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SPECIFIC IMAGE OF THE CHURCH AND EVANGELIZATION IN SAINT BEDE THE VENERABLE'S COMMENTARY ON THE APOCALYPSE

Abstract

Numerous passages of the Book of Revelations, beginning with the prologue (Rev. 1), through letters to the seven Churches (Rev. 2-3), to the vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21), accentuate the image of the Church as well as the role of God's word and the issuing necessity to preach it. Those themes found their reflection in the Commentary on the Apocalypse, composed by Bede the Venerable in the first period of his erudite exegetical creative output. This article, in three subsequent stages presents the following themes: 1) the image of the Church; 2) proclamation of the word of God by the Church; 3) attributes and tasks of God's word preachers.

Keywords: evangelization, Bede the Venerable, biblical theology, word of God, ecclesiology

OSOBLIWOŚCI OBRAZU KOŚCIOŁA I EWANGELIZACJI W KOMENTARZU DO APOKALIPSY ŚW. BEDY CZCIGODNEGO

Abstrakt

W przesłaniu Księgi Apokalipsy w różnych miejscach, rozpoczynając od prologu (Ap 1), poprzez listy do siedmiu Kościołów (Ap 2-3), aż po wizję Niebieskiego Jeruzalem (Ap 21) mocno wyakcentowany został obraz Kościoła oraz rola słowa Bożego, a w związku z tym – również konieczność jego głoszenia. Tematy te znalazły swoiste odzwierciedlenie w Komentarzu do Apokalipsy, który Beda Czcigodny skompilował już w pierwszym okresie swojej pełnej erudycji twórczości egzegetycznej. Niniejszy artykuł w trzech odsłonach ujmuje tematy: 1) obraz Kościoła; 2) głoszenie przez Kościół słowa Bożego; 3) zadania i przymioty głosicieli słowa.

Słowa kluczowe: ewangelizacja, Beda Czcigodny, teologia biblijna, słowo Boże, eklezjologia

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INTRODUCTION

The final book of the Bible so richly endowed with symbolic imagery and referring to the message of both the Old and the New Testament, for centuries posed a challenge for those who wanted to analyse its content. For centuries, its visions were either referred to the history of the whole world in which it found its gradual fulfilment, or to the subsequent stages in the history of the Church. Many authors argued that the Apocalypse of John describes the events of the times in which it was composed, i.e. the turn of the 1st and 2nd century after Christ². Without expanding further on those last interpretations, one can notice that the overall message of the Revelation starting with the prologue (Rev. 1), through letters to the seven Churches (Rev. 2-3), up to the vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21) recurrently highlights the image of the Church as well as the role of God's word and, what follows, the necessity of its proclamation. Those motifs were specifically reflected in the Commentary on the Apocalypse written by Bede the Venerable in the first period of his erudite exegetical creative output. This article takes a synthetic look at the specific image of the Church and evangelization presented in Saint Bede's work.

1. IMAGE OF THE CHURCH

The basic ascertainment resounding from the pages of Bede's Commentary on the Apocalypse in reference to the Church concerns the time in which the visions and images presented in the final book of the New Testament are set. Summing up the lecture on chapters 1-3 of the Revelation, in the words of Rev. 4:1 "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven", Bede explains: "After describing the works of the Church and its future condition, he recapitulates from the birth of Christ, with an intention to repeat the same things in a different manner, for in this book he repeats under various figures the whole period of the Church's history" (PL 93,0142D). Thus, according to the Saint of Jarrow, the text of the Apocalypse encompasses the entire time of the Church's existence. Another question which Bede finds important is

² Authors interpreting the Apocalypse of John, basically, follow the four directions defined by its time references: 1) John's Apocalypse as a prediction of the fate of the Church until the end of the world. Proponents of such an interpretation of the Apocalypse perceive in it an announcement of the seven epochs through which the Church will pass (it finds many supporters among the sects that are awaiting the end of the world today). This way of reading the Book of the Apocalypse spread in the first centuries and had its followers in the Middle Ages. 2) The Apocalypse is perceived as a reflection of the historical situation of the Church in the era of John the Apostle, and the events described in it depict the persecutions and trials of the community of believers (16th century). 3) The Apocalypse refers only to the eschatological times, hence it heralds the end of the world and contains a warning on the last days (18th century). 4) The Apocalypse is a theological vision of the world's history, hence it refers both to the situation of the Church contemporary to the author, and at the same time it refers to the "end times". The Book of the Apocalypse thus sketches a picture of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. This fight will last as long as this world exists, but it is already known who will be the Winner (Wojciechowski 2012, 75-79).

the periodization of the History of Salvation, hence, when providing his explanation of Rev. 6:1: “And I saw when the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals” he tried to convince the readers of his work that “Dominus enim patiens et resurgens finem se esse legis edocuit” (PL 93,0146C), and through the Ascension and the Pentecost, Christ strengthened the Church with the mysterious gift of grace. For Bede, the image of stamps successively opened by the Lamb, epitomize the subsequent epochs in the history of the Church: “So He then opened the book, and now He looses the seals of it. In the first seal, accordingly, he beholds the glory (*decus*) of the primitive Church, in the following three the threefold war against it, in the fifth the glory of those who triumph in this war, in the sixth the things which are to come in the time of Antichrist, and that with a brief recapitulation of former events, in the seventh the beginning of eternal rest (*quietis*)” (PL 93,0146D). What is easily noticeable is the fact that in the periodization read by Bede in the message conveyed in Saint John’s Apocalypse, only the time of the first community of the Church, counted from the moment of opening the first seal and the one from the opening of the seventh seal, is the time of splendor (*decus*) and peace (*quietis*)³. The time following the opening of the second, third and fourth seals is the period of a fierce battle against the Church. The opening of the fifth seal heralds the triumph of the victors in this battle, and the breaking of the sixth seal marks the beginning of the Antichrist’s time.

This diachronic revelation of the Church’s history which reveals the truth about the time of persecutions is, according to Bede, overlapped by a multifaceted image of the Church linked to its beginnings, the present and the future. All references rest on the truth, which provide the basis of the reflection on the Church, namely, that Christ is its foundation. Commenting on Rev. 21:14, the Doctor of the Church says: “That which the gates are, the same are the foundations; that which the city is, the same are the walls. But the patriarchs may also be signified by the term ‘foundations’, in that they contained within themselves the names, that is, the figure of the Apostles. For by them, as foundations, although by the Apostles, as by gates, this city has been opened to the nations which shall believe. And it is to be noted, that ‘the foundations’, when they are spoken of in the plural, signify the doctors, or virtues, of the Church; but when in the singular, the Lord Himself, Who is the foundation of foundations (*Dominum*,

³ In the commentary on Rev. 21, where the vision of the new earth and new heavens and the heavenly Jerusalem is presented, Bede draws a picture of the perfect Church. Referring to the words of the book of the Apocalypse on equal dimensions of the length, width and height of the city of the saint (Rev. 21:16), Bede states: “Id est inexpugnabilem fidei, spei, charitatisque firmitatem. Potest et ipse Dominus Ecclesiam undique protegens, murus magnus intelligi, de quo et Isaias ait: Ponetur in ea murus et antemurale (Isai. XXVI), id est, Domini protectio et intercessio sanctorum, qui iter faciunt ei docendo ad corda credentium” (PL 93,0196A). In an equally engaging way, Bede refers to the vision of the City of pure gold, depicting not only the “look” of the Church, but also its character and qualities during the Lamb’s triumph: “Ecclesia auro figuratur, quae in candelabris aureis et phialis propter sapientiae cultum saepe compta describitur. Vitrum autem ad fidem veri retulit, quia quod foris videtur, hoc est et intus, et nihil simulatum est et non perspicuum in sanctis Ecclesiae. Potest et ad illud tempus referri, quo sibi invicem cogitationes in alterutrum perspicaciter declarantur” (PL 93,0197B).

qui est fundamentum fundamentorum)” (PL 93,0196C). The role of the “foundation of foundations” assigned to the Lord, is in this case used with reference to the patriarchs as a prefiguration of the apostles, as well as to the doctors of the Church⁴. In his reflections on the image of the Church, Bede makes an attempt at providing a specific solution to the symbolism of the Book of Revelation, therefore, after describing Christ as the “foundation of foundations”, while explaining Rev. 21:16 “and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs”, he refers to the perfection of the Church in fulfilling its works and in faith. In this case, the Doctor of the Church interprets number twelve appearing here, saying: “Quatuor enim principalium perfectio virtutum fide sanctae Trinitatis sublimata, quasi numero denario dignitatem componit Ecclesiae” (PL 93,0196A)⁵. In turn, when interpreting the meaning of the lion, calf, man and eagle, he contends that they sometimes refer to the Evangelists, sometimes to the whole Church. In the second case, they constitute the embodiment of the Church’s virtues (Rev. 4:7): “The living creatures, again, at one time denote the Evangelists, at another the whole Church; for its fortitude is represented in the lion, its sacrificial offering in the calf, its humility in the man, and its sublimity in the flying eagle” (PL 93,0144D). From the very beginning of the Commentary, Bede derives his conviction of the Church’s perfection from the close relationship between the Church and Christ the Priest. The vision of the Apocalypse, which includes a figure resembling the Son of Man who walks between the seven candlesticks symbolizing the seven churches, i.e. addressees of the Apocalypse letters (Rev. 1:13), and in particular elements of his dress and appearance, according to Bede, point to the characteristics of the person of the Son of Man and, consequently, also to the Church. And thus, “a garment down to the foot”, as the saint explains: “Poderis, which is called in Latin, ‘tunica talaris’, and is a sacerdotal vestment, shews the priesthood of Christ, by which He offered Himself for us, as a victim to the Father, upon the altar of the cross” (PL 93,0136A). The golden girdle with which Christ is girt, or rather the place in which this girdle embraces the figure of the Son of Man, has certain significance, since, as Bede notes, “By the ‘paps’ he here means the two Testaments, with which He feeds the body of the saints in communion with Himself. For the golden girdle is the choir of saints, which cleaves to

⁴ In other passages of the Commentary, one can find the thought of the Lord living in the Church (4:2): “Ecclesiam in coelesti conversatione positam Dominus inhabitat”. Hence, according to Bede, the fact that the Lord comes to help the Church and protects the Church through the intercession of the saints (4:3): “Iris, qui fit sole nubes irradiante, et post diluvium primo propitiationis indicio factus est, intercessu sanctorum quos Dominus illustrat Ecclesiam muniri designat” (PL 93,0142D).

⁵ An equally interesting reflection on the Church’s perfection appears at the beginning of the Commentary (1:12), where Bede interprets the vision of the seven golden candlesticks: “Pulchre hic forma describitur Ecclesiae, lumen amoris divini in pectoris casti fulgore praeferentis. Iuxta hoc quod Dominus ait: Sint lumbi vestri praecincti, et lucernae ardentes. Cuius interius exteriusque perfectionem per duas septenarii numeri partes designat, dum in ea singuli quatuor corporis qualitibus consistentes Dominum Deum suum ex toto corde, tota anima, totaque virtute, diligunt” (PL 93,0136A). Mentioning here the four properties of the body, the Doctor of the Church means: heat, cold, dryness and humidity (Primasius. *In Apocalipsin* I,44-51).

the Lord in harmonious love, and embraces the Testaments, 'keeping', as the Apostle says, 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:3)" (PL 93,0136B). The Doctor of the Church continues his argument, in which every detail of the description of the book of the Apocalypse has its meaning⁶ and leads to the most important in this context observation: "But all this appearance of the Son of Man belongs also to the Church, for He Himself was made the Christ in the same nature with it, and He gives to it a sacerdotal dignity and a judicial power, and to 'shine as the sun in the kingdom of His Father'" (PL 93,0136D)⁷. These words must be referred to the explanation of Rev. 1:6: "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father in which Bede does not merely state that all Christians are a kingdom and priests, but he draws attention to the Christological foundation of the universal priesthood of the faithful: "Because the King of kings and heavenly Priest united us unto His own body by offering Himself for us, there is not one of the saints who has not spiritually the office of priesthood, in that he is a member of the eternal Priest" (PL 93,0135A). Those explanations give grounds for the conclusion about the central place of the Paschal event and its influence on the establishment of the faithful as the "kingdom and priests" (Caputa 2002, 16-17)⁸.

2. CHURCH AS THE HERALD OF THE WORD

From the first pages of his Commentary, Bede tries to emphasize the message of the book of the Apocalypse in relation to the power of the word of God, and thus, the necessity of proclaiming the word by the Church and by the people called for it. Venerable Bede underlines the special position and role of the Church in this regard. Interpreting one of the Apocalypse's images showing two olive trees and two candelabras (Rev. 11:4), Bede recalls the text of the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 4:2.3) and concludes

⁶ Here, also in the description of feet "as if they burned in a furnace" (1:15), Bede sees the last stage in the history of the Church, which is characterized by hard experience: "Pedes ignitos, novissimi temporis Ecclesiam dicit, quae vehementibus est examinanda et probanda pressuris. Orichalcum quippe est aes multo igne et medicamine perductum ad aureum colorem. Alia translatio, quae dicit similes orichalco Libani, significat in Iudaea, cuius Libanus mons est, Ecclesiam esse persequendam, praecipue novissime. Nam et templum saepe Libani nomen accepit, cui dicitur: Aperi, Libane, portas tuas, et comedat ignis cedros tuas" (PL 93,0136C).

⁷ In another place, Bede also deduces about the unity of the nature of Christ and of the Church made up of two peoples. In *Epistolam beati Petri secundam* 1:4: "Mutat repente personam, et qui prius de se suisque dixerat: Pretiosa nobis promissa donavit, conversus extemplo ad eos quibus loquebatur: Ut per haec, inquit, efficiamini divinae consortes naturae. Quod non fortuito, sed providenter agit. Ideo (inquit) Dominus nobis, qui natura Iudaei, qui sub lege sumus nati, qui magisterio ipsius etiam corporaliter imbuti, omnia divinae virtutis suae secreta reseravit, ideo nobis, suis videlicet discipulis, maxima et pretiosa Spiritus sui promissa donavit, ut per haec etiam vos qui ex gentibus estis, qui eum corporaliter videre nequivistis, divinae suae naturae donaret esse participes, nobis scilicet vos quae ab ipso audivimus docentibus, vos per eius mysteria consecrantibus" (PL 93,069D).

⁸ This can also be noted in the words explaining Rev. 10:1: "Facie Domini clarescente, id est, ejus notitia per resurrectionis gloriam manifestata, pedes illius super montes evangelizaturi et annuntiaturi pacem (Rom X), igne sunt Spiritus sancti illustrati, et instar columnae firmati. Jacobus enim et Cephas et Joannes columnae videbantur Ecclesiae esse" (PL 93,0160CD).

that it is the Church that is “irradiated by the light of the two Testaments, and ever waits upon the commands of the Lord. (...) This is the Church with its oil, which never fails, which makes it shine for the light of the world” (PL 93,0162C)⁹.

In turn, Bede, imposes on the above-quoted image of the partition of the Church’s time, the imperative of proclamation to be fulfilled by the Church. Referring to Rev. 8:2: “And I saw seven angels standing before God, and given seven trumpets”, the Saint of Jarrow states: “The Church, which is often presented under the number seven, is commended to the office of preaching” (PL 93,0154D), and then adds that “For although the Church preached before the coming of the Lord, it was not in every place, until it was strengthened by His Spirit” (PL 93,0155A). Thus, Bede ascertains the universal mission of the Church of all times¹⁰. It should be noted, however, that the idea of mission is presented here by the Doctor of the Church against the background of *Mysterium verbi* and the gradual revelation of God’s plan of salvation which harks back to the time of the people of the First Covenant. This is illustrated in the commentary to the drama-filled moment of the question posed on the pages of the Book of Revelation (5:2) from the mouth of a powerful angel: “Who is worthy to open the book?” Bede interprets this scene as proclamation of the law and, since it was proclaimed in particular phases of the fulfilled plan of salvation, he states that: “For ‘many’ prophets and wise men ‘desired to see the things which the Apostles saw’; and, ‘of this salvation’, as Peter says, ‘the prophets inquired diligently, and searched.’ This is the book which is closed both to the learned and unlearned in Isaiah, but of which even there the opening is thus announced, ‘In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book,’ And of this Ezekiel also says, ‘And I saw, and behold a hand was sent unto me, in which was the roll of a book, and He opened it before me, and it was written within and without’; when he also added that which John concealed, namely, that which was written in the book, saying, ‘And there was written therein lamentations, and a dirge, and woe.’ For the whole course of the Old and New Testament forewarns, that sins are to be repented of, the kingdom of heaven to be sought, and the wailings of hell to be escaped” (PL 93,0152D). The Doctor of the Church, therefore, perceives the mission of proclaiming the word of God as completion of what took place already in

⁹ In the Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, Bede uses the image of the Church as “God’s Mother”. By fulfilling Christ’s command, it is to “give birth” to God’s spiritual children calling them to the new life and thus contribute to spreading the Kingdom “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). *Homilia V. In dominica secunda post octavas paschae*, PL 94,0156. Bede, commenting the words of Luke 13:21: “It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened”, gives yet another explanation: “Mulier quippe fermentum accepit, cum Ecclesia vim supernae dilectionis et fidei, Domino largiente, consecuta est. Abscondit hoc in farinae sata tria, donec fermentaretur totum, cum Asiae, Europae, et Africae partibus verbum vitae ministravit, donec omnes terrarum termini regni coelestis amore flagrarent. Ad hujus mulieris membra se pertinere signabat, qui, recedentibus quibusdam a castitate fidei, tristis aiebat: ‘Filioli mei, quos iterum parturio, donec formetur Christus in vobis’ (Gal. 4:19)”.

¹⁰ Explaining the image of the Angel who set his right foot on the sea and the left on the land (Rev. 10:2), Bede states “Praedicatio fidei Christianae terra marique propagatur. Sed, allegorice, fortiora membra in maioribus periculis, altera in competentibus sistuntur” (PL 93,0161A).

the days of the Old Covenant, and what found its full revelation in Jesus Christ. In this sense, the first people who heard the Good News were the Jews, which is why Bede, interpreting Chapter 7 of the Book of Revelation and referring allegorically to individual generations of Israel, sheds light on Israelites and selects them from “a great multitude, which no man could number” (Rev. 7: 9), to emphasize that generations of Israel were the ones who first heard the Gospel, and only then the Gentiles were to hear about the salvation proclaimed by it (PL 93,0152D: “*enumeratis tribubus Israel, quibus Evangelium primo praedicatum est, salvationem quoque velit commemorare gentium*”). In this sense, Bede draws a conclusion about the universal character of preaching and propagating God’s word. This, as the Saint contends, issues from the essence of the Church, which is *Ecclesia peregrinans*. Hence, in a commentary to Rev. 14:6, where Bede used this term, he at the same time presented the Church’s mission in the context of the whole earth and in the context of the battle with the dragon: “As he had described the doubtful and varied fight of the Church with the dragon, as she is a sojourner in the age, it remains to assign a due recompense to both the combatants, and shew what punishments await the bad, or what rewards the good. So, then, the preacher who runs hither and thither through the midst of the Church, carries with him the Gospel of the eternal kingdom (*Praedicator ergo, per mediam discurrens Ecclesiam, Evangelium regni portat aeterni*)” (PL 93,0174B)¹¹. Thus, Bede places the proclamation of the Good News in the eschatological context of the “already and not yet” - so closely corresponding to the message and the argumentative tension of the whole Book of the Apocalypse.

3. PROCLAIMERS’ TASKS AND DEMANDS IMPOSED ON THEM

Bede the Venerable uses in his writings specific combinations of words to refer to activities related to preaching. A special emphasis is always placed on their subject, that is, the Holy Bible, hence the verb “to proclaim” can frequently be found in a combination “proclaim the word” (*verbum praedicare*) with additional terms such as “God’s word” (*verbum Dei*), “word of life” (*verbum vitae*) or “word of faith” (*verbum fidei*). The activity itself is referred to with the words “proclaim Christ” (*Christum*

¹¹ A similar to context of the pilgrimage and the pilgrim Church, is highlighted by Bede in a comment on Rev. 12. In the image of the Woman seeking shelter in the desert (Rev. 12:6), the Saint of Jarrow sees the Church who, living in the hope of eternal goods, goes through the desert of worldliness and is protected from the dangers of it: “*Ecclesia sub spe vivens aeternorum peregrinatione praesentis eremi gaudet, accepta potestate calcandi super serpentes et scorpiones, et super omnem virtutem draconis rufi instar Israeliticae plebis, quae pane coelesti pasta in eremo, visu aenei serpentis, serpentes vicit ignitos*” (PL 93,0167A). A little further, Bede ensures the recipients of the book of the Apocalypse on the help that the pilgrim Church will experience in the hour of fighting with the devil: “*Coelum Ecclesiam significat, in qua Michaelem cum angelis suis contra diabolum dicit pugnare, quia secundum Dei voluntatem pro peregrinante Ecclesia orando, et adiutoria ministrando, confligit. Quem et Daniel in novissima gravissimaque pressura in auxilium dixit Ecclesiae venturum, unde ab eo putant Antichristum esse perimendum. Ita vero angeli eius esse dicuntur, quemadmodum et angeli nostri. Dominus ait: Angeli eorum semper vident faciem Patris mei (Matth. XVIII), eorum scilicet quorum cives sunt*” (PL 93,0167B).

praedicare), “proclaim the word of God” (*verbum Dei adnuntiare*), “communicate the word” (*verbum ministrare*) and “evangelize” (*evangelizare*) (Martin 2010, 158-159). In the Commentary on the Apocalypse, the Saint of Jarrow speaks of explaining God’s Law to listeners (PL 93,0145: *predicatio legis*), reminding that the possible lack of obedience to the Law brings about the threat of the punishment of hell, prophesied by the heralds of God’s word identified by Bede with the angels of the Apocalypse (PL 93,0155D: *Poenam gehennae sanguinolentis operibus deberi, praedicatorum voce refertur*)¹². In an unambiguous way, the father of the Church speaks of preaching on the wrath of God: “Preachers pour out the wrath of God in a twofold manner, while they either impose the punishments of the ungodly upon the ungodly themselves by judging spiritually; as Peter said to Simon, ‘Thy money perish with thee’; or they manifest it to holy Church by preaching, as he also said, ‘For their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their perdition slumbereth not’ (2Peter 2:3)” (PL 93,0179B)

Elsewhere, Bede makes the Commentary readers realize that the heralds of the word play the role of a bridge linking the past and the present and, moreover, they constitute a repository of the community’s knowledge of the past. Against this background, our author, referring to the words Rev 21:12: “and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon”, expresses the conviction that the names written on the walls of New Jerusalem are *memoriam veterum patrum praedicatorum cordibus insitam* (PL 93,0196A). Earlier, we drew attention to the subsequent stages of the Church’s activity, and among them, to the time of great hardships and struggles. Bede states that the task of preachers in those times is to *contra mox secuturam Antichristi perfidiam fidelium corda confirment* (PL 93,0164C)¹³. However, if their testimony is to be credible and convincing, they must meet the demands of the one who sends them to be heralds of his word, hence in reference to the words of Rev. 15:6: “having their breasts girded with golden girdles”, Bede argues: “Let him who desires to preach strong things not only mortify the body, but also bind the breast with the gold of wisdom (*sed et pectus auro sapientiae stringat*). Or, at least, to bind the breasts with golden girdles, is to restrain all the motions of changeful thoughts by the bands of the love of God alone” (PL 93,0178C). This is, of course, about the pursuit of ascetic life and the mortification of the senses¹⁴.

¹² In another place, explaining the words Rev. 11:1: “Rise, and measure the temple of God”, Bede states that *evangelica Scriptura* is the model for “measuring” the hearts and deeds of people. The task is to be fulfilled by the proclaimers of the word: “Surge dixit, non quia haec Ioannes sedibundus audiebat, sed quia hoc verbo excitantur corda singulorum evangelicam Scripturam actusque metiri. Ibi enim quantum singuli proficiant, quantumque regulae divinae concordent, inveniunt” (PL 93,0162AB).

¹³ Also, referring to the words of Rev. 8:13: “And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth” Bede highlights the role that the Church’s doctors, filled with the wisdom of God, have to play in their fight against the schemes of heretics: “Huius aquilae vox per eximiorum in Ecclesia quotidie pervolat ora doctorum, cum nequitiam haereticorum, Antichristi saevitiam, diemque iudicii, amatoribus terrae” (PL 93,0157AB).

¹⁴ In his numerous works, Bede emphasizes the uniqueness of the calling of the Gospel proclaimers, but at the same time he does not stop at ascertaining their dignity and praising their

Due to his function performed in the Jarrow Abbey and associated with formatting young monks, Bede the Venerable does not abstain in his works from teaching the right attitudes to candidates for religious life¹⁵. Neither does he refrain from it on the pages of his Commentary on the Apocalypse, although it must be admitted that in comparison with other writings of his *Opera exegetica*, he does it rather sporadically. In this regard, it is worth noting that the Church Doctor conceives of the figure of master and his disciple/disciples as a kind of team, which as such is responsible for the quality of proclaiming the word through the testimony of a good life. Commenting on Rev 8:7, Bede says: “The life of the good is found in doctors and hearers. For, ‘Blessed,’ he says, ‘is he who reads, and he who hears the words of the prophecy’” (PL 93,0155D). The words opening his work and referring to Rev. 1:3, have the same meaning: “Teachers and hearers are therefore blessed, because they who keep the Word of God find that a short time of labour is followed by everlasting joys” (PL 93,0134D). And because the master-teacher is responsible for his disciples also in the era of threats posed by false teachers who want to distort the truth of God’s word, hence the commentary in Rev. 9:19: “For the false teachers of the old serpent who deceived man, like those who are supported by the protection of princes, hurt more than if they persuaded by words alone. ‘He sitteth,’ he says, ‘lying in wait with the rich’” (PL 93,0160B).

CONCLUSION

The Commentary on the Apocalypse, similar to other exegetical works by Bede the Venerable, do not provide a systematic treatise on the theory of evangelization (Sztuk 2014, 21) or on the demands towards the proclaimers of the word of God. This is probably due to the fact that the author did not expand on some motifs of the rich imagery contained in the Book of the Apocalypse. However, despite this, Doctor Venerabilis drew on the contents of the final book of the Bible and made his rich reflection on the image of the Church in its various stages of existence and fulfilment of the evangelizing mission in the name of Christ. With an admirable insight, he made the reader aware of his thought and of

personal qualities. It can be assumed that by directing his reflection to the young monks he wanted to develop in them the attitude of *correctio continua* of life and customs. For example, referring to the words Neh. 12:30: “And the priests and the Levites purified themselves”, the Church Doctor states: “Justus omnimode ordo, ut qui populum mundare desiderant doctores ac praesules, prius ipsi mundentur; primo corpus suum castigent, et servituti subjiciant, ne forte aliis praedicantes, ipsi reprobis inveniuntur” (*In Esdram et Nehemiam XXXIII, PL 91,0914*).

¹⁵ This is evident, for example, in the Commentary on the Letter of James, which contains a warning against misusing the gift of speech and an encouragement to confirm the professed faith with deeds. While explaining the words of this letter, Bede warns against seeking the office of teacher in the community without first demonstrating the purity of one’s conduct: “Quia improbis doctoribus silentium imposuerat eos que magisterii gradum tenere vetuerat quos nec vitae perfectionem nec continentiam linguae habere cernebat, consequenter ammonet ut si quis inter eos sapiens et disciplinatus vel sit vel sibi esse videatur magis sapienter ipse ac disciplinate vivendo eruditionem suam quam alios docendo demonstret” (PL 93,0029CD).

the theological truth conveyed in the text of the Apocalypse, that Christ is the Lord of history and, at the same time, the “foundation of foundations” on which the Church is built as a community of believers. Bede’s reflection regarding the proclamation of the word by the Church, as well as the tasks and demands set for the heralds of the word, should be regarded as a kind of theological extension. The first of the above-mentioned topics was inscribed by Bede in the *partitio temporum* of the Church, in the “already and not yet” of the History of salvation together with the truth issuing from those indications about proclaiming the Law to the people of the First Covenant and that the Good News is to be preached to the ends of the earth until the time when “Secundum enim utrumque Testamentum iudicabitur mundus” (PL 93,0193D). The image of the Church and evangelization presented by Bede the Venerable in such an arrangement, in a simple way explains to the recipients of his work the difficult content of the Book of Revelation and turns into an ecclesiastical catechesis of an iconic character.

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