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# CURRENT MISSION MODEL IN THE GLOBAL WORLD

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## Abstract

This paper is a contribution to the debate on the current mission model of the Church. The authors submit mission models regarding the relationship between the Gospel that brings the Church, on one hand and local culture on the other. Contextual approach is the highlight of the missionary discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The need for transformation of the contextual model due to the pressure of the contemporary world is now a challenge for missiology. The authors outline some characteristics of an emerging missionary model for the present, which should be an answer to the growing process of globalization with its attendant socio-cultural changes.

*Keywords:* church, culture, contextualization, globalization, plurality

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## 1. Introduction

Talk about missionary models can be performed from several angles. For example, well-known South-African missiologist David Bosch shows and justifies the historical development of paradigms of the Church's mission. Closing paradigm, which he called 'ecumenical' is the bearer of elements and dimensions, that are reflected in missiological publications of last decades. These include in particular evangelization, inculturation, contextualization, dialogue, justice and freedom. The ecumenical paradigm thus has significant contextual character.

Contextual approach is very characteristic for missiology of last thirty years and it appears in a series of publications. For example, according to missiologist and anthropologist Louis Luzbetak, contextual model occupies the highest place in the hierarchy of the historic mission models ranking [1]. Relationship between the Gospel and the local culture is also reflected in studies of American missiologist Stephen Bevans. According to him this relationship is modelled into six types, on a scale between anthropological model and countercultural model [2]. Theologian Robert Schreier from Chicago also significantly contributed the discussion of missionary models. He says that from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, we can distinguish three models

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that are characterized with these metaphors: expansion, companionship, reconciliation [3]. There are other authors who contributed the debate on mission models, e.g. Aylward Shorter from UK [4]. However, it is not an ambition of this article to introduce, compare or analyse them. Rather we take one possible line outlining the adaptation of the contextual mission model leading to the contemporary model.

The aim of this paper is to contribute discussion in discovering the current model of mission, pointing out some of its features or trends. Today, the question arises whether globalization and the emerging social order is changing missionary strategy and causes a change of the missionary model or even the appearance of a new model. Globalization of the world has an obvious impact on the social and cultural situation of people, so it is possible to consider transformation of contextual model.

## **2. Contextual model of mission**

As we mentioned before, Louis Luzbetak divided mission models into basic types due to the historical development, considering the question of the encounter between cultures and the Gospel. Based on the perception of Luzbetak we can distinguish the following main missionary models: ethnocentric, accommodative, inculturation and contextual [1]. The first two types are obsolete. Contextual and inculturation model according to some authors merge into one model.

### ***2.1. The model of inculturation***

The model of inculturation is still popular among missionaries. Theological basis for inculturation is the belief that God's word exceeds cultures; it has the ability to penetrate them and live in them. John Paul II encyclical 'Slavorum Apostoli' says that inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel into the local culture and introducing local culture into the life of the Church (1985, 21). According to encyclical '*Redemptoris missio*', the Church gives people from local cultures self-worth and she accepts what is good in these cultures. Thus, she teaches deeper to explore and express the mystery of Jesus Christ, while she gets a stimulus to ongoing restore (1990, 52). As the Word of God was incarnated in a particular time and a particular place in a particular Jewish culture, the Gospel must be incarnate in cultures. Indian theologian Mariasusai Dhavamony explains that God's plan of salvation respects cultural pluralism and seeks unity of all people not on the basis of any hegemonic culture, but on the Gospel message as a universal value. People of all races, nations and ethnic groups may respond to God's call to salvation in their own culture [5]. The Gospel is incarnated into the community if it is a community of people who love, serve one another and are open to everyone else around them. Therefore, as Michael Amaladoss claims, the missionaries should particularly focus on people and their lives according to the Gospel, and not primarily for

ceremonies and institutions [6]. Anyway, the model of inculturation is sometimes accused that missionaries may be tempted, that through inculturation they can achieve rapid success in the field of evangelization.

## **2.2. *The contextual approach***

The contextual approach in missiology we meet from roughly half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wilbert Shenk defines contextualization as the encounter of the Gospel message with the local community of people characterized by their culture, leading to the formation of a local community of faith that is culturally authentic and authentically Christian [7]. Generally we can consider several aspects of the context in given place at the time: social, economic and political conditions, cultural situation, religious aspects. David Hesselgrave adds that contextualization is actually an attempt to communicate the Christian message so that it is faithful to God's revelation and make it meaningful to people to whom the message we want to convey in their existential context, that in the social, cultural and religious situation [8]. Contextualization generally concerns the translation of Sacred Scripture, its interpretation and application, Theology, liturgy, evangelization, lifestyle, organization and development of the Church, that is to say everything related to the implementation of the mission of the Church.

Stephen Bevans, descendent of Louis Luzbetak at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, developed the discussion on contextual theological approach. Under the influence of contextual Theology and looking at the missionary practice of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Bevans came up with the concept of contextual theology models, which has an implicit overlap to the missionary models. If we imagine the relationship between the Gospel (Church tradition) and culture, then Bevans on a scale of that relationship initially identifies six models of contextual theological approach: countercultural model, translation model, synthetic model, praxis model, transcendental model and anthropological model. The first one on this scale is closest to the Gospel (focused on salvation or 'soterio-centric'), the latter is closest to the culture (focused on the creation or 'creatio-centric'), others are somewhere in between [2].

## **2.3. *Contextual models***

Let us see briefly on contextual models according to Bevans. The first model on his scale is the *countercultural model*. This model on one hand recognizes the seriousness and importance of culture; on the other hand it approaches to the culture with suspicion, as to something that has to be confronted with the universally valid message of the Gospel. *Translation model* sees culture positively, but focusing on the faithful transfer of the Gospel message to the members of a particular culture, whereas culture is understood rather as a means for transmitting the message than something valuable in itself.

In the *synthetic model*, Theology is a process of dialogue among participants who bring different approaches, viewpoints, and concerns. It accepts the concerns for faithfulness to the Gospel message, local culture, and the immediate context of people, and it tries to accommodate their contributions. *Praxis model* is similar to the anthropological model, in that Theology is done for a given context by the participants in that context. But opposite to the anthropological model, praxis model judges culture critically according to the Gospel and commit themselves to changing social structures that do not reconcile Gospel standards. This model is a way for people who are oppressed, marginalized or socially excluded. *Transcendental model* looks more like the Eastern approach to Theology, which sees the true theologian not as one studying and discussing, but rather as one who cultivates a deep relationship with the Holy Spirit after long years of discipline and prayer. What originated in the experience of an individual can become an authentic theology for others who share the same cultural context. Assumption of the *anthropological model* is that God's grace might already be at work in a culture before the missionary arrives, predisposing its members to hear and understand the Gospel message, however differently in unexpected ways. People of local culture are rather going to participate in contextualizing Gospel for their own culture [2, p. 141-143].

Although the Bevans' division of contextual models is related to the models of missionary work, we cannot speak directly about missionary models. Rather the author deals with different approaches of contextual-inclusivistic theological concept. Bevans in his model scale has made an extraordinary, but still rather academic division. Between the models there is not a clear line and they are intertwined in practice. It is hard to imagine that these models can be applied in isolation, without overlap. The author himself admits that, for example, translational approach is in the situation of initial evangelization, where there is a need to translate the Gospel into the language and customs of the culture, the primary choice while local Christians will not be able to do their own theological reflection. Then they can apply another, more proper contextual model (for example, anthropological or transcendental) [2, p. 43, 140].

Bevans freely handles with the term Christianity. From the context and spirit of his study, it appears as he does not make the distinction between 'Christianity' and 'Gospel'. The question arises: does he perceive Christianity as one of the world's religions which, in a sense, is competing with other religions, or as a loose synonym for the notion of Gospel or Church? Christianity is said to be a partner to the local culture in a dialogical relationship [2, p. 42-44, 59, 73, etc.]. For his concept of contextual theology it perhaps can be understood in a sense that the local Christian community creates its own contextual theology in the process of self-reflection. But here we must make a distinction: from the missionary perspective a partner for the people of the local culture is not Christianity, but the missionary Church, which carries the Gospel. The aim of the mission is not to Christianize the natives, nor bring the Christianity as a religion, but to offer people the fullness of life through sharing the Gospel and its value as a sign of God's Kingdom.

In the missionary practice, the question is not worth such a way that a single missionary or mission team wonders which contextual model will be applied. They simply work as it is best possible in given situation, conditions, circumstances and contexts. Their strategy is based also on such important factors as the inherent charisma, charisma of missionary society in which they work, political and social context. We should also distinguish whether we examine the individual missionary or missionary team. There occur in the missionary team different synergies which are simply not ‘technically’ possible to grasp. But the range offered by Bevans, however, may be an inspiration.

The concept of contextualization has also its tensions and limitations. In particular, the tension between universality and supra-culturality of the Gospel message on one side and the incarnation of the Son of God in the context of the Israel history on the other, which is paralleled in the tension between the universal dimension of Theology and contextual theologies. Thinking on contextualization we can run into the problem of syncretism. Bosch adds the danger of relativism and absolutization of contextualism, which may mean absolutization of contextual theological approaches. In other words, there is a danger of replacing the dominant and hegemonic Western theology with another hegemonic theology – the contextual one [9]. In relation to the meaning of contextualization Aram speaks about arrogance of cultures, which the Gospel must challenge. After all, racism, class supremacy, sexism, poverty and exploitation were born in cultures [10]. Christ did not bring any new culture, nor came to abolish Jewish culture, but he has come to transform and promote it.

### **3. Pluralistic model for global mission**

In the globalizing contemporary world, the question of transformation of contextual missionary model arises, or even it is a time to look for a new missionary model. We will call it pluralistic model. The adjective ‘pluralistic’ here has no relation to the pluralistic model, that is of interest for the Theology of religions, and which preaches that all religions have equally salvific value. This working name wants rather to show the plurality of ways, approaches and strategies in missionary activity today.

Pluralistic missionary model will still have many of the characteristics of contextual or inculturation model, while other characteristics shall take regarding the particularities of the local community or region, the challenges of globalization and the specifics of the missionary approach. World-wide globalization changes the context of the mission of the Church. Universal Church in changed conditions must find current missionary model in which pluralism and holism, diversity and unity will apply in the dialectical tension. We are not going to bring a complete definition of a pluralistic missionary model, nor to offer its complete outline, but rather to present the contribution in discovering the contemporary missionary model, showing some of its features or trends.

Missionary Church has overtaken postmodern society in a response to globalization. Church is a reflection of the 'communion' of the Holy Trinity, so we can see her as a plurality in unity. Therefore, as the Vatican II Decree 'Ad gentes' points out, the mission of the Church, as a basic expression of her life, stems from intrinsic 'missionary' dynamism of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in order to meet the lives of individuals and entire nations (1965, 2). The Church is the convened universal community which comes from different nations, cultures and social groups who is inspired with Holy Spirit, and whose centre is Jesus Christ. What in the universal Church brings people together is neither culture nor work, nor social status, or common interests, but Christ himself and his Gospel. Global vision of the Church is based on her substance and the missionary mandate of Jesus (Mathew 28.19, Mark 16.15).

Missionary Church is trying to convey the universality of God's mission (Missio Dei), while in the light of the Gospel transforms, liberates and promotes local culture. On the one hand, the Church must maintain her distance and independence in relation to globalization movement; on the other hand, she must inculturate in this world, so must learn to live and work in the context and conditions of globalization and be the intelligible sign of salvation for people today. It seems that currently is the time in which special importance shall enter the fourth character of Christ's Church – catholicity (universality, plurality in unity). Catholicity of the Church says that the Church is indeed universal and global, but also is associated with local communities. Universal Church encourages the development of local Churches and vice versa. According the Second Vatican Council each local Church is missionary, but at the same time needs mission. Mission belongs to the local as well as the universal Church. This is a global mission in the global world. According M. Arias, when we think about global mission, we see a biblical paradigm, which is the coming God's Kingdom. The issue of Kingdom of God is a key issue in thinking about the global mission of the Church [11].

The actual model of mission should apply particularly the prophetic dialogue. The term 'prophetic dialogue' appeared on the XV<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Divine Word Society, which was held in 2000 in Rome. This term indicates that the missionary Church enters into dialogue from the position of her faith and with the partners in the dialogue seeks to hear the voice of God's Spirit. Divine World missionaries identified four basic situations in which the prophetic dialogue takes place: initial evangelization and re-evangelization, service to the poor and marginalized, intercultural cooperation and interfaith understanding (Documents of the XV General Chapter SVD, 52-54).

Application of the prophetic dialogue should take into account the specifics of global society. Such specifications include, for example, the emergence of new subcultures, which are no longer relative to particular ethnic or geographic origin of man, but as its social status, profession, interests or membership to some movement (which might be a subculture of homeless people, street children, migrants, members of alternative movements, etc.), mass migration and a rapid increase of urbanization, particularly in developing

countries, occurrence of a kind of global culture with the parallel emergence of new particularisms, etc. Bevans and Schroeder point out that prophetic dialogue is a synthesis of these three strains: mission as participation in the life and mission of the Holy Trinity; mission as continuation of the Jesus' ministry to preach, serve and witness to the liberating justice of the Kingdom of God; and mission as the proclamation of Christ as the only Saviour of the world [12].

The question of inculturation today in some specific social situations or in certain geographic locations, or due to a shift in the thinking of people may not play such an important role, as it was twenty or thirty years ago. For example, the situation of the blurring of lines between cultures and creating a sort of transnational global culture (especially in term of young people), and the situation of coexistence of different cultures in the world megacities, or perhaps the state of miserable existence of whole communities of people in the poorest neighbourhoods of big cities – slums, where the issue of traditional culture is covered by issue of massive areal poverty. In this case, we are encouraged rather to start with cooperation in ensuring basic living conditions of the target groups and subsequently trying to proclaim the Gospel.

Pluralistic model does not reject all approaches of its development predecessors. The model assumes a plurality of approaches, which is another feature. What approach missionary chooses will depend on various factors, which will include the degree of development of the target group or community. In some cases of community-based missionary work we must initially function even in a kind of 'paternalistic' mode, especially when the local community itself does not know to identify even their own needs, ways of development and the main factors of their deprivation. Such cases we have also in Europe. We can consider for example some Roma settlements in the eastern Slovakia.

Regarding the issue of inculturation, we can mention the corresponding results of field research from Cambodia conducted by the authors of this article. Research was focused on mission strategies in Cambodia among Catholic missionaries from different countries who work in various mission projects. In the following, we outline a few examples of the results of this research which are related to the theme of this paper. Inculturation is still current and relevant missionary method, but there is a marked shift from the previous orientation, which focused on the outer material and symbolic culture to the current target of inculturation focused more on internal human living (missionary works with values and mentality of local people, conditioned by their cultural tradition and cultural patterns).

Intercultural dialogue and understanding between world religions is another hot topic regarding contemporary missionary model. The question arises: how the Gospel will be proclaimed in globalized intercultural relations? The contemporary missionary model should take into account all these situations and approaches due to current movements and tensions in human communities. For example, one of the outcomes of mentioned research in Cambodia is finding that the missionaries use teaching of Buddhism and its certain similarity to the moral principles of Christianity to explain the universality of the Gospel

message, but for converts they recommend not mixing Christian worship with Buddhist one.

Church's mission should call to perform globalization without marginalization and oppression. While globalization, as we have already discussed, has its positive features, one of the major negative side is that it displaces the poorest classes on the margin of society and the poorest countries on the sidelines of international economic and political relations. As a post-synodal apostolic exhortation 'Ecclesia in Asia' says, the role of local Churches is to act such a way, the social teaching of the Church has necessary impact on the formulation of ethical and legal standards that govern the free world market and the activities of the media (1998, 39).

Evangelization is a long process based on the form of the mission which we can call "to be with people" [13] and the missionary is rather the first witness of life rooted in the Gospel as a businessman or manager. Back to the research in Cambodia - whereas Cambodians are in their cultural nature very submissive to authority, therefore to missionaries as well, they would in most cases have responded positively to an invitation to Christian evangelization activities, which would on their part could be purposeful behaviour. Thus missionaries are restrained to use the technique of inviting to such activities, but they are waiting for the own interest of Cambodians about Jesus Christ and his Gospel, which can be excited by the testimony of missionary life and by the service to local communities in missionary diaconal projects. Very important place in mission projects include social and medical assistance to vulnerable, marginalized and socially excluded groups, which is considered as the form of indirect evangelization demonstrating interest in the dignity of human being. Globalization promotes international cooperation in missionary diakonia.

Inspiration for the global mission we can find in encyclicals of last popes as well as in many other Church documents. Church in the world has to be faithful to her missionary task as to:

- seek and manifest a truth about God, people, the world, and relationships between them;
- proclaim the word of God, which is the source of constant renewal;
- share the faith which is the light of individuals, human society and history, and is the basis of the people's unity;
- advocate for life and its protection at any level;
- remember the role of the man as God's co-worker, whom God has called to this world to be the steward governor, and not only a consumer;
- engage in matters of the family protection and promotion;
- defend the dignity of every human being, protect human rights, hold the oppressed, excluded and humiliated, but also women and children;
- highlight the errors committed by the society or groups that contradict the Gospel teachings;
- advocate for justice and peace in the world as well as bring reconciliation into the relationships between people, communities and nations;

- engage in spreading the truth via communication media and offer the Gospel message to the space of social networks (based on the Church documents such as: encyclical of John Paul II ‘Redemptoris missio’, 1990; apostolic exhortation of pope Francis ‘Evangelii gaudium’, 2013; post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Benedict XVI. ‘Verbum Domini’, 2010; encyclical of pope Francis, ‘Lumen fidei’, 2013; encyclical of Benedict XVI ‘Caritas in veritate’, 2009; encyclical of Benedict XVI ‘Deus caritas est’, 2005; encyclical of John Paul II ‘Evangelium vitae’, 1995; encyclical of John Paul II ‘Centisimus annus’, 1991; Concluding document of the plenary assembly of Pontifical Council for Culture ‘Where is your God?’, 2006; Message of Benedict XVI for World Day of Peace, 2011; Message of Benedict XVI for the 47<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, 2013).

Church gets new challenges in the field of culture, arts and scientific research. Globalization calls the Church to deepen its involvement in the work with migrants, refugees, youth and minorities. Today once again racism increasingly emerges in its different forms, which is still a grave challenge for the missionary work. There are many challenges from subcultures of megacities. It also includes the previously mentioned efforts to solve global problems of environmental protection and integrity of all creation. Missionary task is to offer an alternative option to the consumer lifestyle, which devastates nature and human being as well. Globalization puts a great challenge in terms of ecumenical cooperation and dialogue between religions and cultures.

What is the interlocutor for the pluralistic model of mission? Missionary model for globalized and pluralistic world carries an important and essential dimension, which is the concept of reconciliation. This concept is discussed in the encyclical of John Paul II *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*. Reconciliation refers to four dimensions: reconciliation with God, with himself, with neighbour, with the world and the whole creation. The American theologian Robert Schreiter at the turn of our century developed an application of the concept of reconciliation in the contemporary missionary model [14]. He considers healing and reconciliation as the most important dimension of missionary activity today. The possibility of healing and reconciliation in a divided society, says Schreiter, is one of the most important messages of the Gospel in today’s world. Reconciliation as the fruit of the mission is a deep and impressive manner expressed in the letter of the apostle Paul to Ephesians. Paul here says about reconciliation through Christ’s blood, the demolition of walls of division and hostility, the enthronement of peace, and the creation of a new man who becomes through the Holy Spirit inhabitant of house of God (Ephesians 2.11-22). Schreiter does not understand reconciliation only as ‘collecting fragments’ after a violent conflict or the devastating effects of globalization [15].

Bevans and Schroeder point out that reconciliation takes place at several different levels. In the first place, there is the personal level of reconciliation (for example, healing for victims of violent crimes or for those who have suffered due to natural disasters), at the second level is the cultural reconciliation (healing for people of cultural groups whose cultural identity has been ignored or

disparaged), the third level is the political reconciliation (for example, in situations of violence among ethnic groups or tribes, healing for refugees and victims who have escaped genocide), and at the fourth level there is reconciliation within the Church itself (for example, healing for victims of a clericalism) [12, p. 391-392].

Here we can again bring the corresponding outcome from the mentioned research in Cambodia. The Catholic Church in this Asian country acts as a mediator of reconciliation between the two most numerous ethnic groups: in addition to the 90% majority of ethnic Khmer live in the country about 5% Vietnamese minority. Between these two ethnicities long-term tension persists, whose roots date back into history. It is interesting that majority of the Cambodian Catholic Church consists of Vietnamese. The results of the research shows that lived, the Gospel has the ability to bring near these hostile ethnic communities.

Reconciliation is not a simple and easy task. According to this concept it is not a kind of therapeutic process. Reconciliation is especially healing, changing mindsets and attitudes that cannot be programmed. It is more a matter of spirituality than a strategy with beginning and end. It is a synergy of God's healing grace and human nature. Through reconciliation is morally reconstructed the society to not repeat obscure acts of the past anymore [16]. The main objective of reconciliation is healing the wounds of individuals and society as a whole, in which witness of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ plays a key role. This reconciliation does not mean a return to the original state, but the result is something new – a new creation, a new man, a new society.

#### 4. Conclusions

All characteristics of the ecumenical paradigm that Bosch has shown 20 years ago are valid also today. However, we can see a shift on the issue of inculturation and contextualization as the impact of globalization. In this article, we tried to introduce transformed contextual missionary model for current world which we called pluralistic model.

What are the characteristics of the pluralistic model which appear to be the most important? The basic characteristic of the model is the application of *prophetic dialogue*, which is a synthesis of these approaches: mission as participation in the mission of the Holy Trinity; mission as continuation of the Jesus' liberating ministry; and mission as the proclamation of Christ as the only Saviour of the world. An important feature of pluralistic model is the focus on *social inclusion* of excluded groups in society with regard to old and new forms of poverty. Missionaries strive to make the benefits of globalization also to profit the excluded or marginalized groups and not just the rich elite. Another feature of today's missionary model is the *change of approach regarding the question of inculturation*. Missionaries work more with the mentality and value orientation of local people, as specific elements of material culture. Pluralistic model already in its name indicates that it does not refuse some proper approaches of

its predecessor. The model assumes *plurality of approaches*, which is another feature of it. Intercultural *dialogue* and understanding between world religions is also a very actual topic today. The Gospel is proclaimed in globalized intercultural relations. Missionary model of the current world is characterized by an essential characteristic which is the *concept of reconciliation*. As it was already said, reconciliation takes place at several levels, as the personal, cultural, political reconciliation and reconciliation within the Church itself.

It turns out that in a situation of advanced globalization, the Church in her missionary activities is increasingly facing a situation where her partners are not only local communities, nations or regions, but it is becoming a global humanity. On the other hand, there rise strong local ties in the specific environment characterized by particular social, economic and political situation, such as sites with extreme poverty, regions with strengthening nationalism and the like. The present pluralistic model of missionary activity is a response to the current situation. Its features, which we have tried to present in this paper are not definitive, but are in constant evolution.

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