor Rocchetta.

Even the Catholic theology recognizes the virtue of tenderness. Pope Francis frequently talks about tenderness. He made tenderness one of the pillars of his pontificate, when he invited us not to be afraid of it, because it helps us give a human face to the world. „In my publication *Teologia della tenerezza. Un «vangelo» da riscoprire* (2001), in relation to the importance of expressing tenderness, I used the example of Jesus Christ and his life. Jesus Christ was a man and he was able to express tenderness despite the fact that the way he lived and loved led him to crucifixion. The cross is part of this journey. When working with married couples and providing family counselling, we need to realize and always bear in mind how important it is to express tenderness between husband and wife and that the husband needs to be tender as well. That is why family is a gift, mutual sharing and receiving tenderness,” says professor Rocchetta.⁶¹⁰

„Several key aspects to rediscover organic family pastoration“

The above-mentioned facts confirm the importance of organic, i.e. united, harmonious and lively family pastoration. But how to re-establish this organic family pastoration for several years to come? First of all, it needs to be stressed that family pastoration care needs to consider all the above-mentioned elements and we must ask ourselves what methods and key aspects we will need to rediscover/re-establish family pastoration and pastoral plans. (C. Rocchetta)

Three central aspects will significantly help us to restore organic family pastoration. The first aspect is „to stress the beauty and nobleness of the calling to the sacrament of matrimony in new and attractive ways.“ (C. Rocchetta) The fact that two people get married on the basis of receiving the sacrament can no longer be taken for granted. The sacrament of matrimony is God's calling and according to Christian faith, it is a miracle. Therefore, Pope Francis stresses that Christianity's opinions on a human couple and family cannot be limited to cold defence or doctrine. These opinions should not rely on exterior beauty of God's project in the sense of God's plan with marriage and family. This calling, this miracle, is a journey which can receive holiness and at the same time, it is fully aware of the beauty and magnificence of man and woman and nobleness of their mutual sharing and co-ownership in tenderness – a precious bond from which new life is created. “This is when a family becomes the reflection of Trinity God of Love. So this interpretation of marriage and family is the second important aspect of organic family pastoration.” (C. Rocchetta) Pope Francis explains the meaning of this aspect in the following way: family creates domestic Church which matures, prepares and provides the first experience for children among people and in the Christian community. This is where through God's mercy, the secret of the Holy Trinity is reflected. Father, Son and the Holy Spirit have always lived and will always live in perfect unity.

„The third aspect is the stressing of Christian family calling.“ (C. Rocchetta) Christian family is called to contribute to the Church's calling responsibly and in its own original way, which means in practice that it serves the Church and the society in its life and actions as a community of life and love. This principle is also repeated by Pope Francis: he considers Christian families through the grace and sacrament of matrimony to be the main entities of family pastoration. That is why it is no longer sufficient to carry out pastoration for the family, but rather *with* the family. „In organic family pastoration, it is essential to work on the discovery of marriage and its values. This is a very important role not just for the Catholic Church, but also for the entire Church

610 More detailed information can be found in: Carlo Rocchetta *Teologia de la ternura* (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2001); Cinà Giuseppe et al., *Dizionario di Teologia Pastorale Sanitaria* (Torino: Edizioni Camilliane, 1997).

community in the near future and the years to come. In particular, the Catholic Church needs to develop and revive organic family pastoration, because pastoration of the Church depends on the opinions of the Catholic Church on destructive processes which influence the family, and the future of the Catholic Church and its communities depends on the position of original/traditional family and perception of its value,” says professor Rocchetta.

“Stabilizing strategies for family strengthening”

Today's modern era has created many new – and not always positive – views of life and family. We could say that it has freed people from bonds with their extended family and community, and caused fragmentation of human life into areas governed by bureaucratic apparatuses which weaken family competencies. These difficult and dynamic times have also resulted in people finding themselves in difficult situations leading to personal crises. The fact that families find themselves in a crisis is just a natural result of this situation.

There are several stabilizing strategies which can be used to strengthen the family and the perception of its value in the eyes of the global society. According to Mária Šmidová, one of them is counselling, which is a new pastoral intervention method in the family. The aim of counselling, which uses psychological methods, is to help the married couple and the family to understand their relationship, various life complications and crises which they have to face. Married couples and parents need to hear that they are not alone in this situation and if they are religious, they are still part of a spiritual community which they adhere to. “It is important for them to find someone with open arms and heart who listens to them, understands them and helps them relieve their pain. Mutuality, human contact and meeting give them new strengths and become a source of reconciliation with themselves, with others and with God.

This stabilizing strategy designed to help families is not just “traditional” spiritual help, which often consists of offering sacraments, using Scripture as a relief or an invitation to intense prayer, but also a process which, using social science approaches and methods and respecting the freedom of moral choices, helps apply gospel instructions through personal life decisions and thus face difficult situations which affect the individual on a personal, social and spiritual level. In counselling, married couples looking for help receive “help for self-help” to handle their problems with their own internal resources. This help is connected to the ability to make free decisions and take control of your future,” says professor Šmidová.⁶¹¹

611 More detailed information can be found in: Fabio Folgheraiter, Annalisa Pasini and Maria Luisa Raineri, *Apprendere il counseling. Esercizi introduttivi di Roger Mucchielli. CD-ROM (Italiano) CD-ROM* (Trento: Erickson, 2016); Alex Liégeois, “Pastoral Counselling in Care Services: Between Confidential Space and Integrated Care,” *Counselling and Spirituality* 25, 2, (2006), 127-140.; Felice Perussia, “Cum sol: Immagini del counselor,” *Giornale di Psicologia* 1, no. 1, (2007): 40-56. *Giornaledipsicologia.it*

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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LIST PÁPEŽA INOCENTA I. BISKUPOVI DECENTIOVI Z GUBBIA [POPE INNOCENT I'S LETTER TO BISHOP DECENTIUS OF GUBBIO]



Miloš Lichner

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Expert translation of an original Latin text is always challenging, though very meritorious, work. It is even more praiseworthy if the original and its critical edition are almost unattainable in the countries where experts are systematically working on the gradual publication of critically revised sources of early Christian works, devoting a great deal of scholarly effort and capacities to their processing and revision, as well as reflection and subsequent commenting on them.

A recent monograph written by Miloš Lichner entitled *Pope Innocent I's Letter To Bishop Decentius of Gubbio* represents an example of such an untraditional and extraordinary deed.

The publication includes a very detailed, highly professional and systematic introductory study dealing with historical context of the work, the historical circumstances associated with the pontifical enthronement of Pope Innocent I (402 – 417) and various historical traditions of the early churches that were not unified. The intertextual references of this document can also be found in the reputable historical annals *Liber Pontificalis* or in Jerome's *Epistula 130*, which testifies to its strong resonance in ancient doctrinal literature and to its significance, as shown by the reception of authorities on antiquity (mainly pontifical ones). Like other letters of Innocent (e.g. *Letter to the bishops of Apulia – Epistle 39*), this letter aims to demonstrate the primacy of the Roman tradition. It also answers practical questions raised by bishop Decentius of Gubbio concerning regular celebration of the sacraments. The author of this study, Miloš Lichner, exerted considerable effort to elevate the doctrinal level of the epistle by adding historical and posterior references with direct quotations (and a mirrored translation), thanks to which the publication acquires an interesting colouring of not only a descriptive but also an analytic nature, with literary-critical remarks and highly consolidated commentary clarifying the background of the particular answers of Innocent.

Apart from this ample monographic study, the work also offers a current translation of Innocent's letter to Decentius of Gubbio, who – as can be partly reconstructed on the basis of the text of the Letter – turned to the Pope sometime in 416 with the following eight (mostly liturgical) questions: Primarily, he was worried about the question of the "sign of peace" (the kiss of peace)

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that was subject to different liturgical traditions, for example, in Gallia (where it was performed before the Eucharistic prayer) and in Rome (after the Eucharistic prayer). In his unpreserved letter, Decentius most probably asked which of these two traditions should be followed. The bishop of Rome naturally answers that according to *disciplina arcana*, only believers – Christians who have already been baptized – should engage in the sign of peace gesture. Therefore, he recommended that the sign of peace tradition should be implemented after the Eucharistic prayer. The second question of Decentius concerned the reference to Church donors, which in Gallia took place after prayer (*collection post nomina*) and after the kiss of peace, while in Rome the names of donors were pronounced after the *memento mortuorum*. It was common practice in the fourth century for the deacon to read the names of donors during the holy mass, and the priest added the following words: “*quorum fides Tibi cognita est...*” While Jerome criticized the act of explicitly naming donors (In *Ezek. 6, 8* and in *Jer. 2, 108*), Pope Innocent approved of it and instructed Decentius to read the names before the Eucharistic prayer and thus to preserve “the Roman way”. The third question raised by Decentius is: Who can anoint neophytes with chrism on their forehead? Should it be the presbyter (as in Gallia) or the bishop (as in Rome)? In this case, Pope Innocent clearly distinguishes between anointment with chrism performed during the rite of baptism and anointment that is linguistically (in Latin) associated with the sacrament of confirmation (*consignare*). The latter, in his opinion, represents the exclusive right of a bishop. The fourth question that probably appeared in the letter of Decentius concerned fasting – whether believers are obliged to respect this rule on Fridays (like in churches outside of Rome) or also on Saturdays. This tradition was associated with broader polemics within the Western Church, and Innocent replied: “There is no other reason for Friday, the day our Lord suffered, than for the day of his descent into hell to rise from the dead on the third day and revive joy after two days of grief...” The fifth question concerned the so-called *fermentum* (leaven). This was a Roman custom reportedly introduced by Pope Miltiades, on the basis of which bread transfigured during pontifical mass was carried to the titular churches of Rome in order to be distributed during parish holy masses. This tradition is rooted in a time when no Eucharist, but only a liturgy of the Word, was celebrated in other Roman churches. Hence, Decentius asks if this custom should be preserved only *intra muros* (solely in Rome) or if it is also valid in Gubbio, which is situated in a rural area. Pope Innocent answered in the negative, mainly due to Gubbio's distance from Rome. Another question of Decentius – the sixth – was about who has the right to impose hands on people possessed by the devil (within exorcism): a presbyter or a bishop? Innocent conditions the act by the approval of a bishop. A bishop has the right of imposition of hands; however, he can entrust it, e. g. to presbyter, if he is too far away to perform the act personally. In this case, similarly to previous ones, his answer defines a privilege that has been legally exerted ever since.

The penultimate question that worries Decentius concerns the day of penance – which day before Easter should be understood as the day of penance? Here, Decentius means the day of exertion of the sacrament of penance. Innocent replies that the Roman tradition concerns Holy Thursday (*quinta feria ante Pascha*). However, if there is an emergency, a bishop should determine a day “to prevent a person from leaving this world without communion”.⁶¹³ The eighth and last question is related to the anointment of the sick and the person who can exert it. According to the *Epistle of James*, it should be performed by a presbyter, but Decentius still asks if it must be done by a bishop.⁶¹⁴ Innocent replies that “the oil prepared by a bishop can be used for the

613 Cf. Miloš Lichner, *List pápeža Inocenta I. biskupovi Decentiovi z Gubbia* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2019). 83.

614 This question is addressed by the author in a more detailed way in another publication. Cf. Miloš Lichner, *Sviatosť pomazania chorých: historicko-teologický pohľad* (Warszawa: Rhetos, 2012). 15n.

anointment not only by priests but also by all Christians who can anoint themselves or their neighbours in case of an emergency...”

Pope Innocent answered all the questions of Decentius of Gubbio in his letter sent on 19 March 416. It was one of the 36 letters that he wrote (25th decretal letter CPL 1641). It is necessary to underline that Innocent wrote it during a difficult geopolitical and ecclesiastical situation, which is very well illustrated by the author of the monograph, Miloš Lichner. This was the era of the geopolitically active rebellion of Alaric and the attacks of the Goths. It was a period of thriving heresies, such as Pelagianism, when Pelagius was excommunicated by Innocent on the decision of the Council of Carthage, of Montanism, of the movements of the Cataphrygians or the Novatians etc.

Pope Innocent summarizes some doctrinal conclusions of the great councils (mainly the Council of Nicaea). This way, the teaching of the councils was spread to bishoprics and bishops then handed over to parishes, distributing and justifying the regulations from a pastoral point of view. When it comes to its pastoral and dogmatic aspects, the letter represents an important milestone for spreading the Catholic faith, emphasizing the necessity of a single stabilizing (primarily liturgical) tradition within the Western rite, thus pointing out directly or indirectly the primacy of the Roman tradition (and the Roman bishopric).

It is important to mention that apart from the above main questions, Innocent I also draws attention to other areas that needed improvement, which – according to the author of the study – means that he responded not only to the questions of Decentius but anonymously and indirectly also to the problems of the pastors of other Churches where practice differed from the Roman tradition (and the Roman bishopric).

This work is topically related to the ancient traditions described in other volumes of the *Early Christian library* editions, where fragments of liturgical customs are mentioned. We are primarily talking about Tertullian's work *On the Veiling of Virgins*⁶¹⁵ or about Ambrose's work *De Sacramentis*. The latter was translated in volume nine, which also deals with the question of the plurality of liturgical traditions.⁶¹⁶

Generally, it can be said that the monograph written by Miloš Lichner thoroughly analyses the background of the ancient opus and adds a well-described context. It can be praised for its high level of professionalism and excellent historical insight into the ancient geopolitical and ecclesiastical situation. In addition, it offers a complete translation of the original Latin text of the Letter, which is rather short but complex and a doctrinally crucial document offering perfect harmony between its content and form. The opus not only supports readers' orientation and erudition but also shapes their faith (not only informatively), presenting deeper insight into the mysteries of faith. For the above reasons, I warmly recommend the monograph to the scientific and lay public, as I truly believe that it will provide a further addition to the mosaic.

615 Liturgical questions concerning the dress and the veiling of women in Tertullian's work: TERTULLIAN. *O závoji panien. O nepravěj ženskej krásy Starokresťanská knižnica 2*, ed. Helena Panczová, (Bratislava: Dobrá kniha, 2007). 98.

616 Miloš Lichner and Horka Róbert, “Svätý Ambróz a katechumenát.” *SV. AMBRÓZ. Výklad Vyznania viery, O sviatosťiach, o tajomstvách. Starokresťanská knižnica 9*, (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2017). 27 – 28.

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