

Sources of Inspiration in Understanding Missionary Spirituality in the Thought of John Paul II

Źródła inspiracji w rozumieniu duchowości misyjnej
w myśli Jana Pawła II

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Abstract: The concept of missionary spirituality falls within the mainstream of Christian spirituality. John Paul II understands it in the personalistic and Christological perspective. According to the Pope's thought, the missionary spirituality is the fruit of the total submission to the Holy Spirit in the missionary's aim to become permanently conformed to Christ. This attitude results from a deep union with the Holy Trinity in the experience of the Father through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Imitating Christ, the preacher of the Gospel, is essential for an authentic missionary spirituality. Following the ideal of missionary spirituality leads to an authentic inculturation, love of the Church, shapes the proper spirit of prayer and missionary asceticism, dynamises apostolic commitment and lays the foundations for a true dialogue, inseparable from the missionary activity.

Keywords: personalism, Christocentrism, the mission of the Church, Christian spirituality, missionary spirituality, inculturation, interreligious dialogue

Abstrakt: Pojęcie duchowości misyjnej mieści się w głównym nurcie rozumienia duchowości chrześcijańskiej. Jan Paweł II postrzega ją w personalistycznej i chrystopologicznej perspektywie. Zgodnie z jego myślą duchowość misyjna jest owocem całkowitego poddania się Duchowi Świętemu w dążeniu misjonarza do trwałego upodobnienia się do Chrystusa. Postawa ta wynika z głębokiego zjednoczenia z całą Trójcą Świętą, zjednoczenia z Ojcem przez Jezusa Chrystusa, w Duchu Świętym. Naśladowanie Chrystusa, głosiciela Ewangelii, jest niezbędnym elementem duchowości

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misyjnej. Jej praktyka prowadzi do autentycznej inkulturacji, miłości do Kościoła, kształtuje właściwego ducha modlitwy i ascezy misyjnej, dynamizuje zaangażowanie apostołskie i kładzie podwaliny pod prawdziwy dialog, nierozzerwalnie związany z misyjną działalnością Kościoła.

Słowa kluczowe: personalizm, chrystocentryzm, misja Kościoła, duchowość chrześcijańska, duchowość misyjna, inkulturacja, dialog międzyreligijny

How should spirituality today guide and direct the daily lives of followers of Jesus in their commitment to God's mission? It has to do with our inner life and relationship with God. It is in showing our love and concern for others that we prove our love for God, as the apostle John says (1 John 4). Mission without spirituality will only be a human effort to convince people of religious theories. Spirituality without the Church's missionary commitment will not express God's desire for the transforming Gospel to reach every person. During his pontificate, John Paul II has tried to deepen these questions in a theological perspective. The purpose of this article is to identify and analyze the sources of inspiration in the formation of the concept of missionary spirituality in the official teaching of John Paul II.

I. Locum of Missionary Spirituality

The missionary activity is a part of the very nature of the Church. The missionary vocation, which in order to be undertaken and lived out requires certain forms of spirituality, is a part of the missionary endeavor. Thus, it is necessary to speak specifically about the missionary spirituality. In modern theological literature in the field of missiology and spirituality, we find various attempts to define it.¹ The expression "missionary vocations and missionary spirituality" appears

¹ Of the more important studies, the following should be mentioned: A. Aubert, *Théologie missionnaire et spiritualité missionnaire*, "Collectanea Mechiliniensis" (1974), pp. 424–432; H. Bürkle, *Missionarische Spiritualität als Antwort auf Grunderfahrungen in den Religionen*, "Geist und Leben" 48 (1975), pp. 431–443; G. Courtois, *Esprit chrétien, esprit missionnaire*, Paris 1966; M. Dhavamony, *Basic Structures of Missionary Spirituality*, "Omnis Terra" 13 (1979), pp. 179–210; J. Esquerda Bifet, *Missionary Spirituality*, Bangalore 1977; idem, *Spirituality for a Missionary Church*, Roma 1994; B. Kelly, *Missionary Spirituality*, Dublin 1960; J. Monchamin, *Théologie et spiritualité missionnaire*, Paris 1985; A. Nebreda, *Mission, Theology and Spirituality*, "Teaching All Nations" 13 (1976), pp. 71–85; Y.M. Raguin, *"I Am Sending You": Spirituality of the Missioner*, Manila 1973; M.C. Reilly, *Spirituality for Mission*, Manila 1973; A. Retif, *La mission, elements de la théologie et spiritualité missionnaire*, Tours 1963; A.J. Gittins, *Reading the Clouds: Mission Spirituality for New Times*, Liguori 1999; idem, *Ministry at the Margins: Strategy and Spirituality for Mission*, New York 2002; W. Kluj, *Duchowość misyjna. Między „Ad gentes” a „Redemptoris missio”*, "Annales Missiologici Posnanienses" 15 (2006), pp. 19–36; J. Kiciński, *Duchowość misji współdzielonej. Studium w świetle współczesnego Magisterium Kościoła*, Wro-

in the Vatican II Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church *Ad gentes* (see AG 29), where the Council Fathers point to the responsibility of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, “this office should promote missionary vocations and missionary spirituality, zeal and prayer for the missions, and should put out authentic and adequate reports about them” (AG 29). The essence of the missionary spirituality, as the Council perceives it and draws out its main features, is contained in Chapter IV of the Decree *Ad gentes*, entitled “Missionaries,” where the issues of the missionary vocation (see AG 23), missionary virtues in connection with their spirituality (see AG 24), missionary formation (see AG 25–26) and missionary institutes (see AG 27) are developed.²

The Decree *Ad gentes*, referring to missionaries, defines them as persons endowed with a special vocation (AG 29) which requires a truly evangelical life characterized by generosity and fidelity to one’s call, so as to be consistent with the demands of the mission. Therefore, the Council admonishes, “The heralds of the Gospel lest they neglect the grace which is in them, should be renewed day by day in the spirit of their mind (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14; Eph. 4:23; 2 Cor. 4:16)” (AG 24) and prepare themselves “by a special spiritual and moral training” (AG 25). In turn, by devoting himself to his own spiritual life, the missionary makes the life of Jesus a reality “in those to whom he is sent (2 Cor. 4:10ff.)” (AG 25).³

The specific vocation to fulfill the demands of the mission is one of the cornerstones of the missionary spirituality and an important element in allowing it to be more precisely defined. Thus, although mainly Chapter IV of the Decree was devoted to the missionary spirituality, nevertheless, throughout the whole document there is an emphasis on the specific dynamism, Christian openness and readiness in the spiritual perspective towards the development of the mission. Spiritual life is a life according to the Spirit. In fact, it is “the Holy Spirit [who] makes the entire Church ‘one in communion and in ministering; He equips her with various gifts of a hierarchical and charismatic nature,’ a giving life, soul—like, to ecclesiastical institutions and instilling into the hearts of the faithful the same mission spirit which impelled Christ Himself” (AG 4).

A life lived out according to the Spirit allows the missionaries to become ever better witnesses of the Gospel, and their witness influences their spiritual attitudes, beliefs and decisions (cf. AG 6). One of the main goals of the Church’s

ćław 2013; P. Piasecki, *Duchowość misyjna w posoborowej nauce Kościoła katolickiego*, Poznań 2013; M. Tatar, *Modlitwa i sakramenty święte fundamentem duchowości misyjnej*, “Lumen Gentium”. *Zeszyty Misjologiczne* 34 (2014) 1 (166), pp. 18–35.

² P. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation*, New York 1998, p. 50. See J. Esquerda Bifet, *Misionologia. Evangelizar en un mundo global*, Madrid 2008, p. 471; P. Piasecki, *Duchowość...*, p. 15.

³ J. Esquerda Bifet, *La spiritualité missionnaire pour une nouvelle évangélisation*, “Omnis Terra” 320 (1996), p. 61.

missionary activity, which completes the Creator's salvific intentions for all humanity, is the glory of God. The Council Fathers note, "by means of this missionary activity, God is fully glorified, provided that men fully and consciously accept His work of salvation, which He has accomplished in Christ" (AG 7). Through this, the Church's mission is fulfilled, moving toward the unification of all humanity in God. The union with God and fraternity of all people is expressed through prayer and acts of love, "Thus, at last, the ancient plan of the Creator creating man in His image and likeness will be fulfilled in essence, when all who share in human nature, renewed in Christ by the Holy Spirit, will be able, beholding the glory of God to say with one accord: 'Our Father'" (AG 7).⁴

In the post-conciliar documents, both the topic and the concept of the missionary spirituality are further deepened and defined. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, Paul VI devotes a chapter to the spirit of evangelization, with the expression "spirit" being understood as a certain inner attitude animating evangelical workers.

We would not wish to end this encounter with our beloved brethren and sons and daughters without a pressing appeal concerning the interior attitudes which must animate those who work for evangelization. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the name of the Apostles Peter and Paul, we wish to exhort all those who, thanks to the charisms of the Holy Spirit and to the mandate of the Church, are true evangelizers to be worthy of this vocation, to exercise it without the reticence of doubt or fear, and not to neglect the conditions that will make this evangelization not only possible but also active and fruitful. These, among many others, are the fundamental conditions which we consider important to emphasize (EN 74).

It should be noted that the concept of the spirit invoked in the exhortation can be identified with the concept of spirituality, because the Pope understands "spirit" as a specific way of life of an evangelizer who faithfully implements the mission of Christ entrusted to the Church (cf. chapters I–III, IV and VI of EN).

Precisely for this reason, the mission requires and deserves that "the apostle consecrates to it all his time and all his energy, and [...] sacrifices for it, if necessary, his own life" (EN 5). Paul VI links spirituality with the mission, for spirituality flows from the mission. The mission is its *raison d'être* and also the goal of this specific spirituality, according to the way of life of Christ, the Evangelizer himself, who wished to remain in His Church, where evangelization has been continuous.⁵

Paul VI thus builds the concept of the missionary spirituality based on several mission related dimensions. First, he points to the principle of fidelity to the Holy

⁴ P. Piasecki, *Duchowość...*, p. 16.

⁵ J. Esquerda Bifet, *La spiritualité...*, p. 62; P. Piasecki, *Duchowość...*, p. 17.

Spirit (see EN 75), then to the authenticity of a person's living out the Gospel rooted in a deep experience of God (see EN 76). It takes into account the role of the service for the unity (see EN 77) and truth (see EN 78), apostolic zeal and pastoral charity, lived as paschal joy (see EN 79–80). In this way, the Church, united with Mary in the Upper Room and faithful to the received gifts of the Holy Spirit, can continue the renewed evangelization which “docile to her Lord's command, must promote and accomplish, especially in these times which are difficult but full of hope!” (EN 82).⁶

On the other hand, John Paul II, in his Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, in articles 86–88, reminds the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith of its responsibility for the development of the missionary theology, both in the domains of pastoral theology and spirituality (see PB 86), pointing to prayer and witness as the main pillars of the missionary spirituality (see PB 87), and entrusting priests, religious and laity alike with the concern for missionary vocations (see PB 88).⁷

II. Toward Defining the Missionary Spirituality in the Thought of John Paul II

The concept of missionary spirituality in accordance with John Paul II's view is rooted in his teaching on Christian spirituality. Hence, it is necessary to identify the main features of his thought in this regard. The Pope most often uses the concept of spirituality to define or describe the supernatural reality, thanks to which man finds personal fulfillment and achieves salvation in the context of the connection with culture, respect for the dignity of the human person and human rights, the need to improve social conditions, and care for peace. Undoubtedly, the starting point of the papal concept of Christian spirituality is personalism, and the point of arrival is Christocentrism. It is, therefore, a dynamic view of the Christian spiritual life.⁸

⁶ See C. Bonivento, *The Nature of Evangelization according to “Evangelii nuntiandi”*, “Omnis Terra” 14 (1980), pp. 249–260; P.D. Letter, *The Missionary Legacy of Pope Paul VI: From “Ad Gentes” to “Evangelii nuntiandi”*, “Worldmission” 30 (1979), pp. 4–9; J. Dupuis, *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii nuntiandi” of Pope Paul VI*, “Vidyajyoti” 40 (1976), pp. 218–230; L. Kaufmann, *An Introduction to the Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii nuntiandi”*, “Omnis Terra” 11 (1976–1977), pp. 31–35; B. McGregor, *Commentary on “Evangelii nuntiandi”*, “Doctrine and Life” March–April (1977), pp. 53–97; F. Miller, *Pastoral Aspects of “Evangelii nuntiandi”*, “Omnis Terra” 11 (1976–1977), pp. 209–213; J. Esquerda Bifet, *Spirituality...*, p. 53.

⁷ P. Piasecki, *Duchowość...*, p. 17.

⁸ See R. Buttiglione, *Mysł Karola Wojtyły*, tłum. J. Merecki, Lublin 2010, p. 81.

The motto of the pontificate of John Paul II, “Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ,”⁹ uttered during his inaugural homily on Sunday, October 22, 1978, then taken up once again and deepened in the encyclical letter *Redemptor hominis*, indicates that Christocentrism is the goal of spiritual life. Moreover, the phrase of the Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, “the truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light” (RH 8; GS 22), can be seen as a suitable hermeneutical key to the entire papal doctrine on Christian spirituality, including his reflection on the missionary spirituality.¹⁰

Interestingly, John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris Mater*, in the context of Marian spirituality points out that this spirituality is a way of living out one’s faith and fulfilling its demands in the concrete circumstances of life of a believer (see RM 48). On this occasion, he reminds us that a certain model of such spirituality and piety was left by St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort. From the rich Mariological content of *Redemptoris Mater* and the proposal of forms of Marian spirituality contained in the thought of Grignion de Montfort, four spiritual models of evangelization germinate in the papal intention. The first model is to evangelize with Mary: the Mother of Jesus evangelizes with the Church and lives in the Church community gathered around the Risen Lord; Mary was the first to accept Him into her life and she is the example of how to be close to Him. The second model is to evangelize like Mary and in Mary: the spiritual life should be shaped after the model of Mary’s involvement in the mystery of salvation. A member of the Christian faithful through his faith is a child of Mary in the order of grace. Thus, there is a spiritual similarity between a Christian and the Blessed Virgin. The third model is to evangelize through Mary, with her help: through the obedience of faith, Mary prepares the Church to proclaim the Good News, and shows how to do so. The fourth model is to evangelize for Mary: to embrace her attitude imbued with the concern for the salvation of every person.¹¹

The Pope defines spirituality more precisely in his Encyclical Letter on the Continued Relevance of the Church’s Mission *Redemptoris missio*:

This spirituality is expressed first of all by a life of complete docility to the Spirit. It commits us to being molded from within by the Spirit, so that we may become ever

⁹ John Paul II, *Homily for the Inauguration of His Pontificate*, St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, 22 October 1978 https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19781022_inizio-pontificato.html [accessed: 20.1.2023].

¹⁰ See L. Łysień, *Jan Paweł II — zdumiewanie jest tajemnicą człowieka* [in:] *Hermeneutyka nauczania Jana Pawła II*, red. A. Węgrzyniak, L. Łysień, Bielsko-Biała 2006, pp. 31–56.

¹¹ P. Piasecki, *Maryjne modele ewangelizacji w duchowości bł. Jana Pawła II*, “*Salvatoris Mater*” 1–4 (2014), pp. 407–420.

more like Christ. It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit. This docility then commits us to receive the gifts of fortitude and discernment, which are essential elements of missionary spirituality (RMis 87).

In the words quoted above, the Pope emphasizes that what is essential in Christian spirituality is the docility to the Holy Spirit, understood as openness to His action and obedience of faith, exemplified by the Mother of Jesus (cf. RM 13–14). The essence of spirituality, therefore, includes openness and receptivity. Thus, the proper cause of spirituality is the Holy Spirit. The second feature of Christian spirituality is an “intimate communion with Christ” (RMis 88), which manifests itself in conformity to Him, that is, the imitation of His attitudes which is the proper object of submission to the Holy Spirit, who leads to the Father.¹²

John Paul II took up a similar route in his Post-Synodal Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Modern World *Pastores dabo vobis*. Recalling the conciliar recommendation that candidates for the priesthood should be “taught to seek Christ” (PDV 46), the Pope points out that this search is “a classic theme of Christian spirituality” (PDV 46). Priests in particular should cultivate in themselves the spirituality of the Heart of God, which means “to lead a life characterized by love and affection for Christ the Priest and Good Shepherd” (PDV 49). Both the docility to the Spirit and the conformity to Christ condition apostolic effectiveness since “those who have the missionary spirit feel Christ’s burning love for souls, and love the Church as Christ did” (RMis 89). In this can be seen the further characteristics of Christian spirituality which is missionary and apostolic, and fully understood only in the perspective of ecclesial spirituality. Particularly with regard to presbyters, John Paul II emphasizes their association with the local Church, “the priest needs to be aware that his ‘being in a particular Church’ constitutes by its very nature a significant element in his living a Christian spirituality” (PDV 31). Thus, John Paul II unequivocally teaches that an authentic Christian spirituality is impossible outside the Church. Hence, especially when he speaks of the spirituality of consecrated life, he strongly emphasizes the need for a “spirituality of communion,” to which he devotes much space in his Post-Synodal Exhortation on Consecrated Life *Vita consecrata*, as well as in his letter *Novo millennio ineunte*.¹³

In *Vita consecrata*, the term “specific spirituality” (VC 93) deserves particular attention. Through his concern that “the consecrated life should be nourished from the wellspring of a sound and deep spirituality” (VC 93), John Paul II points out that this is “inscribed in the very essence of the consecrated life by the fact

¹² M. Chmielewski, *Personalistyczno-chrystologiczna terminologia duchowa w nauczaniu papieskim*, “Duchowość w Polsce” 15 (2013), p. 21.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

that, just as every other baptized person, and indeed even more so, those who profess the evangelical counsels must aspire with all their strength to the perfection of charity” (VC 93). It follows that the center of Christian spirituality is aimed at love (cf. Matthew 22:38–40). In this context, the Pope speaks of the “specific spirituality” of consecrated persons marked by “particular spiritual emphases and choices of apostolate, which accentuate and re-present one or another aspect of the one mystery of Christ” (VC 93). In other words, spirituality is a concrete form of living the mystery of Christ through his imitation.¹⁴

In a similar vein, he speaks in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America*. There, he encourages not only pastors, but all the faithful

to know more deeply and to make their own a genuine Christian spirituality. In effect, the term spirituality means a mode or form of life in keeping with Christian demands. Spirituality is ‘life in Christ’ and ‘in the Spirit’, which is accepted in faith, expressed in love and inspired by hope, and so becomes the daily life of the Church community. In this sense, by spirituality, which is the goal of conversion, we mean “not a part of life, but the whole of life guided by the Holy Spirit” (EAm 29).¹⁵

Christian spirituality, therefore, is the concrete actualization of faith, that is, the life in Christ in submission to the Holy Spirit. Its proper source and, at the same time, its manifestation are the sacraments and the liturgy as well as prayer. In the post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, we find a pivotal remark that “Christian spirituality is nourished above all by a constant sacramental life, since the Sacraments are the root and endless source of God’s grace which believers need to sustain on their earthly pilgrimage” (EAm 29). Moreover, prayer is an inexhaustible source and manifestation of spirituality, as the Pope notes when speaking of the specific schools of spirituality and prayer (cf. VC 94; cf. RVM 5.19).¹⁶

III. The Core of the Missionary Spirituality

The most important document in which John Paul II properly defines missionary spirituality is, undoubtedly, his encyclical letter *Redemptoris missio*, published on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the promulgation of the conciliar Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad gentes*. The structure of the encyclical letter is exceedingly clear and in some way reflects the method of doctrinal teaching of John Paul II.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem, pp. 21–22.

The purpose is to outline clearly the Church's teaching on a given issue, then to show the doubts and objections that can arise against the particular teaching, coming both from those members of the Church, who do not fully understand all the circumstances, and from the modern world. The Pope usually concludes his lecture by pointing to the positive and practical solutions that result from the doctrine presented.¹⁷

In this key, in Chapter One, John Paul II justifies the truth that Jesus Christ is the only Savior, while the Church is the sign and instrument of salvation. In the context of postmodern currents of thought, the Pope insists that "...the kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program subject to free interpretation, but it is before all else *a person* with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God" (RMis 18). Moreover, it is Christ who embodies the Kingdom of God (cf. RMis 13). It is immediately apparent that this approach expresses a personalist-Christological view and, consequently, any concepts of salvation and mission that could be called 'anthropocentric' in the narrow sense of the word as essentially focusing on the earthly needs of man, are unacceptable (cf. RMis 17). As a result, they reduce the Kingdom of God to a merely human and secularized reality.

Characterizing the contemporary postmodern situation of the Church, the Pope also draws attention to some opposing phenomena. Namely, he refers to the concepts which deliberately emphasize the Kingdom, "There are also conceptions which deliberately emphasize the kingdom and which describe themselves as 'kingdom-centered'. They stress the image of a Church which is not concerned about herself, but which is totally concerned with bearing witness to and serving the kingdom" (RMis 17). Both conceptions of the Church are severely criticized by the Pope, showing that "above all, they maintain a certain silence with regard to Christ," and furthermore, they overemphasize the mystery of creation, leaving out the mystery of Redemption (cf. RMis 17).¹⁸

Hence, the Church's charitable and educational activities alone are not sufficient, but it is necessary to proclaim Christ and the Kingdom of God in the spirit of the Gospel. In this statement, the contours of personalism and Christocentrism in the thought of John Paul II are clearly drawn. In the missionary activity of the Church, these two realities complement and clarify each other. This is aptly reflected in the title of the document: *Redemptoris missio*. For the Church does not carry out her own mission, but faithfully continues the salvific mission entrusted to her by Christ.¹⁹

¹⁷ M. Chmielewski, *Duchowość Jana Pawła II. Studium na podstawie encyklik i adhortacji*, Lublin 2013, p. 168.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

John Paul II also points to the pneumatological rationale for the Church's missionary activity, "The Spirit worked through the apostles, but at the same time he was also at work in those who heard them: through his action the Good News takes shape in human minds and hearts and extends through history. In all of this it is the Holy Spirit who gives life" (RMis 21). He makes the whole Church missionary, in view of which the missionary activity belongs to the deepest nature of the Christian community (cf. RMis 26). It is not only its right but above all its duty. The *mission ad gentes* remains relevant:

While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization (RMis 38).

While this phenomenon is not without ambiguity, it poses a great challenge to the Church in sharing with others her spiritual heritage. John Paul II goes on to declare that the witness of Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission (cf. RMis 42). The related preaching of the Word of God is aimed at Christian conversion understood as the full and sincere adherence to Christ and His teachings and submission to the Holy Spirit (cf. RMis 46). The effectiveness of conversion, on the other hand, largely depends on the personal testimony of the preacher. This poses a challenge not only for individuals, in this case the missionaries, but for all Christian communities and movements, which "are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a civilization of love" (RMis 51).

On the backdrop of this thought, the Pope devotes much attention to the issue of inculturation, which he understands as "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures" (RMis 52). This gives rise to certain requirements that must be met, such as a thorough knowledge of the culture in question and its language. Touching on the issue of interreligious dialogue, John Paul II does not hesitate to emphasize that "*the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation" (RMis 55).

In this way the Pope by no means questions the importance and culture-creating role of other religions, but lays the foundations for a true dialogue inherent in missionary activity. For the dialogue, as one of the ways of the Kingdom, aims at purification and interior conversion, which, when carried out in obedience to the Holy Spirit, will bear spiritual fruit (see RMis 57).²⁰

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 170.

The Holy Father points to the universal value of spirituality. This thought resounds throughout the Church even more forcefully when he talks about the necessity of the development of a human person and his/her conscience. The clearly personalist-Christological orientation of the Pope's teaching is evident in the statement that "Man is the principal agent of development, not money or technology. [...] Man's development derives from God, and from the model of Jesus—God and man—and must lead back to God (see RMis 58–59).

Although the mission is undertaken through the Church as a community of believers, John Paul II emphasizes the personal responsibility of everyone, and in a special way, of the missionaries specifically delegated to this task: priests, consecrated persons and laity.²¹

Most interesting from the point of view of defining the missionary spirituality is certainly the eighth chapter of *Redemptoris missio*, entitled "Missionary Spirituality." Here the Pope states that whoever undertakes any missionary activity must be characterized by a specific spirituality, which is expressed above all in the life full of docility to the Holy Spirit (see RMis 87). This docility then demands the acceptance of the gifts of fortitude and of ability to discern, which are essential features of missionary spirituality understood as "an inner union with Christ" (see RMis 88). For one cannot understand the missions and make them the content of one's life without reference to Christ, the first Sent by the Father in the Holy Spirit. In this statement, the Christocentric dimension of spirituality and of all missionary activity is clearly emphasized. The missionary spirituality should be characterized by apostolic love to the measure of Christ's example. This means that "the missionary is a person of charity" (RMis 89), who, while loving Christ, at the same time loves His Church. If the basis of the missionary spirituality is a close union with Christ, this means that the missionary vocation flows from the vocation to holiness, as the Holy Father notes while stating that the universal vocation to holiness is intimately connected with the universal vocation to missionary activity. In other words, the missionary spirituality of the Church leads to holiness (see RMs 90). From this central thesis, the Pope derives specific indications for the spiritual life of the missionary, noting that he is to be a man who combines prayer and action. This ability determines the operability of his ministry, especially in countries with a rich non-Christian spiritual tradition. In addition, the missionary is a person of the Beatitudes, experiencing the realization of the Kingdom of God in a specific way. This will bear fruit in the inner joy that flows from faith, which is the hallmark of the authentic life of the missionary (see RMs 91). The Holy Father therefore invites everyone to live a life of holiness, because only in this way can the Christians become a sign of God in the world and rekindle the missionary spirit that characterized the early Church.

²¹ Ibidem.

At the same time, John Paul II emphasizes the universality of the vocation to missionary service, which includes all the baptized, comprising the laity. This represents not only a development and deepening of the conciliar doctrine, but also an important innovation in the doctrine of the Church (cf. AA 3).²²

IV. Conclusions

The missionary spirituality in the thought of John Paul II is closely connected with the evangelizing activity of the Church. Its axis and, at the same time, its main nerve, is the theme of the Church's mission inscribed in the *missio Dei* (the history of Trinitarian sending—the whole Trinity as the source of mission). The genesis of the theological justification of this spirituality should be sought in the Person of Jesus Christ sent by the Father, carrying out in the Holy Spirit the eternal plan for the salvation of humankind. The missionary spirituality in this perspective is seen by the Pope as a specific form of the mystery of following the Savior, who was sent to evangelize (RMis 88).

In a general sense, John Paul understands that every Christian can be a missionary, because through the witness of his own life, he contributes to the spread of the Gospel and the building up of the Kingdom of God. Taking an interest in proclaiming the Gospel to those who have not yet heard it and subordinating to this goal one's own life of prayer and asceticism, also takes a missionary form. Likewise, by engaging in missionary animation at the level of the parish, the diocese, the whole Church and each Christian becomes a missionary.

Finally, in the strictest sense, a missionary is the one whose way of life, subordinated to the proclamation of the Gospel to those who do not know Christ and the building of new Christian communities, is a personal response to a specific missionary vocation in the Church (see RMis 87). The identification and union with Christ sent in the emptiness of the mystery of the Cross through the missionary's self-denial and renunciation of everything, living a life of poverty that makes him free for the Gospel, detached from persons and temporal goods so that he becomes a brother to those to whom he is sent to bring them Christ the Savior (see RMis 88), is the core of the missionary spirituality.

In John Paul II's thought, moreover, some important factors present in the missionary spirituality should be distinguished.

(a) Docility to the Holy Spirit

Mission is the fruit of the dynamic impulse of the Holy Spirit (see RMis 27), who impels the disciples to communicate to others their experience of Jesus and

²² Ibidem, pp. 171–172.

the hope that animates them. The Spirit empowers them to bear witness to Jesus with “openness” (RMis 28), to be courageous witnesses to him and enlightened heralds of his word (cf. RMis 24). The missionary spirituality is the fruit of total docility to the Holy Spirit in the missionary’s striving to become permanently conformed to Christ and to receive the gifts of fortitude and the ability to discern (see RMis 87) in order to evangelize effectively. This attitude flows from a deep union with the whole Trinity in experiencing God through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. It contributes to the maturity and holiness of the missionary, “Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity” (LG 41).

(b) The Inculturation Factor

With regard to the missionary spirituality, of great importance is the process of inculturation, through which “catechesis *takes flesh* in the various cultures” (Eaf 59). Inculturation is understood as reproducing in one’s own life what Christ accomplished by renouncing Himself by becoming “all things to all people” (cf. AG 24). The process of cultural identification of the missionary with those to whom he is sent, transcending the boundaries of race, caste, ideology, is clearly a part of the process of formation of the missionary spirituality. Functioning within such a concept of spirituality leads to an authentic inculturation (see RMis 88) and enables the missionary to become a universal brother and sister to those to whom they preach the Gospel (cf. RMis 89). In this way, he is able to overcome all the difficulties of evangelizing in a non-native culture, often at a considerable distance from his own country and culture. Through fidelity to his vocation, the missionary fulfills his mission because he allows himself, like Christ, to be led by the Father through the Spirit.

(c) The Prayer Dimension

The mission in which a missionary engages human talents essentially derives its dynamism from a spiritual relationship with God. Hence, following the example of Jesus, the missionary should be a man of contemplative prayer and action (see RMis 91). For in prayer he meets and experiences Christ, who fulfills in the Holy Spirit the Father’s intention to save man. Jesus, who prayed and preached at the same time, becomes a model of contemplative person and action for the missionary. Jesus’ public activity would not be effective without His daily prayer before the Father. Hence, John Paul II in no. 91 of *Redemptoris missio* strongly emphasizes the crucial dependence of the authenticity of the preaching of the Gospel on the missionary’s personal prayer, “Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way. He is a witness to the experience of God, and must be able to say with the apostles, “that which we have looked upon [...] concerning the word of life, [...] we proclaim also to you” (1 Jn 1:1–3)”.

The missionary spirituality, marking out for the missionary a specific path for the realization of personal holiness, among all kinds of spiritual support points to the two essential tables: the Holy Scriptures and the Eucharist (cf. PO 18).

(d) Apostolic Love

The missionary spirituality presupposes the practice of specific forms of apostolate and ministry, with which apostolic love is linked. “The missionary is urged on by ‘zeal for souls,’ a zeal inspired by Christ’s own charity, which takes the form of concern, tenderness, compassion, openness, availability and interest in people’s problems” (RMis 89). Apostolic love brings the missionary closer to God and people. “Above all [it is] the gift of self, [...] by which we imitate Christ in His gift of self and in His service [...]. Pastoral love defines our way of thinking and acting, our way of relating to people, and is a particularly demanding love for us” (PDV 23). Moreover, it helps the missionary overcome excessive attachment to people and things and conquer racial and ideological divisions, and allows him to become a living sacrament of God’s love for all, especially the poor (cf. RMis 88, 89; cf. AG 24).

(e) Ascetic Effort

A missionary who follows Christ with the goal of spreading the Kingdom of God enters a specific path of ascetic life. Two forms of ascetic self-denial can be distinguished in the spirituality of the missionary. The first refers to the personal concern in disciplining oneself against selfishness, self-promotion and self-indulgence. Instead of building up his own inner comfort, the missionary reads and carries out God’s will, and proclaims His glory with his whole life. In addition, he constantly strives to free himself from unnecessary things and affairs, obeys his superiors, and maintains chastity dedicated to God and the Church according to his state of life. The second form of ascetic effort is directly related to the specifics of the ministry to the recipients of the Gospel message. It is characterized by the acceptance of the inconveniences and risks associated with the dangers of missionary service, and the suffering associated with the lack of support in his ministry from his closest associates. The missionary, therefore, must always be ready to give himself to the service of proclaiming the Gospel to the people under all conditions and circumstances, to do everything for everyone (cf. RMis 88).

(f) Love of the Church

The missionary spirituality is also characterized by a deep and authentic love for the Church. As Christ loved the Church, His Bride, and gave His life for her (cf. Eph. 5:25), similarly, the missionary takes every opportunity to give himself in love to the Church for the salvation of man (cf. RMis 89). Sometimes the Gospel does not find an audience among those to whom it is addressed, and its

preacher is persecuted, and sometimes becomes a martyr. For martyrdom is a part of the logic of love for the Church, since “going so far as to give one’s life is [...] the point of reference” for the missionary (RMis 89). The Church’s missionary activity requires not only authentic and credible but also heroic witness.

(g) Missionary Dialogue

The fact of the existence of different religions poses an evangelizing challenge to the Church (cf. EAs 6). It motivates it both to discover and recognize the signs of Christ’s presence and the work of the Holy Spirit, “as well as examining more deeply her own identity and bearing witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all” (RMis 56). The Holy Spirit works and breathes where He wills and moves the minds and hearts of many to accept the Gospel. The Church thus proclaims Christ to the people of every era and culture, so that all may know the truth that will set them free (cf. Jn 8:23). In this context, the missionary spirituality aims to care for every person so that they come to know the Father and begin to worship Him in Spirit and truth (cf. Jn 4:23).

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