

TRANSFORMATIONS OF CYRILLO-METHODIAN TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOSITY¹

Peter Kondrla – Peter Majda - Roman Králik – Tibor Máhrik

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Abstract: KONDRLA, Peter – MAJDA, Peter – KRÁLIK, Roman – MÁHRIK, Tibor *Transformations of Cyrillo-Methodian Tradition in Contemporary Religiosity*. The contribution of the Cyrillo-Methodian religious and cultural mission has been described from different perspectives and points of view. The aim of the study is to examine how the basic principles of the Thessalonian brothers' mission are interpreted and how they are experienced and updated in the current religiosity and cultural tradition. In our study, we focus on current trends that appear in today's religiosity survival which are based on the results of the research carried out in 2020, related to the prospects of development of religiosity in Slovakia. From a methodological point of view, the text compares the underlying principles of religiosity, which are integrated in the teachings of Cyril and Methodius with current trends and ideas of the younger generation about their own religiosity. The aim of the study is to determine whether in the scenarios of the development of religiosity we find the presence of the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition and how they are transformed in the current conditions.

Key words: *Cyrillo-Methodian tradition, missionary principle, faith, language, religiosity*

Missionary principles of the Thessalonian brothers and their timeless applicability

Several authors agree on three main moments of the significance of the mission of the Thessalonian brothers for Slovakia. The first meaning is religious; the second is national meaning, in a broader sense political; and the third is literary, philosophy and cultural meaning (Hurbanič, 2005, 1-11; Judák – Liba, 2012; Lubaňska et al. 2013, 587-593; Zozulák 2016, 110-118; Žeňuch 2016, 199-209).

All the mentioned meanings create a compact whole, in which religious life is connected with political life, faith is an everyday part of a person's life, and it is manifested in his value orientation, decision-making, behaviour, in contact with the wider and narrower social environment. (Zozulák 2019; Vymětalová et al. 2021). A compact whole of lived faith is the ideal of every mission which brings a meaningful direction to the existence of an individual in society. The connection of the spiritual and social dimensions prevents the emergence of "vague religiosity", in which a person's place in the world and the meaning of religion for him are not precisely defined.

As pointed out by Hetényi and Ivanič, Cyril and Methodius were typical missionaries, but at the same time, they were prominent spiritual leaders as well as representatives of the educational elite of their era. In their time, intellectuals, but also statesmen of the Byzantine Empire more

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than ever believed in their ecumenical mission (Ivanič – Hetényi 2021, 12,14). The trust probably also originated from the belief that the mission had rational foundations, given the education of both brothers. The principles of the mission did not follow the emotional plane; it was not based on fear or joy. The principles of their mission were built on a rational basis of faith that respects a logical sequence. It is a faith that is received by the mind and then lived in the heart.

Hlad indicates that the actuality of missionary work is unquestionable, which is emphasized by several theologians and, last but not least, by the Magisterium itself. “It follows that what applies to preaching according to the current Magisterium also applies in a certain sense to Cyrillo-Methodian preaching. And what is true (based on the study of the sources) of the Cyrillo-Methodian preaching can be discovered as present and developed in the documents of the Magisterium. So there is a certain hermeneutic circle between the Magisterium and the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition” (Hlad 2021, 180). The hermeneutic circle points to the topicality of the mission of the Thessalonian brothers and its constantly renewed inspirational potential. It means that their missionary work is still alive and a constant source of inspiration for theologians. Therefore, the main ideas of the mission are the basis of the theological teaching and principles of the current new evangelization. On the other hand, the process of permanent evangelization creates new conditions that must be responded to by new interpretations of the original principles and their updating. This cycle of evangelization and the creation of new cultural conditions is constantly repeated. From the point of view of the hermeneutic circle, today’s Christianity faces the challenge of how to apply the generally valid principles of the Christian faith in the current conditions of the changing times. In this sense, the liturgy, which was at the centre of the mission of the Thessalonian brothers, undoubtedly plays a significant updating potential role. As Runciman points out, the Eastern liturgy is connected to apophatic theology, which is at the foundation of the Byzantine theological tradition. Man is not able to speak about God adequately, and is not able to worship him enough. This is manifested precisely in the liturgy, which complements theologically the image of a humble and surrendered believer (Runciman 2010, 112). Such a conception of the liturgy is popular for believers in times of crisis, suffering and persecution, and at the same time, it is a suitable tool for use in asserting political power through missionary activity.

Judák opens up the broader dimension of the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition in the context of the liturgy, specifically actively experienced liturgy. Active participation in the liturgy is an invitation to actively and authentically experience a personal relationship with God. “If it is true that the historical path of the exodus, connected with the revelation on Sinai, the covenant and the liturgical worship of God, which constitute a kind of inner country, is a necessary condition for the acquisition of the outer country, then the Cyrillo-Methodian path, not only the outer one but especially the inner one, whose goal is a new exodus, the meeting of God on Mount Zobor and Skalka, the renewal of the covenant, the actively lived liturgy (which represents another very strong link between the Cyrillo-Methodian and Benedictine traditions), acquires state-building and nation-building significance” (Judák 2021, 23).

Liturgical celebration is currently expanding into new areas; especially young religiosity is looking for new spaces for its realization. From the theological point of view, we register here a certain tension between the teachings of the Church and efforts to create one’s authentic religiosity. Although new trends in contemporary religiosity are based on tradition and the word, their external manifestations hardly become part of the standard liturgy. The consequence of decentralization is the creation of autonomous movements with alternative liturgies, which have their spirituality and create the impression that their activities disrupt the unity of the Church and cause division. They create an alternative religious reality (Akimjak et al. 2022). Splitting and disunity were not the goals of the mission of Cyril and Methodius. On the contrary, their intention

was unity and unification, while the unity of the Church was able to maintain respect for authentic otherness (John Paul II 1985).

In the concept of a new religiosity, there is a meeting of two principles that create the already mentioned tension. One is the need for unity of teaching and liturgy, and the second principle is openness to cultural challenges and new possibilities of evangelization. Both principles are found in the foundations of the mission of the Thessalonian brothers, and both of these principles may turn into problems in contemporary religiosity. On the one hand, we are witnessing efforts to preserve traditional liturgy with all its external features, and on the other hand, theologians and catechists are trying to make the Word accessible in a form that is understandable and acceptable to the younger generation. On the one hand, there is a tradition and demand based on the immutability of the Gospel message, on the other hand, there is the effort and energy of young people who want to actively experience the liturgy, and who want to practice their cultural values, their music, and their concepts. (Gluchman 2017, 62-74).

Dynamic mission principles in a changing environment

The potential of the mission of the Thessalonian brothers for contemporary religiosity was emphasized several times and from different points of view by Pope John Paul II. As Hetényi and Ivanič point out, the developing ecumenical dialogue, of which the mentioned Pope was a supporter, takes place in the light of the mission of Cyril and Methodius, because the Church, which was born from their missionary activity, bears the universal sign of ecumenism, which the brothers themselves bear (Budniak 2013). The Pope also found very strong motives in the Cyrillo-Methodian roots with the authentic values they taught as well as the immediate, personal and committed approach to their mission. (Hetényi – Ivanič, 2021) The basic principle of their mission was to live the truth they preached. This should be the principle of every mission, but historical experience shows that this was not always the case. In this context, Hurbanič states that Eusebius of Caesarea already developed a comprehensive theological-political doctrine, influenced not only by Origen but also by the traditional Hellenistic political-philosophical schemes of Neoplatonism and its doctrine of the eternal archetype and its image. Specifically, it is a picture of the Christian empire ruled by the Roman emperor which is, in a sense, the kingdom of heaven on earth. (Hurbanič 2005, 2) The combination of political and religious contexts led to religion becoming a tool for empire building and supporting political power, which in some aspects is still true today.

John Paul II himself in the spirit of the tradition of Cyril and Methodius and directly in the sense of reference to their tradition founded the school in Krakow and at the same time developed the ideas of personalism. Personalism is the fulfilment of the idea of the authentic development of the human person, and this development takes place based on a person's relationship with God. These ideas appealed and appeal also today mainly to young people, who do not perceive religion as a historical and cultural value but as a tool for active searching and finding one's value in community with other believers.

Kloбуšická emphasizes the original understanding of the philosophy of language, which is transformed into the process of inculturation, which also appears significantly in contemporary religiosity. "The importance of written speech and its service to theology in St. Constantine stems from the original philosophy of language and the resulting philosophy of culture. According to that, language is not only a means of communication but also contributes to the uniqueness of a tribe, a national group. Language helps a nation to develop its own culture, helps it rank among culturally highly developed nations" (Kloбуšická 2013, 577).

Language is not only a means of communication, but our thinking also takes place in language, and with the help of language we create an image of the world (Binetti – Pavlíková 2019). We can say that the mission of the Thessalonian brothers also brought a way of thinking and the logic of meaning that came along with God's word. The logic of language incorporated the connection of the search for meaning with the existence of God, and with religion. God and faith have become part of communication and, thanks to this connection, part of everyday life (Taneski 2020).

At the same time, such logic of language enables the education of an authentic person, which is fully penetrated by faith. Maturkanič talks about the authenticity that preachers bring and which forms the basis of their missionary work. "Only a true personality can make others think or follow certain ideas that bring with them a lifestyle of developing their self. We can state that this specificity is contained in every human existence, which reveals its uniqueness in its humanity. We know from life experience that it does not have to be only about the positive charisma of a certain individual or a group that believes in a specific teaching" (Maturkanič 2013, 622).

The idea of authentically experienced Christianity is the motive of the current young generation, which wants to create an immediate relationship with God. The immediate relationship in which the believer experiences love, and shares sorrow, where his whole life is permeated by a relationship with God, as we mentioned above. On the other hand, this updating of the missionary message leads to laicization, where young people first do not need a priest, then they do not need the community of the Church and finally they become believers without a confession and a rationally justified faith (Pavlíková 2021). This process can also lead to the creation of alternative movements of a sectarian nature, which reject the unity and thus the very missionary intention that was at the beginning. In this context, Lyko emphasizes the aspect of building a community that does not have a closed, exclusive or even sectarian character. On the contrary, "they built a community of faith and, through it, a profane society, which, according to them, should never have been separated from Christian values." (Lyko 2017, 245).

The dynamics of the missionary work of the Thessalonian brothers, as we have already indicated, brings with it several risks that become visible precisely in the process of transformation and in contact with new cultural challenges or changing social conditions. Zubko defines two basic problems that the transformation of the Cyrillo-Methodian heritage causes in society. The first problem is the risk of ideological laicization, the second problem is sectarian integralism (Zubko 2014, 107-108). Both of these attitudes or approaches are also reflected in the paths taken by contemporary religiosity.

Dynamic transformations and the updating of missionary principles lead believers, specifically the youth, to search for an active community, a living Church, which is the mother of all believers. However, such zeal runs into problems concerning doctrine. Eastern Christianity had rich experience with doctrinal controversies (Dvornik 1970). An important role in resolving disputes was played by the monarch, who intervened in the course of religious councils and made sure that Christian teachings corresponded to political ideas and ambitions (Külzer 2016, 93-94). Such a model has been on the decline for a long time, and the dynamic process of secularization has brought new challenges in the form of alternative Christianity. Of course, this concept of alternative Christianity also includes an alternative interpretation of the teachings of the Church (Krupa 2005).

We can say that the more openness, the less concrete doctrine, the less belief in truth and more belief in one's own opinion. On the other side, some are afraid of any relativization and reject anything new, any transformation and adhere to the historical interpretation of the religious tradition. Both of these approaches, as we have already indicated, represent attempts to transform or apply the basic missionary principles of the Thessalonian brothers, but both of these approaches create space for misinterpretation or an inaccurate understanding of the missionary vocation.

Scenarios of the development of religiosity in relation to the Cyrillo-Methodian missionary principles

The principles on which the mission of the Thessalonian brothers was built are still relevant today. As part of the research project that we implemented in the years 2017 – 2021, it became clear that the challenges facing contemporary Christianity have several common moments with those to which the brothers of Thessalonian responded.

The first significant moment is the risk of stereotyping. The stereotype appears not only in culture but also in religious experience. The basis of this process is the gradual loss of meaning of principles, which are replaced by stereotyped, thoughtless repetition of certain religious acts or rituals (Tkáčová et al. 2021a, Tkáčová et al. 2021b, Tkáčová et al. 2021c) The Cyrillo-Methodian mission did not directly solve the problem of stereotypes in religious experience, but it encountered another problem, which we could describe as the absence of the principles of faith. The absence of principles was given by the liturgical language. The language, which the believers did not understand, led them to perform certain ritual actions, the content and meaning of which they did not know. They were supposed to be actions that express their faith, their attitude and authentic experience of spiritual life. But in the end, the content of faith could be fundamentally different from what the church taught. Stereotype and misunderstanding of faith is a risk even today. According to the outputs of the project solved by us, not only is the number of believers decreasing but the number of the so-called formal believers is increasing. Those are believers for whom religion is a certain cultural constant and not a personal belief.

The emphasis on the intelligibility of the liturgical language was for the missionaries a basic starting point for their philosophy of language, as we mentioned above. It is a philosophy of language in which language is an active component of thinking in the sense that language is not only a tool for describing reality, but it becomes a tool for creating the individual experience and, ultimately, the meaning of existence. (Zozulaková 2016)

The inadequacy of the language in which faith is expressed, or the incomprehensibility of faith subsequently produces the second problematic level in religiosity, and that is irrationality (Čergetová Tomanová et al. 2021). Irrationality is the source of several problems in religiosity. As we have already stated, Constantine placed great emphasis on the rational dimension of the mission for a simple reason. Faith that does not stand on a rational basis has no internal logic, it is not an authentic faith, but is a faith that is superstition. Inauthentic faith is characterized by the fact that it is built on external signs and actions. Religion and faith are located in the position of cultural services that a specific institution, in this case, the Church, provides to interested parties. A person can choose whether he wants a church funeral or not, he can choose whether he is more comfortable with a ceremony in a church or an office, etc. Faith becomes only an external formal act, in which the decisive role is played by the sentimental aspect, the aesthetic dimension of the act and not by its spiritual or rational aspect.

With irrationality comes another complication in the form of intolerance and radicalization of believers, as already mentioned by Zubko (2014). We see this trend even now. Radicalization together with the irrational creation of an enemy and a return to unquestionable roots is one of the possible scenarios for the development of religiosity in Slovakia, as pointed out by Štefaňák (2019). Specifically, it is a scenario in which it is assumed that young believers will tend to return to old traditions, such as the return of the liturgy to the Council of Trent, the rejection of the equality of men and women, the rejection of Slovak as a liturgical language, or the acceptance of religious morality as universally valid morality, for example in the field of sexuality. Irrational radicalization also brings with it sharp opposition to believers in other Christian churches or believers of other religions (Žalec – Pavlíková 2019). Our research has shown that this scenario of the development

of religiosity was the least represented among the respondents, along with the scenario of loss of faith. Even so, we can observe certain historically recurring models of rationality, in this case, the rather irrational concept of religiosity and its experience (Kobylarek et al. 2022). Traditionalism often relies on a return to the missionary principles of the Thessalonian brothers. This concept is significantly linked to the overemphasis on national principles before the ecumenical dimension of the mission. It creates an environment of exclusivity in which the only rightful inheritors of the mission's legacy are profiled.

The openness to experiencing religiosity is most prominently represented among the current young generation, in contrast to traditionalism. The openness of religiosity is characterized not only by accepting ecumenical challenges but also by significant absorption outside of Christian stimuli. In connection with the mission of the Thessalonian brothers, its inculturation dimension, as the ability to bring the Christian message to the existing culture, is often discussed (Hetényi 2019). The aim of the mission is not to abolish the cultural norms in force until now, but to bring the light of faith into these norms. Part of this bringing to light is the alternation of meanings and value orientations of the given culture.

This is the already mentioned hermeneutic circle, in which new challenges become stimuli for the search for new solutions. New problems that appear in the dynamics of time are not solved using valid, traditional standards. The solution is the path of searching and uncovering the truth. The contemporary religiosity of young people is open to just such stimuli. We observe activities that we could describe as sanctifying the everyday, searching for the meaning of the everyday and revealing the presence of God in ordinary situations.

Faith without affiliation is also a significant trend in contemporary religiosity. It is a relatively new phenomenon that points to certain shortcomings in pastoral activity (Štefaňak, 2020a). It is a new phenomenon, for which we would have a hard time looking for an answer in the missionary work of the Thessalonian brothers. Nevertheless, we discover an important element in this religious trend, which is the absence of the already mentioned inculturation dimension. And that is significantly related to the mission. Liturgy and formal religion do not fulfil the needs of young people and do not give them answers to their life questions. The problems that young people live with are not the problems of the clergy. The emerging tension is then manifested in a deviation and resignation to the official Church. However, the anthropological constant of the search for God remains present and the fulfilment of spiritual needs then takes place through alternative forms of religiosity.

A person longing for faith thus finds himself in three possible situations. He may seek to preserve the legacy of his fathers so radically that he rejects any change and labels anyone who tries to change as evil. The second option is to reject the historically proven values of culture and faith and focus on building a new culture and a new epoch (Petrovič – Maturkanič 2022). In both attitudes, there is an enemy on the other side that must be fought. Part of the population is ambivalent about the value link and chooses according to the current need, creating a puzzle in which they put everything they like. The aestheticization of the cognitive process is typical of postmodern thinking and is also significantly manifested in spiritual life (Nežič Glavica 2020).

The last approach, which can be considered an authentic interpretation and transformation of the Cyrillo-Methodian heritage, is an approach for an open transformation of the interpretation of values. The principles of values, as well as the foundations of faith, do not change, but their interpretation and how they are implemented in the life of an individual and society do change. This approach proved to be the most represented in the research. In this scenario of the development of the religiosity of young people, we can talk about two constants. The first constant is the immutability of the Gospel message on the one hand and the dynamic variability of the conditions for experiencing faith on the other. It is a situation similar to the one in which Cyril

and Methodius found themselves during their mission. On the one hand, the teachings that they carried with them and truths that could not be questioned, and on the other hand, new conditions, new cultures and a different logic of language. A characteristic sign of radical solutions is that they are oriented in one direction, towards an extreme either-or solution (Pružinec 2020, Tavilla – Králik– Martin 2018). In its dynamic setting, the mission of the Thessalonian brothers was open to receiving suggestions from one side and the other, from the Church and laypeople. It interpreted faith and its content, and at the same time, brought it closer to the individual and his daily experience of meaning.

Conclusion

In our article, we worked with several parallels that connect the mission of the Thessalonian brothers with the current religious situation and religious condition of Slovakia. We can say that the religious situation in Slovakia is in many aspects similar to that which awaited the Thessalonian brothers (Ivanič 2019). Research shows that the need for faith in the population remains more or less constant. The desire for the transcendent, the need to search for the meaning of existence, and the effort for authentic spiritual self-realization are present in the population as much then as today. There is also a need for a new evangelization, a new understanding and explanation of faith, a need for a new language understood by young people, those who participate in public administration, and those who create social relationships (Štefaňák 2020b).

The mission of the Thessalonian brothers, as has already been mentioned several times and in many places, was not a mission of the sword but a mission of the word. It was a mission of understanding and a new interpretation of culture, not a mission of violent enforcement of the truth. The tendency towards radicalization or traditionalism on the one hand or boundless plurality and alternatives on the other hand does not bear the desired fruit (Lyko 2013). The truth that the missionaries brought had an absolute basis, but it was interpreted in the conditions of the time, it was interpreted in a language that was understood by those to whom the message was intended.

The challenges facing today's pastoral theology as well as religious education are precisely defined and are similar to those faced by the Thessalonian brothers (Zozulák 2022; Krupa 1998; Gluchman 2018, 15-31; Kobyłarek 2019, 5-13).

To speak and preach in such a way that the message can be understood (Rychnová et al. 2022). Not to preach one's truth and one's convictions, but to be God's spokesman. The process of transformation of the Cyrillo-Methodian heritage moves, as already indicated, in a hermeneutic circle. The mission brought challenges that transformed the entire society and created the foundations for a new culture. At the same time, new cultural conditions create the ground for the transformation of religiosity so that it integrates both components. Religiosity that reflects the joyful gospel and at the same time fulfils the needs that appear in the spiritual plane of individually and autonomously experienced existence.

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doc. PhDr. PaedDr. Peter Kondrila, PhD.
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra
Faculty of Arts
Institute for Research of Constantine and Methodius' Cultural Heritage
Štefánikova 67
949 74 Nitra
Slovakia
pkondrila@ukf.sk
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4857-5578
SCOPUS Author ID: 57188814697
WOS Researcher ID: AAG-6643-2020

doc. ThDr. Peter Majda, PhD.
The Catholic University in Ružomberok
Faculty of Theology
Theological Institute in Spiske Podhradie
034 01 Ružomberok
Slovak Republic
peter.majda@ku.sk
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8310-2533

Prof. ThDr. PaedDr. Roman Králik, ThD.
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University)
Department of Russian Language
117198 Moscow
Russia

The Catholic University in Ružomberok
Faculty of Theology
Theological Institute in Spisske Podhradie
034 01 Ružomberok
Slovak Republic
roman.kralik@ku.sk
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1929-1894
SCOPUS Author ID: 46861468800
WOS Researcher ID: AAD-8311-2020

PhDr. Ing. Tibor Máhrik, PhD.
Evangelical Theological Seminary of Prague
Stoliňská 41a
193 00 Prague
Czech Republic
mahrik@cbza.sk
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7799-5841
SCOPUS Author ID: 46861333000
WOS Researcher ID: AAL-7681-2020