

Pregledni znanstveni članek (1.02)
Bogoslovni vestnik 74 (2014) 3, 399—412
 UDK: 27-3"20"
 Besedilo prejeto: 5/2014; sprejeto: 9/2014

Ervin Budiselić

Christian Witness for the 21st Century: Contemporary, yet Orthodox and Radical

Abstract: Christianity is a religion of witness, and in our contemporary world Christian witness is faced with secularist and postmodernist societies that do not accept religious claims as valid and normative. Hence, the purpose of this article is to analyze how and in what way the exclusivist claims of Christian religion can and should be proclaimed in the societies that reject the *ultimate truth* and consider more relevant concepts as relativism, pluralism and others. The article compares some aspects of the New Testament concept of witness, which has the message and the messenger at its centre, with the approach defined as a *socio-theological* one, which puts the recipients of the witness at its centre. Based on this comparison the article concludes that although Christian witness must be offered in the form of a contemporary and respectful dialogue, the radicalism of Christian message cannot be avoided if we want our witness to remain orthodox.

Key words: Christian witness, socio-theological approach, dialogue, pluralism, rationalism, kingdom of God, lordship of Jesus Christ

Povzetek: **Krščansko pričevanje za 21. stoletje: sodobno, vendar pravoverno in radikalno**

Krščanstvo je verstvo pričevanja in v sodobnem svetu se krščansko pričevanje srečuje s sekularističnimi in postmodernimi družbami, ki ne sprejemajo verskih trditev in zahtev kot veljavnih in normativnih. Zato ta članek skuša razčleniti, kako naj bi razglašali izključnostne trditve in zahteve krščanske vere v družbah, ki zavračajo *dokončno resnico* in se jim zdijo pomembnejši pojmi kot relativizem, pluralizem ipd. Članek primerja nekatere vidike novozaveznega pojma pričevanja, ki ima v središču sporočilo in oznanjevalca, s pristopom, ki ga lahko označimo kot *socialno-teološkega* in ki v svoje središče postavlja prejemnike pričevanja. Na osnovi te primerjave pride do sklepa, da je sicer treba nuditi krščansko pričevanje v obliki sodobnega in spoštljivega dialoga, vendar se ne moremo odpovedati radikalnosti krščanskega sporočila, če želimo, da pričevanje ostane pravoverno.

Ključne besede: krščansko pričevanje, socialno-teološki pristop, dialog, pluralizem, racionalizem, Božje kraljestvo, gospostvo Jezusa Kristusa

1. Introduction

Is it possible to deduce from the Bible or more precisely the New Testament certain principles which Christians should use in their witness for Christ? The question is challenging because the Bible is not a unison book, does not discuss particular topics in systematic ways, and does not give an answer to every question that we tend to ask. Therefore, to argue for something as *biblical*, we have to function under certain limitations and recognize: a) the diversity of biblical record about any given topic; b) that these diversities can be understood and interpreted in many ways; c) biblical »silence« on many issues, which can be understood in two ways: things that God did not reveal or said are not important for us, and therefore, we should not take into the consideration; or we may try somehow to supplement missing data using our freedom to think and rationalize about such issues in order to supplement missing information. The second equally important question is can the contemporary Church develop practice of witness that would be appreciated by the pluralistic, postmodern and secular societies of today, and yet faithful to the biblical record? This challenge is valid because, as Andrea Riccardi says, believers need to have the courage to look beyond their borders and reach toward others without discarding one's roots. They need to be faithful to them, yet be on the spiritual adventure of encountering others (Riccardi 2013).

The purpose of this article is to establish and affirm some aspects of the New Testament's approach to the concept of witness in comparison to what we will call a *socio-theological approach* to Christian witnessing which aims to proclaim Christian witness to the world with the agenda to be as much as possible relevant to modern recipients. Today's discourse about witnessing concerns above all pluralism, modernism and postmodernism, the importance of dialogue, secularism, the relationship between the gospel and culture or church and society, etc. Although some traces of these topics can be found in the Bible, for the most part the Bible is not so outspoken about these and similar issues. The major difference between these two approaches is in their emphasis. Predominately, but not exclusively, when the New Testament speaks about witness, the main focus is on the *messengers and their message*: what, how and in what way they need to *give* their witness. On the other hand, a *socio-theological* approach predominately, but not exclusively, is concerned with the *recipients* and how they will hear and understand Christian witness. Hence, this change of focus from *messenger* to *recipient* naturally produces different approaches, vocabulary, categories and methodologies. According to this second approach, if someone wants to testify for Christ, he or she must pay great attention to the recipient's cultures, ideas, worldviews, current situations, trends in societies, and so on. However, although the Church and Christians need to pay close attention to both ends of the story, in this article it would be argued that a *socio-theological* approach has a tendency to neglect or even distort New Testament teaching about Christian witness for Christ.

For this matter, in the first part of the article, we will give some introductory notes regarding the topic of witness, and in the second part, we will select seven-

ral problematic areas that are present in today's discourse about witnessing, and compare how the socio-theological approach and the New Testament address them. Based on this comparison we will see the areas in which these two »models« overlap, but also more or less differ. Finally, the article will end with the concluding remarks.

2. Different understandings of mission and witness

Through the history of Christianity, the nature of Christian mission was variously understood, implemented and accomplished. In a sense, Christian history is a story of successes and failures, but also a story of searching for proper ways to share one's faith with others. A good survey of some modern approaches to mission in the last 100 years comes from the book *Witnessing to Christ Today* which speaks about the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 where Christians from major Protestant denominations and missionary societies gathered together to discuss the nature of Christian missions. The dominant theory of Christian mission of that time was »fulfillment theory« according to which missionary task was to humbly enquire and identify »points of contact« in non-Christian religions and using them to draw adherents of other faiths toward the full revelation of truth found in Christ. This theory continued to be dominant during the first half of the twentieth century (Daryl and Kim 2010, 35).

In 1938 Dutch missiologist Hendrik Kraemer argued that searching for »points of contact« is a misguided effort since God's revelation in Jesus Christ was absolutely *sui generis* and could not be related to other religions. Precisely because the revelation of Christ directly contradicted all human religious life and wisdom, there cannot be continuity from non-Christian religions to Christianity (36). Although Kraemer emphasized discontinuity between God's revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ and non-Christian religious traditions, he allowed space for continuity and fulfillment »when these are kept within the framework of God's gracious self-disclosure in Christ« (Netland 2001, 42).

Finally, the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1988 organized the fiftieth anniversary of the International Missionary Council's conference in Tambaram with the main theme of dialogue in the pluralistic context. Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim point out that when the idea of interfaith dialogue was introduced in the early 1970s, it was a controversial subject matter because proponents of such approach insisted that any motive to convert the dialogue partner of another religion is unacceptable. Furthermore, »the dialogue partner is to be treated with respect and should be received with openness. Any claim for superiority by Christians is considered an impediment for the practice of dialogue. Interpreted this way, many feared dialogue was a way of compromising their Christian faith, and thought that it rendered Christian mission meaningless« (Daryl and Kim 2010, 37). An additional problem was so called »pluralistic theology« which affirmed the salvific validity of different religions, and proponents of this theology were fierce advocates

for a dialogical approach to other religions. In conclusion, Balia and Kim observe that some Christians confused dialogue with pluralistic theology and therefore they consider dialogue as a threat. However, while they do not support pluralistic theology, they claim that the plurality of religions has to be accepted as a fact of life, and this demands a dialogical way of witnessing. In their own words »Christians must treat people of any faith and no faith with genuine respect in their act of witnessing to the gospel« (38–9).

3. Socio-theological and the New Testament approach to Christian witnessing: a comparison

This brief and selective survey shows that throughout the Church history Christians understood differently their task of witnessing. If previously in the Middle age European societies were God-centered, with the occurrence of the Enlightenment, God was slowly but surely taken out of the picture, while man was put in the center. It is no wonder that this shift affected ways in which people understood the activity of Christian witness. Where previously the emphasis was on God, his messengers and his message, today a great deal of attention is given to the recipients, their circumstances, surroundings, and how they will hear and understand God's message. That does not mean that a *socio-theological* approach cannot be faithful to some New Testament aspects of witnessing, but due to its starting point – man and his current situation in society – there is a tendency to discuss predominately how Christian witnessing must be accommodated and conformed to today's intellectual agenda. Hence, the big challenge for Christians is how to reach others who are different from them, yet remain faithful to its roots – how to be present and relevant, yet keep its distinctiveness.

Since our aim is to show in what ways these two approaches complement and differ from each other, we will present some of the most important and dominant ideas that are connected with a *socio-theological* approach, and then discuss how some New Testament aspects of witness these same ideas. This survey on both sides will be selective and not comprehensive, yet it can serve as a good introduction to further study of this topic.

3.1 Socio-theological approach to witnessing

A *socio-theological* approach came into existence and was developed as a result of two things: the previous failures and mistakes in Christian mission, and the current philosophy of postmodernism. Grace Davie claims that missionary enterprise in Europe has been seen primarily as a form of cultural oppression profoundly damaging to »native« beliefs and civilizations, and for that matter criticized by secular-liberals as something that profoundly disturbs native beliefs and cultures (Davie 2001, 468). On that same note Thias Kgatla observes that the communication process is in danger if the messenger is preoccupied only with his/her message since »the messenger needs much more than a knowledge of

the message he/she is conveying. One needs an increased awareness of one's environment, as well as of the audience, before one can communicate effectively. Communicators need to be liberated from their cultural captivities in order to interact with people of other cultures in a 'neutral zone'« (Kgatla 1994, 71).

This sensitivity about one's environment and audience goes very well with the philosophy of postmodernism which affects the way Christian churches do their mission and work. According to Daryl and Kim, several influential theological trends reveal close affinities with postmodernism. Instead of putting much emphasis on doctrinal questions, newer theological thinking and practice leans towards focus on practice and experience. Furthermore, in the last few decades the church in the West has undergone a significant shift towards »softer« Christianity, which emphasizes life and ethics rather than faith and doctrine. Also in some traditional Protestant churches there is a tendency to downplay, ignore or even reject the traditional concept of eternal damnation in hell, to focus less on proclamation and more on coexistence and dialogue. A traditional exclusivist position becomes more and more abandoned in favor of inclusive or even pluralist notions of the relation between Christianity and other religions and worldviews (Daryl and Kim 2010, 75). This change is the best seen in the fact that more and more speech about Christian witness includes reference to pluralism and postmodernism, secularism, rational arguments, and dialogue which we will consider now.

3.1.1 Postmodernism and Pluralism

While modernity is characterized by belief in the power of rationality and scientific ingenuity to solve human problems, postmodernity is characterized by a crisis of authority, and a profound suspicion of all *a priori* claims to truth and knowledge. Hence, in postmodernity »everybody has a voice; there is not necessarily any 'right' or 'wrong' voice; it all depends on the point of view. Thus everybody contributes, and everybody is free to pick what is preferred from the patchwork of many voices; eclecticism is fundamental to postmodernities« (Daryl and Kim 2010, 65). In such scheme, the Christian's claim about *ultimate truth* based on God's revelation in Jesus Christ and their attempts to persuade others can be seen as an expression of disrespectful arrogance, and understood as an imposition of someone's viewpoints on others, and for that matter, as an invasion of an inviolate privacy (77–8).

The natural outgrowth of postmodernity is pluralism. Since there is no ultimate truth, pluralism is not an option but necessity. In such a scheme, Christian truth at best can be viewed as one of many »truths«, but not the ultimate one. Hence, the ideology of pluralism denies the authority of Christian claims and confines its authority to the private and subjective spheres of life. Christianity can be truth for individuals in their private life, but universal validity can have only those ideas and truths which are established by scientific standards. Accordingly, all religious beliefs are just private preferences and nothing more (Gelwick 2000, 40). It must be noted that there is a difference between *pluralism* and *plurality*. Plurality speaks about the existence of many cultures while pluralism rules out a priori the possibility of a particular religion having a universal truth (41).

3.1.2 Secularism

Closely connected with postmodernism and pluralism is the idea of secularism. Domenic Marbaniang explains that secularism emerged in the West when people chose to rely on human reason rather than on religion for the knowledge of the truth. This confidence in human reason, capabilities and progress brought all spheres of human life under the dominance of reason, which eventually produced the removal of the dominance or influence of religion upon education, society and state (Marbaniang 2011, 11). Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann define secularism as »a loss of influence of religious institutions on society as well as the loss of credibility of religious interpretations on people's consciousness« (Berger and Luckmann 1995, 36). Anđelko Domazet reminds that secularism combines three different claims: secularization as differentiation of secular areas from religious institutions and norms, secularization as weakening of religious beliefs and practices, and secularization as marginalization of religion into private domain of life (Domazet 2006, 277).

3.1.3 Rational arguments

According to Kirsteen Kim, theologians often lament that the Enlightenment, which ushered in what is referred to as »modernity«, has led us toward emphasis on the material or empirical, and the relegation of the »spiritual« to the realm of speculation. Religion is opinion at best, but fact and truth must be established based on physical scientific research (Kim 2006, 334). In the same manner Domazet observes that since the Enlightenment rationalism strongly shapes the worldview of Western culture; human reason and not God's revelation is the ultimate authority for determination of the truth. Again, truth becomes only that which can be experimentally and empirically attested and confirmed (Domazet 2006, 275). This means that rationalism as »human philosophy that glorifies man's reasoning ability to understand truths and obtain knowledge over and above sensory experiences and divine revelation« (Lindsey 2005, 69) is fundamentally opposite to Christianity since for every sphere of human life such as ethics, morality or religion, human reason is that final arbiter which defines what is good or bad, right or wrong.

All that leads us to the question whether Christianity can offer a witness about God that will be acceptable to modern rational men? Of course Christianity has some rational elements (if we define »rational« according to the Enlightenment thinkers), and to a certain point it can present its arguments according to this scheme, but fundamentally, Christianity is a result of God's revelation, and as such, it is not acceptable to a modern »rational« man.

3.1.4 Dialogue

In a society which is postmodern and secular, where people recognize only arguments which are rational and scientific, it is unavoidable that religion and religious claims are considered as problematic. This position affects Christian witness because if Christian witness wants to be heard by people, it needs to be adjusted to the current mental or intellectual paradigm. So the big challenge is how much

Christian witness can be adjusted to the »ears of modern men«, and yet remain faithful to its roots.

Speaking about the issue of cross-cultural witness, Kgatla claims that »persons wishing to convey a message to other cultures must learn before they can tell, and listen before they can speak. They need not only to know the exact meaning of the message for their audience, but also to understand the world in which the message must be communicated« (Kgatla 1994, 71–2). The document »Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World« made by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance brings into focus two interesting things: first, the document invites Christians to learn about and understand others' beliefs and practices, and to acknowledge and appreciate what is true and good in them. Criticism can be offered but this should be made in a spirit of mutual respect. Secondly, there is a tension between dialogue and evangelism, and dialogue and mission, due to the issue of inter-religious conversion. While most pluralistic theologians either minimize or question the validity of inter-religious conversion, the issue is still relevant because Christianity consider itself as the only true religion. About this issue the document says that »while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating others' rights and religious sensibilities.«

Although the need for respectful dialogue is always important, Richard V. Peace goes one step further and claims that religious people in their discussion bring an agenda of conversion to the conversation. Hence, their conversation can be well intentioned, but it is manipulative, or at least it is felt that way. He sees the problem in the following: »Who wants to talk to someone who thinks you need to be converted?« Therefore, he argues for conversation that will meet the needs of people who are searching for a genuine spirituality that is faithful to core Christianity and non-coercive. Such conversation should involve conversion of not just one but both conversation partners because »[t]his is what gives richness to this kind of conversation. There is no dominant partner; there are two or more individuals seeking growth and change (conversion). The imperialism of so much evangelism is done away with and replaced by the openness of all to the reality, power, and transformation of God« (Peace 2002, 255–6).

Balia and Kim argue that »dialogue means witnessing to our deepest convictions, whilst listening to those of our neighbors in a two-way exchange.« Furthermore, they agree with the statement which says that »witness does not preclude dialogue but invites it, and that dialogue does not preclude witness but extends and deepens it« (Balía and Kim 2010, 46–7). Speaking of that same subject, Jan van Butselaar explains that witness must have its place in a dialogue because its absence would diminish the credibility of dialogue, and witness can no longer be realized in the absence of dialogue. The matrix is simple: »If we are not prepared to listen to what people of other faiths have to say to us, how can we expect them to listen to what we have to say to them« (Butselaar 1985, 403). Butselaar concludes that the proclamation of the gospel is no longer a triumphalistic activity since Christians have learned that »to live the life of Jesus Christ means first liste-

ning and seeking to understand the faith and perspectives of their neighbors« (Butselaar 1985, 401).

3.2 New Testament aspects of witnessing

In the previous section we have presented *socio-theological approach* which was defined as an approach which in the activity of witnessing is predominately concerned with recipients. We have seen several of its features such as *pluralism*, *post-modernity* and *secularism* which undoubtedly are our reality, and we cannot ignore them because they shape our contemporary societies. Although this approach has good and positive characteristics and brings valid corrections to some mistakes previously done in the Christian mission, it is suggested that leaning too much on the side of recipients can weaken the cutting edge of Christian witness. In its core, Christianity is exclusive, possessive and even sectarian, because it claims that Jesus is *the only* way toward God, and presents itself as the keeper of the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus which is the Christ. Hence, no matter how much we try to be respectful toward others and their beliefs, careful and sensitive to others' religious feelings, or find something good and positive in other religions and belief systems, we cannot escape from the radicalism of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

In this part of the article our intention is to present particular New Testament aspects of witnessing which are much more concerned with the message and messenger which God sends to the people than with the people's hearing of the message. We will see that the idea of the kingdom of God is diametrically opposed to secularism, and the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah, Christ and Lord is opposite to ideas that promote pluralism and to the philosophy of postmodernism. We will also see that the New Testament idea of witness includes the demonstration of the Spirit in power and not just rational arguments. Finally, we will affirm dialogue as valid way of witnessing as long as it does not exclude the radicalism of Christian message.

3.2.1 Kingdom of God as opposed to secularism

Is there any agreement between the philosophy of secularism and the kingdom of God? No there is not. While secularism claims that the world, society and people belong to the sphere of rational, scientific, and that Christianity (together with all other religion) has its place in the private domain of individual, God's vision for this world is that the whole world is created by him and belongs to him. God does not recognize the dichotomy between »God« and the »world« that secularism claims. It is no wonder that the first and the last books in the Bible, at the very beginning and the very end, contain the report about creation of the world. In Genesis 1–2 we have a report about the first creation of the world, and in Revelation 20–22 we have a report about the second creation where God destroys the old heaven and earth and creates a new one. This clearly shows that God has not changed his plan: it is his world and he will save and restore it. Since we live in the midst of this grand-narrative, we need to look backward and forward in order to keep our focus on God's vision for this world:

The community now looks backward, as in a mirror, to find itself in the biblical narrative and to compare the life of the community today with the life of the primitive community. The community also looks forward to the eschatological future for an eschatological verification of its present moral life and aspirations /.../ Mission, then, properly understood, is a witness – enabled by the Holy Spirit and supported by the Word of God – to that vision, a vision for the reality of the Kingdom in the world without hope (Parushev 2004, 29).

Speaking about the kingdom of God, N. T. Wright says that the basis of the Christian message is the large story which speaks about God's relationship with this world. Accordingly, this story claims that »/.../ the world is basically God's world, and it's a good world, but it's gone wrong, and evil has infected it in all sorts of ways which modernism really didn't want to take account of and which postmodernity has partly seen but then has wallowed in because it's got no answer. Because the answer is that God the Creator has rescued the world from evil and is rescuing it from evil. That's why we need the death and resurrection of Jesus at the center of every Christian retelling, and every Christian challenge. God's condemnation of evil — God takes evil exceedingly seriously — but then God's launch of new creation at Easter, when Jesus comes out of the tomb, not only to announce new creation but to embody it in himself.« (Wright 2005)

In his speech Wright also uses the language of »empire« claiming that the message about the kingdom of God or »an empire of God« as he calls it, was a direct challenge to Roman empire: it conveyed dangerous language, dangerous both politically and philosophically, because past or modern empires do not like that. Since this world belongs to God, and since he has already started with *re-creation* of it, the secularist notion that Christian God belongs to the sphere of privacy is in direct collision with the teaching of the Bible.

3.2.2 Gospel which proclaims Jesus as the Lord of everything as opposed to postmodernism and pluralism

Can we make the Gospel message to be non offensive to our modern hearers? Hardly, because no matter what world-view or philosophy is »on the throne«, the Gospel message will always be offensive and provocative – in a positive way of course. Two things are important to recognize: first, as Michael A. Milton claims, God has always made himself known in *pluralistic setting* which he defines as »plurality of beliefs and ideas and even the customs and cultures that are derived from those ideas.« So that is not something new, and this pluralistic setting is not a problem per se. Today, as in the past, God »...stands in judgment over the other pseudo gods, false religions, and harmful thoughts of this present evil age and who calls for human beings to escape the coming judgment on those religions and find the abundant life and eternal life that comes from trusting in Jesus Christ.« But the problem comes when in the name of pluralism people affirm validity of every religion with the notion that »all spiritual paths leads to the same sacred ground« (Milton 2006, 5; 7).

Second, it is important to recognize that the Gospel message in its original context was as equally challenging as it should be today. N. T. Wright challenges the notion that that the first-century pagan world was, so to speak, »ready for Christianity«. On the contrary, the Gospel message offered a challenge to the pagan world in many ways. First, paganism constantly identified God with objects or forces within creation itself. Contrary to them, the apostle Paul with his Gospel message stood against the divinization of creation and against the multiplicity of gods with the news of the one true God. Second, the Gospel message challenged paganism at the level of cult. With many gods of every sort and for every purpose, the Gospel message directly challenged all of that, claiming that Jesus crucified and resurrected is the final truth and the only way for salvation and the restoration of creation. Third, Wright claims that by using the title *kyrios* for Jesus, Paul directly challenged *Kaisar* who bears the same title. In other words, when Paul said »Jesus is Lord« that meant that Caesar is not. If Jesus is the Lord of the world, that meant that all false gods are dethroned and all powers of the world are confronted with the one who is the true Lord of all. Fourth, Christianity viewed paganism as a self-destructive mode of being human, and offered a genuine way of being human through new life in Jesus by the Spirit. Fifth, against the essentially ahistorical worldview of paganism and against the »golden age« dreams of some philosophers of history, Christianity offered to its hearers a story in which the whole cosmos is *going somewhere*. The creation has a beginning and an end. And finally, the Gospel offered an implicit challenge to the major pagan philosophies of the Roman world such as Stoicism and Epicureanism (Wright 1997, 86–94).

3.2.3 Witness in the Spirit and power as opposed to merely rational arguments

Since we live in a time where »truth« is that which is scientifically and rationally explained, the question is can Christian witness successfully meet such criteria? Profoundly, Reinhold Niebuhr claims that Christianity is found in a situation where the scientific world view has achieved tremendous triumphs in the technical conquest of nature and gained prestige, so that it seems that modern Christianity is capable of survival only if reduces its worldview to dimensions which would make it seem compatible with the scientific attitudes of modern men. However, the fact remains that »the essentials of the Christian faith cannot be proved, as one proves either scientific propositions or metaphysical theories« (Niebuhr 1953, 840). Parush R. Parushev agrees with Niebuhr claiming that thus far attempts to communicate the Christian worldview on purely epistemological grounds have failed. So when the Church stands on epistemological grounds alone, the Church is always on the losing side. That does not mean that faith cannot be expressed, or communicated, or argued in rational terms (Parushev 2004, 25), but obviously something more is needed. About that »something more« speaks Kim who argues that witnessing based on facts, rationality and logical reasoning is no longer seen as a way to know God. What is needed is a generation that is full of the experience of Spirit and the Spirit, because the Spirit leads to the Son, who reveals the Father. Accordingly, the churches that are growing today are finding new methods of evangelism that relate to people's spiritual experience (Kim 2006, 339–40).

What sets apart Judaism and Christianity from all other religion is the claim that God is always active in human history. Hence, the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ or the announcement of the coming of the kingdom of God, are not just nice historical events, but also present realities. On that line is the statement from Francois Durrwell who says that Christians are people who attest claims that Jesus makes for himself, but Christians also proclaim that what is being establish in the world by the strength of this attestation: the Lordship of Christ (Durrwell 1980, 122). This idea that Christian testimony includes not only proclamation of some past events, nor only announcement of the events that will happen in the future, but in conjunction with all that, it includes speech about present reality being manifested and established in our midst, is probably the most neglected or overlooked aspect of Christian testimony. Christian testimony includes proclamation not only about what God *has done* or *will do*, but also about what *he is doing*.

When Jesus started his ministry, one of the first things he said was that »the kingdom of God has come«, and if we accept the doctrine of inaugurated eschatology, that implies that the kingdom of God in that moment was a present reality. The announcement of the kingdom means the announcement of God's reign and his lordship, and that reality cannot be completely confined to the area of invisible inner spirituality. In Matthew 12:28 Jesus clearly announced the relationship between him, the Spirit of God, the kingdom of God and exorcisms, and in Luke 10:9 Jesus said »and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'.« The connection between the announcements of the kingdom's coming and healing is, I presume, obvious.

The story continues in the book of Acts where in 1:8 Jesus declares that prerequisite for being a witness includes the reception of the *Spirit* and Spirit's *power*. According to Gonzalo Haya-Prats, the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts is always the source of the message, the divine power that enables believers to proclaim the Gospel, while to the concept of »power« (*dynamis*), Luke exclusively ascribes extraordinary phenomena such as healing, exorcism or any other superhuman phenomena that can be perceived by the senses (Haya-Prats 2011, 33–4). If Haya-Prats is right, that implies that witness in conjunction to the past and future dimensions includes testimony about what God is doing in the present. Several examples: in Acts 2, the coming of the Spirit (2:1–13) is the occasion for Peter to proclaim the Gospel message (2:14–36). In chap. 3–4 the healing of the crippled man (3:1–10) is another occasion for testimony about Jesus (3:11–26). In chapter 4 Peter uses that same healing event as an opportunity before Sanhedrin to testify about Jesus. And the same pattern is more or less present in Acts 4:23–35; 5:12–29, chap 6 and 7; 8:4–8; 9,32–35; 11:19–21; 13:4–12; 14:1–3; 14:8–21 and 19:8–20. The question is can we take book of Acts and some other parts of the New Testament as a model for our witnessing today? Different answers are possible, but I agree with the ascertainment of A. B. Simpson who lamented that mainline Protestantism »has lost her faith /.../ in the supernatural signs and workings of the Holy Ghost, she has lost the signs also, and the result is that she is compelled to produce conviction upon the minds of the heathen

very largely by purely rational and moral considerations and influences« (McGee 2001, 154).

3.2.4 Witnessing as oppose to merely dialogue

When we oppose witness against dialogue, the idea is not to claim that dialogue should not be a part of Christian witness, but dialogue must be used as a means of witness. Otherwise, it is more than likely – useless. Richard V. Peace reminds us that during the first century Christians sought to share their faith in Jesus, and their talk about Jesus to others was to be a »witness«. But what is interesting is the fact that the Greek word »witness« (root μαρτυρέω) is the word from which the English word »martyr« is derived, which shows that at various times in history it was dangerous to testify about Christian faith (Peace 2002, 256). Accordingly, is it too radical to conclude that only when Christian witness in a form of dialogue is ready to suffer martyrdom, only then a dialogue is valid and acceptable? As long as dialogue is nothing more than just politically correct way of speech in a pluralistic and postmodern society, such heavy emphasis on dialogue is out of the place.

Isaac C. Rottenberg raises that same issue when he discusses the relationship between witness and dialogue: »Why not just use the word 'dialogue'? Edwin Newman, in a recent TV commentary, called it 'one of the most boring words to come along in years . . . a word that is bunk.' According to Newman, dialogue means only that people are talking with each other. In Christian ecumenical circles, where the term is frequently invoked, it is often stressed that 'dialogue' carries a broader meaning. Sometimes, in order to make the point that we are talking about 'talk plus,' the term 'faithful dialogue' is used. The partners in dialogue are to be free to affirm their beliefs. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, a basic rule of the game seems to be that one must not expect anyone to change. Any such anticipation, it is feared, will inevitably lead to manipulation. It is all right to share convictions so long as one does not try to be convincing; persuasiveness is seen as tantamount to proselytizing.« (Rottenberg 1977, 353)

Rottenberg is not against dialogue, since he argues that all witness should have a »dialogical quality« which he defines as willingness to listen to and learn from the other. He also reminds that witness ought not to be triumphalistic or boastful. However, all dialogue should include a dimension of witness which means »testifying to truths that have taken hold of us and shaped our commitments....We ought to be able to reason and occasionally to argue with each other about those things« (353).

All that points to the fact that in this cultural milieu, the confident announcement of the Christian faith may sound like an arrogant attempt to impose Christian values on others, but as Richard Gelwick observes, the Church should not be content to offer its beliefs modestly as simply one of the many brands available in the ideological supermarket without any offense. On the contrary, »the affirmation that the truth revealed in the gospel ought to govern public life is offensive« (Gelwick 2000, 40).

Accordingly, witness must involve dialogue as one of the oldest modes of communication, but in this dialogue Christians should not deny Christ's teaching which

is exclusive, radical and challenging to the world. As Lyle VanderWerff argues, »dialogue, however, can never become a substitute for proclamation, baptism, inclusion into Christ's Body and instruction in Christ's teachings. Such would be a violation of the vision of the Gospel« (VanderWerff 1996, 111).

4. Conclusion

The Christian church is faced with the challenge to offer a witness that will be contemporary and adjusted to the current mindsets of the people, but in the same breath remain orthodox – biblically sound and faithful to the revelation of Jesus Christ. The challenge is huge because due to some modern influences, in some aspects Christianity has lost the concept of Christian faith as a public truth which relates to all people and has importance not just for individuals, but for society and community as well. Christianity cannot claim less than that because to confess Jesus as Lord (*kyrios*) means that Jesus is not only Lord of certain individuals or the Church, but the Lord of creation. Accordingly, if the Church had become privatized and lost its public meaning and relevance, Paul Hertig argues that the Church is called to return to the public square, reengage in public issues and rediscover itself as a transforming agent in an ever-changing context (Hertig 2004, 485).

Although modern societies demand from Christians conversation which is non offensive, neutral, and relativistic, Christianity cannot always provide such a type of conversation. Christianity is exclusive, radical and provocative, and in this respect radical, but at the same time, it does not mean that is judgmental, closed minded or disrespectful. Christianity claims that it possesses the truth, yet this truth cannot be forcefully imposed on others. After all, Jesus was crucified as an enemy of the Roman Empire. Can we expect that this world will celebrate us as their friends? In the second century, Christians were labeled as haters of the human race. Can we expect anything less today? The point is that because of the exclusive nature of Christianity, conflicts are sometimes unavoidable. However, these conflicts should not come as a result of bad manners – whether in words or deeds.

Dialogue as one mode of witness is a positive thing, but reducing *all* witness to the level of a dialogue is wrong. Jesus or the first church did not *dialogizomai* with people. They were persecuted not because they did not respect religious feelings of their contemporaries, but because they bore witness to God and his truth. Although we are living in a time where great emphasis is given on recipients and how will they receive the message, while this is important, it is not crucial. Christians must stretch themselves toward others who are different from them, but not to the point of compromising God's revelation given to us in Jesus Christ. In order to remain orthodox, Christian witness must be biblical, and if it is biblical, it will be radical.

Finally, greater attention in Christian witness needs to be given to the present dimension of Christian faith. When Christians proclaim salvation or the lordship

of Jesus Christ, they proclaim something that is within our world as a present reality – living and active among us. That implies that Christians should, as part of their witness, be able to proclaim what God is currently doing among them in order to save people and establish his lordship over sin, sickness, injustice, demonic oppression and everything else that opposes his reign.

References

- Balia, Daryl, and Kirsteen Kim.** 2010. *Witnessing to Christ Today*. Oxford: Regnum Books International.
- Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann.** 1995. *Modernity, Pluralism and the Crisis of Meaning*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers.
- Butselaar, Jan van.** 1985. Dialogue and Witness. *The Ecumenical Review* 37, no. 4:398–405.
- Davie, Grace.** 2001. Global Civil Religion. *Sociology of Religion* 62, No. 4:455–73.
- Domazet, Anđelko.** 2006. Budućost duhovnosti i nova religijska svijest. *Služba Božja* 46, no. 3:272–93.
- Durrwell, Francisco Xavier.** 1980. Christian Witness: A Theological Study. *International Review of Mission* 69, no. 274:121–34.
- Gelwick, Richard.** 2000. Christian Faith in a Pluralist Society. *Tradition and Discovery* 27, no. 2:39–45.
- Haya-Prats, Gonzalo.** 2011. *Empowered Believers: The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts*. Eugene: Cascade Books.
- Hertig, Paul.** 2004. The Subversive Kingship of Jesus and Christian Social Witness. *Missiology: An International Review* 32, no. 4:475–90.
- Kgatla, Thias.** 1994. Christian Witness and Cultural Plurality. *International Review of Mission* 83, no. 328:71–7.
- Kim, Kirsteen.** 2006. The Potential of Pneumatology for Mission in Contemporary Europe. *International Review of Mission* 95, no. 378/379:334–40.
- Lindsey, David Michael.** 2005. *The Beast in Sheep's Clothing: Exposing the Lies of Godless Human Science*. Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company.
- Marbaniang, Domenic.** 2011. *Secularism in India: A Historical Analysis*. S.l.: Domenic Marbaniang.
- McGee, Gary B.** 2001. Miracles and Mission Revisited. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 25:146–56.
- Milton, Michael A.** 2006. Cooperation without Compromise: Faithful Gospel Witness in a Pluralistic Setting. Reformed Theological Seminary. [Http://www.rts.edu/site/resources/facultyarticles/cooperation_without_compromise_3.3.pdf](http://www.rts.edu/site/resources/facultyarticles/cooperation_without_compromise_3.3.pdf) (accessed 01. 12. 2013).
- Netland, Harold.** 2001. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold.** 1953. The Christian Witness in a Secular Age. *The Christian Century* 22:840–3.
- Parushev, Parush R.** 2004. Presence and Witness: Facing the Challenges to Christian Mission Today. *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 4, no. 2:25–33.
- Peace, Richard V.** 2002. Holy Conversation: The Lost Art of Witness. *Word & World* 22, no. 3:255–63.
- Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.** 2011. Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct. [Http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interrelg/documents/rc_pc_interrelg_doc_20111110_testimonianza-cristiana_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interrelg/documents/rc_pc_interrelg_doc_20111110_testimonianza-cristiana_en.html) (accessed 1.12.2013).
- Riccardi, Andrea.** 2013. Speech of Prof. Andrea Riccardi – Opening Assembly. Rome. Community of Sant' Egidio. [Http://www.santegidio.org/pageID/3/langID/en/itemID/125/Trento_Speech_by_Prof_Andrea_Riccardi_at_the_Diocesan_Pastoral_Assembly.html](http://www.santegidio.org/pageID/3/langID/en/itemID/125/Trento_Speech_by_Prof_Andrea_Riccardi_at_the_Diocesan_Pastoral_Assembly.html) (accessed 1. 12. 2013).
- Rottenberg, Isaac C.** 1977. Should There Be a Christian Witness to the Jews? *Christian Century* 94:352–6.
- VanderWerff, Lyle.** 1996. Christian Witness to Our Muslim Friends. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no. 3:111–6.
- Wright, N. T.** 1997. *What Saint Paul Really Said*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- . 2005. The Christian Challenge in the Post-modern World. *Response* 28, no.2. [Http://www.spu.edu/depts/uc/response/summer2k5/features/postmodern.asp](http://www.spu.edu/depts/uc/response/summer2k5/features/postmodern.asp) (accessed 1. 12. 2013).