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## TO BE A MISSIONARY CHURCH IN POLAND IN THE LIGHT OF POPE FRANCIS' TEACHINGS

In 2016 the Church in Poland celebrates the 1050th anniversary of the baptism of Prince Mieszko I and his court, the date which is known as the baptism of Poland. The event marked a long process of the Christianisation of the nation lasting at least 200 years<sup>1</sup>. It resulted, among others, in the elimination of pagan cults and the creation of Church structures. In what way can we think of a missionary Church in Poland? In classical understanding, it is the awareness of the Church in Poland to send missionaries into the world in order to preach the Good News in missionary countries (mission *ad gentes*)<sup>2</sup>, praying for missions and spiritual sacrifices or material offerings. However, this article focuses on mission *ad intra*. There are numerous expressions to describe missions within the Church, such as re-evangelisation, new evangelisation and, according to the terminology suggested by the Pope Francis, pastoral ministry in a missionary key which leads to pastoral conversion (cf. EG 33)<sup>3</sup>. Without doubt, “the Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy” (EG 21). Every member of the People of God is a “missionary disciple” (EG 120). There are no local churches which are fully Christianised, especially in Europe and therefore everyone needs a new missionary impulse.

<sup>1</sup> Z. Sułowski, *Chrzest Polski*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 3, Lublin 1995, col. 374.

<sup>2</sup> F. Filoni, *Aktualność misji ad gentes*, in: *Radość Ewangelii źródłem misyjnego zapachu*, eds. K. Sobolewski et al., Górna Grupa 2015, p. 248-249.

<sup>3</sup> Instead of using the term *new evangelisation* Pope Francis gradually introduces other terms, such as *pastoral ministry in a missionary key*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A point of departure for our reflection on a missionary Church in Poland might be a reference to French experiences. In 1943 two young priests, sociologists of religion, Yvan Daniel and Henri Godin published a report entitled *France, a Missionary Country?*<sup>4</sup> The authors stated that the Church in France had lost the vast majority of the faithful ignoring social transformations and remaining in the traditional model of functioning. They referred mostly to the working-class environment. At that time this approach was shocking and the Archbishop of Paris, Emmanuel Suhard, was crying when reading the text. He was deeply saddened by the vision of the Church of strong structures and rich tradition but with members who, in many respects, lived and valued as pagans.

Since that event a lot of time has passed and it is not surprising that some countries of Western Europe are called missionary. Although Poland has left Communism behind and protected itself from galloping secularism, creeping laicisation gradually leads to the erosion of traditional religiosity<sup>5</sup>. Still, the percentage of self-declaration of faith<sup>6</sup>, the *dominantes* and the *communicantes* indicators are high but there are first harbingers of deinstitutionalisation and privatisation of religion<sup>7</sup>. Gradually, there are more and more nominal and occasional Catholics. A selective adoption and application of Christian norms of life also constitute a serious problem. It refers mostly to morality which results in high social acceptance of relativism of norms and values as well as situational ethics. Frequently, Catholics maintain an increasingly demanding attitude treating their parish as a religious “supermarket” where they can receive spiritual services after paying a certain amount of money. Also, the identification with the Church of young and middle-aged people is decreasing. If we add to that the fact that Polish society is aging rapidly, in a few years the predominant feature of parish life will be pastoral care of the elderly.

<sup>4</sup> See Y. Daniel, H. Godin, *France, pays de mission?* Lyon 1943.

<sup>5</sup> See J. Mariński, *Sekularyzacja i desekularyzacja w nowoczesnym świecie*, Lublin 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Sociological research reveals that in the USA and Poland the indicators of religious self-declaration are higher than the reality whereas in Western Europe they are lower. It is possible that this fact is associated with the position of Christianity in social mentality which is still high in Poland and the USA.

<sup>7</sup> In 2014 the percentage of *dominantes* in Poland was 39.1%. Within the last 10 years the group of people who participate in Sunday Mass has decreased by almost 2 million, however, the causes of this phenomenon are diverse, beginning with secularisation and ending with migration. The percentage of *communicantes* in 2014 reached 16.3%. The research conducted since 1980 reveals that the slight fall in the *dominantes* indicator is accompanied by the increase in the *communicantes* indicator. However, the data do not explain the complex dynamics of transformations in religiosity.

As early as in 1987, St. John Paul II noticed these problems during his 3rd Papal visit to Poland on June 14th when at Parade Square in Warsaw he said: "Poland, our country, needs new evangelisation like other European countries." In one of the interviews, Prof. Józef Kudasiewicz commented provocatively on these words of the Pope: "Here, in Poland, nobody was crying. Abandoning Christ, the Gospel and the Church raises aggression rather than tears"<sup>8</sup>.

St. John Paul II returned to the theme of missions in his speech to the Polish bishops on their *ad limina apostolorum* visit in 1993. The title of the speech was very telling: "The Church as an Evangelising Community." Reminding the message to preach the Good News (Mark 16:15) the Pope said: "During today's meeting I wish to reflect with you, my dear Brothers on this command of Christ which is the reason why the Church exists. The world we live in is at a turning point in history. The face of Poland, Europe and the world is changing but Christ's calling does not lose its actuality: 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel' (Mark 16:15). Today, the Church feels urged by the Master to intensify the effort of evangelisation *ad intra* and *ad extra*"<sup>9</sup>. In the context of the present problems in Europe these words have acquired a prophetic character. Our continent is at a turning point in history and Poland is still a Catholic country. In order to stop the process of laicisation and to be a leaven of evangelisation for Europe the Church in Poland must be missionary<sup>10</sup>.

## 2. MISSIONARY CHURCH – AD AXTRA I AD INTRA

Ecclesiology is the basis of proper understanding of the missionary Church. An understanding of the Church as a fortress under siege which has to be protected leads to the domination of apologetic dimension in the pastoral practice. It is undoubtedly important, especially nowadays, but it is only one of the components of Christian attitude. Faith should be always protected; it is one of the duties resulting from the sacrament of confirmation as the baptised "by the sacrament of Confirmation are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed" (CCC 1285). However, apart from defending the faith there is also the transmission of the faith, by word and by example of life, which seems to be the most effective defence. Missionary Church does not focus on *status quo* but preaches the Gospel all the

<sup>8</sup> Cf. H. Seweryniak, *Nowa ewangelizacja w parafii. Perspektywa Kościoła powszechnego*, „Homo Dei”, 84(2015) no. 4, p. 41-42.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Paweł II, *Kościół wspólnotą ewangelizującą*, „L'Osservatore Romano”, 14(1993) no. 2, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> A. Godnarski, *Potrzebujemy ognia Ducha Świętego!*, in: *Nowa ewangelizacja. Kerygmatyczny impuls w Kościele*, eds. P. Sowa, K. Kaproń, Gubin 2012, p. 6-8.

time (cf. EG 33)<sup>11</sup>. This is not only care for the first evangelisation (mission *ad gentes*) but a missionary slant in a direction of those who lost their way (mission *ad intra*).

Vatican II document teaches that “the Church is missionary by her very nature” (AG 2) and this text acquires a new significance nowadays. It does not refer only to mission *ad gentes* but also to mission *ad intra*. In earlier ages the desire of Jesus’ apostles was to win new confessors of Christ and to transmit the faith, namely the first evangelisation. Nowadays the situation is much more complicated and the ministrations of the Church should be treated as a multifaceted and complex process (cf. EN 24). It is difficult to delineate sharp boundaries between missions, pastoral care and new evangelisation, especially in the regions which were Christianised long time ago<sup>12</sup>. In the secularised world all these elements permeate and complete each other (cf. RMiss 34). Therefore it is one of the reasons for difficulties or even terminological confusion. But this is not the question of terminology but the fact that the Church is missionary towards the people who are formally named Christians but distance themselves from the Church following laic models of life, namely living like pagans.

The missionary nature of the Church is intrinsically linked with the testimony. Blessed Paul VI in his exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* wrote that “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (EN 41). The necessity of the missionary nature of the Church is not only the result of theological data but also psychological premises. One of the criteria of mature religiosity or, even if we go further, of mature faith is the authenticity of life, namely the testimony combined with a missionary activity<sup>13</sup>.

Saturation with the missionary activity in the Church is a consequence of Christian condition. If the Church is strong and dynamic, she is channelled by nature for evangelisation and mission, both *ad gentes* and *ad intra*. These activities should not be separated as they are complementary to each other and might be treated as different visions of the same reality in the Church.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Papież Franciszek, *Otwartość na natchnienia Ducha Świętego warunkiem rozwoju wiary*, <http://ekai.pl/wydarzenia/watykan/x96114/otwartosc-na-natchnienia-ducha-swietego-warunkiem-rozwoju-wiary>, (22 I 2016).

<sup>12</sup> J-L. Moens, *Na czym polega nowa ewangelizacja?* in: *Nowa ewangelizacja. Kerymatyczny impuls...*, p. 20-21.

<sup>13</sup> It is assumed that the criteria of mature religiosity are: 1) A right vision of God, 2) An ability to distinguish what is essential from what is less important or unimportant in religion, 3) An ability to experience and overcome the crisis of faith, 4) Authenticity of life.

### 3. MISSIONARY DIOCESES AND PARISHES

A missionary diocese is focused on the activation of all pastoral subjects and structures so that they are channelled for evangelisation. It is not important to multiply the goods, to care for privileges and conveniences as well as to fight for influences. Structures are necessary as it is impossible for a diocese to function without, for example a seminary, but they should be subordinate to evangelisation (cf. EG 63). The key pastoral activities are evangelisation, ministry and missions. Various names might be used but the core is the same, namely the awakening (preaching the kerygma), strengthening and deepening of faith based on the personal relation to Jesus Christ, which, in turn, should bear fruit in the form of missionary involvement.

Pope Francis calls for a missionary impulse capable of transforming the Church, named also a missionary conversion (cf. EG 27)<sup>14</sup>. It might be characterised by two keywords – facilitation and search. Such a conversion relies on leaving the well-trodden paths of redemptive activity and courageous going forth to those on the outskirts of the Church and those who have nothing to do with the Church. The missionary conversion concerns not so much the individuals but the entire communities<sup>15</sup>.

Pope Francis in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* repeated the words which he used when talking to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures” (EG 49). The Pope referred to these words once again on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015 during the meeting with the participants of the 5<sup>th</sup> National Ecclesial Convention<sup>16</sup>. He said that he dreamt of a restless Church ever closer to the abandoned, the forgotten and

<sup>14</sup> A similar term in use is pastoral conversion. It appeared for the first time in 1992 in Santo Domingo during the 4<sup>th</sup> General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean and was developed during the 5<sup>th</sup> General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean which took place in Aparecida. See “Nie możemy biernie czekać”, an interview with Archbishop Victor Manuel Fernandez, “Więź”, 2013 no. 4, 67-72; *Pójść na drugi brzeg. Wezwanie z Aparecidy*, „Więź”, 2013 no. 4, p. 73-83; K. Kaproń, *Kościół, który się nawraca*, „Więź”, 2013 no. 4, p. 84-90; *Jesteśmy przy ścianie*, an interview with Bishop Grzegorz Ryś, „Więź”, 2013 no. 4, p. 91-101; G. Ryś, *Nawrócenie pastoralne*, in: *Polskie drogi nowej ewangelizacji*, eds. K. Świąt, D. Lipiec. Lublin 2014, p. 11-19.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Jesteśmy przy ścianie*, an interview with Bishop Grzegorz Ryś..., p. 92-93.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *I dream of a restless Church, The speech made during the meeting with the participants of the 5<sup>th</sup> National Ecclesial Convention (10 XI 2015)*, “L'Osservatore Romano”, 36(2015) no. 12, p. 33-38.

the imperfect. He pointed out the dangers which block the missionary character of the Church. The Pope mentioned neopelagianism based on obsessive trusting in structures, in organisations and planning that is perfect because it is abstract. It frequently leads us to a controlling, harsh and normative manner of regulating the life of the Church. According to the Pope, another danger is the attraction of gnosticism, a purely subjective faith in theoretical reflections and beautiful ideals, which leads us to forget the problems of everyday life and to ignore another man (cf. EG 94)<sup>17</sup>.

Why is this missionary conversion important for our dioceses and parishes? Because various kinds of conditions of pastoral care in Poland, mainly historical, lead us to recall nostalgically good old days. We are accustomed to what we know and distrustful and critical or even hostile to all novelty. This attitude leads to “a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying” (EG 94). The sources of such a way of thinking stem from fear of the unknown and apprehension of effort which has to be made<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, a dislike for the new may result from the conviction that the pastoral situation in Poland is so individual and specific that any recommendations from the outside should be disqualified<sup>19</sup>.

A missionary slant of the diocese and parish depends on the change of mentality of the clergy and laity. It is important not to forget to view the parish as a “community of communities”. It is crucial to leave behind exaggerated bureaucracy. An official and institutional dimension of parish is needed as it introduces order and helps in maintaining unity. However, it must be harmonious with a charismatic and community dimension or even subordinated to it.

Blessed Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki entitled one of his books *Sympathisers or Christians?*<sup>20</sup> This professor of theology from Lublin pointed out the problem which St. John Paul II developed in a wider scale in his post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*. He noted that “a renewed proclamation is needed even for those already baptized. Many Europeans today think they know what Christianity is, yet they do not really know it at all. Often they are lacking in knowledge of the most basic elements and notions of the faith. Many of the baptized live as if Christ did not exist: the gestures and signs of faith are repeated, especially in devotional practices, but they fail to correspond to a real acceptance of the content of the faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus” (EE 47).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 35

<sup>18</sup> K. Wons, *Strategie Apostołów*, „Pastores” 2014 no. 2, p. 9-12.

<sup>19</sup> D. Rey, *Definicja nowej ewangelizacji i wyzwania stojące na jej drodze*, in: *Nowa ewangelizacja. Kerygmatyczny impuls...*, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> See F. Blachnicki, *Sympatycy czy chrześcijanie?* Kraków 2010.

A remedy for this situation might be a suggestion of Fr. Blachnicki which still awaits its full realisation. He postulated the return to the ministry which uses the experience of the ancient catechumenate adjusted to contemporary conditions, also named deuterocatechumenate. In Poland there are numerous evangelisation initiatives but it is necessary to lead the baptised and those who have experienced Jesus to the deeper faith and life in the Church. The fruit of this activity is the ministry in Church which may take various forms, from a testimony in the family and public life to an involvement in the life and mission of parish. The scheme: *evangelisation – deuterocatechumenate – diakonia* should be the main element of missionary ministry. At the same time, each stage of this scheme results from another one and depends on it. This is the process where each part is equally important. New evangelisation will be useless if it does not bear fruit in the form of entering into the life community of faith based on the word and sacraments and this, in turn, should lead to mission. Missionary disciples do not appear out of nowhere but they are messengers of Christ and the Church. They come from a community and they introduce others to it. Christians can be missionaries not only if they are prepared to receive sacraments but also to enter a community. In this process sacraments are not the end but the help in a deeper unity with Christ in the Church community and mission is the fruit of it.

#### 4. MISSIONARY FAMILIES AND MISSIONARY RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONS

In Poland the number of the so-called *participantes* is estimated at 8%. They are the members of movements, communities, associations and groups<sup>21</sup>. It is supposed that this percentage of *participantes* makes it possible to influence the whole parish. The rise and growth of various religious associations “can be seen as the work of the Holy Spirit, who blazes new trails to meet their expectations and their search for a deep spirituality and a more real sense of belonging” (EG 105). Therefore it is a good point of departure to ensure that the whole parish becomes missionary. It is important, however, that these communities have a missionary slant. They cannot fall prey to “collective narcissism” and concentrate on their own formation within the group but they should realise diakonia and mission<sup>22</sup>.

In comparison to other European countries the condition of families in Poland is still good although we can observe first symptoms of disintegration of a traditional family and marriage model. This is a chance to create in Poland pastoral ministry in a missionary key. In pluralistic society the Catholic family is missionary when through the testimony of the Domestic Church it serves other families

<sup>21</sup> In the last 20 years this number has increased from 4% to 8%. It is a reason for hope and optimism.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. W. Śmigiel, *Eklezjalność zrzeseń religijnych*, Pelplin 2015, p. 92.

and the society as an encouragement to receive the Gospel of the Family. *Ad intra* mission can be conducted by Catholic families who can testify about Christ with joy. The Neocatechumenal Way created a model of *The Families in Mission* who wherever they are requested by the bishop leave their homes to go in mission to the de-Christianised regions or where implantation of church (*implantatio ecclesiae*)<sup>23</sup> is necessary. These are the families coming from the Neocatechumenal Way who offer themselves to the Church voluntarily and freely devoting their entire lives to mission.

The relation between the Church and the family is reciprocal. The Church brings into being the family by the power of word and sacrament, forming and leading it to perfection. On the other hand, the family enriches the community of the church and builds it through various charisms received from the Holy Spirit (DCC11; cf. GS 48-49). The inclusion of the family into the mystery of the Church results in the fact that they both have the same charism which enlivens, dynamises and sanctifies them. This is Love which originates from the Paschal Sacrifice and was offered to the Church in the Holy Spirit<sup>24</sup>.

The mission of the Church is to build the community between the Divine Persons and people. The creation of this community starts in the family because it constitutes the basis to strengthen wider social bonds. The family is “humanity’s cradle of life and love” (Cf. GS 48; CL 40) and at the same time realises mission within the family circle as there might be family members who distance themselves from the Church, in the neighbourhood and ecclesial and social circle. The missionary family is a community shaped in the Christian spirit, open to other families and society (FC 42). The missionary nature of the family is based on strengthening love and faith, which constitutes the heart of the “civilisation of love” postulated since the pontificate of Bl. Paul VI (cf. LdR 13)<sup>25</sup>.

Recapitulating, it might be assumed that the salvific ministry of the Church in Poland understood in a missionary key is needed to oppose the processes of laicisation. The Church is missionary by Her nature, both *ad extra* and *ad intra*. Even if secularisation in Poland is not galloping but crawling, it demands the missionary activity. Missionary dioceses and parishes animated by families, movements, communities, associations and groups – this is a pastoral challenge for the Church in Poland.

<sup>23</sup> *Statuty Drogi Neocatechumenalnej, Zatwierdzone definitywnie 18 V 2008*, Lublin 2008, art. 33, p. 62.

<sup>24</sup> J. Bajda, *Teologia rodziny. Istotne zarysy problemu*, in: *Rodzina – bezcenny dar i zadanie*, eds. J. Stala, E. Osewska, Radom 2006, p. 56.

<sup>25</sup> W. Przygoda, *Posługa charytatywna Kościoła w Polsce*, Lublin 2004, p. 189.

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### Summary

The Church is missionary by her very nature, both *ad extra* and *ad intra*. Missionaries come from a community and introduce others to it. The Church that functions in the countries which had been christianised a long time ago also requires ministry in a missionary way. It relies on facilitating access to the Church and searching for those who got lost. This form of ministry is able to stop and oppose the process of laicisation and creates a chance to build a lively parish. Missionary dioceses and parishes animated by families, movements, communities, associations and groups – this is a pastoral challenge for the Church in Poland.

**Keywords:** *mission ad intra, new evangelisation, missionary ministry, pastoral conversion, missionary Church, missionary*

### Streszczenie

Być misyjnym Kościołem w Polsce  
w świetle nauczania Papieża Franciszka

Kościół jest misyjny z samej swojej natury, zarówno w wymiarze misji *ad intra*, jak i *ad extra*. Misjonujący uczniowie wychodzą ze wspólnoty i wprowadzają do niej innych. Kościół funkcjonujący w krajach schrytyanizowanych przed wiekami także wymaga posługi w kluczu misyjnym. Polega ona na ułatwieniu dotarcia do Kościoła oraz na poszukiwaniu tych, którzy się pogubili. Taka forma posługi może przeciwdziałać procesom laicyzacyjnym i daje szansę na budowę żywej parafii. Diecezje i parafie w misji ożywiane udziałem rodzin, ruchów, wspólnot, grup i stowarzyszeń – oto wyzwanie duszpasterskie dla Kościoła w Polsce.

**Słowa klucze:** *misja ad intra, nowa ewangelizacja, posługa misyjna, nawrócenie duszpasterskie, Kościół misyjny, misjonarz*