

JOZEF ŽUFFA

**THE NEED FOR CONTINUOUS UPDATE OF
THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION.
CASE STUDY FROM SLOVAKIA**

*Potrzeba ciągłego rozwoju edukacji w zakresie teologii. Studium
przypadku ze Słowacji*

Christian faith and organized religious communities are presently no longer such a natural part of the political, cultural and social life as they were in the European countries at the beginning of the 20th century. This also applies to Slovakia, which, as compared to the countries of Western Europe, is still considered conservative, traditionally Christian or even Catholic. Thirty years after the major social changes that ended the power of regimes in the Eastern Europe hostile to religion, most of the Slovak Republic population consider themselves members of the Catholic Church, but a trend towards the detachment from the traditional churches is noticeable in Slovakia as well.

At the same time, few of the topics related religious faith and the Church attract or even are of interest of the today's society. A part of the community fears that the church officials intervene in politics and legislation in order to impose their ethical ideas upon the society. Other social groups, on the other hand, see the threats coming from the liberal elites and use traditional religion as a defensive shield against liberalization, multicultural, and globalization tendencies.

The functioning Church-Society relationship is often represented by priests and other consecrated persons, who could lead a dialogue

between faith and culture¹. The education of the priests and theologians within the Catholic Church is framed by several normative texts. These are grounded primarily in a document of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* by John Paul II, followed by the newer *Veritatis gaudium*². The point of the whole document is identified in the very first article of *Sapientia christiana*³. The question remains, how to constantly put this ideal into practice, since there are several possibilities of discussing the nature of the theological education.

While the statements about „higher education crisis” or „devaluation of a university education”, may sound almost like clichés, at a closer look into the life of the academic community, comprising of the researchers, teachers and students, it turns out that these statements point to the heritage created by the previous generations in the sphere of the so-called „free academic education”. In the context of the humanities, such as philosophy and theology, appear specific issues which – when one attempts to put them into „practical use” nowadays – become some kind of „dinosaurs”, surviving at universities due to the grace of other „useful” faculties, that are allegedly paying for that. In the face of these „pragmatic” tendencies that advocate bringing the areas of studies closer to “the needs of practice”, “idealistic ideas” aiming at turning the whole process back to the roots and essence of university education, are gaining popularity in the academic discussions.

A description of the profiles and skills of theology graduates in Slovakia and abroad can be obtained mainly from the information available on the websites of the educational institutions or career centers for the graduates.

¹ For different perspectives on dialogue with the modern world, see e.g. ZULEHNER, Paul M. - NEUNER, Peter: *The Church in Today's World: A Need or Anachronism; a practical ecclesiology*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2013; PETRÁČEK, Tomáš: *The Church, Tradition, Reform: The Reference of the Second Vatican Council*. Prague: Vyšehrad, 2016; DREHER, Rod: *Benedict's Choice: a Strategy for Christians in the Post-Christian World*. Bratislava: Postoj Media, 2017.

² FRANTIŠEK: *Apostolic Constitution Veritatis gaudium*. Trnava: SSV, 2018.

³ JÁN PAVOL II: *Apostolic Constitution Sapientia christiana*.

Below, there are presented passages chosen from several websites that complement each other.

The Slovak Theological Faculty of the University of Trnava puts an emphasis on the communication skills of their graduates:⁴ “Is he able to address groups expressing different opinions, to talk and listen to people who are in difficult life situations? Is he able to provide help to people surviving tough life situations, such as anxiety, loneliness, depression, guilt, partnership crisis, stressful situations? Can take a stand on the current issues of ethics, politics, culture and religion”?

Another criterion listed on the website is the skill of independent critical thinking: “The student will learn the basic methods of the research work and be able to form his own ideas creatively. He will learn to understand history as a source of inspiration for the present. He will be able to differentiate among the philosophical and theological movements and discuss them professionally. He will be able to assess and work with relevant information and propose adequate solutions.”

The third requirement of this faculty is based on the social skills: “The student is theoretically and practically prepared for the field of social care, pastoral counseling and professional accompaniment. The acquired skills and Christian value orientation form the basis for the pastoral and social activities.”

A very similar list of requirements is systematized by the British portal in support of students who work in various disciplines. With regard to graduates of theology and religious studies the following skills are mentioned: research, analytical and presentation skills; ability to interpret and systematize information, formulate questions and solve problems; ability to understand written documents, team and communication skills; writing and argumentation skills; empathy and the ability to work with people expressing different opinions; independent thinking. The applicability of skills has a wide range.

The British newspaper *The Guardian* in its article „*What to do with a degree in theology or religious studies*”, draws attention to the areas

⁴ www.tftu.sk/uchadzac [12.12.2019].

in the labor market where the graduates of theology can apply⁵. It describes the prospects for such graduates as people who are highly empathetic and communicative with people coming from different backgrounds. Relying on the research, it seems best to work in the areas of development, social care, counseling in local and national politics, human resources departments, and management positions.

Similarly, the US Labor Statistics Bureau website⁶ enumerates sectors with real employment opportunities for the theologians; the ranking is based on a descending scale of the percentage of the sectors covered: religious organizations, home health care services, primary and secondary schools, universities and vocational schools, hospitals.

The German news server *rp-online.de*.⁷ refers to the data from the 2011 German Episcopal Conference. According to this data, 22,000 students study theology in a particular year. Three quarters of the students study it as one of the subjects in their studies of pedagogy, the remaining six thousand study theology as a single subject. Only 900 students of theology study towards priesthood; thus, as many as 5,000 students have to find jobs as journalists, teachers, social workers, politicians, third sector activists, etc. In case of all these jobs, their social competences are highly valued. A short analysis ends with a statement from one of the theology students: „Whoever enjoys thinking, history, and philosophy, the study of theology is right for them”.

In Germany, there are three types of studies devoted to the perspectives for the theologians as laymen, with references to several German and Austrian websites. The first was established through the initiative of a working association of Catholic theology graduates,⁸ the second is dedicated to the necessary qualifications for the theologians

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/money/2010/apr/10/theology-religious-studies-degree> [12.12.2019].

⁶ <http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes212099.htm#ind>. [12.12.2019].

⁷ <http://www.rp-online.de/leben/beruf/theologen-sind-in-vielen-berufen-gefragt-aid-1.3073950> [12.12.2019].

⁸ BOHMEYER, Axel: *Berufsfelder für Theologinnen und Theologen: eine Informationsbroschüre der AGT*. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2000.

with the ambition to penetrate other working sectors⁹, and the third deals with an evaluation of the experience of graduates of theology¹⁰.

When assessing the educational process at the faculty of theology, it is necessary to clarify the main criterion which the graduate should be prepared to meet. According to the monitoring¹¹ of one of the Slovakia's Faculties of Theology, the content and organization of the study is most suitable for graduates who, as priests, after their professional studies, devote themselves mainly to the spiritual needs of people in the context of pastoral or social care.

The result reflects the fact that in the specific conditions of Slovak society and the Church there is not enough job opportunities for lay theology and philosophy graduates, although it is clear that the space exists in different areas of pastoral work, such as accompanying families, initiating the youth activities, overall social practices, counseling centers for families, and educational institutions for lifelong learning. Therefore, many laymen understand this form of study rather as their own intellectual and spiritual enrichment alongside the study of another discipline that is meant to provide a „living” in the future. A study aimed at shaping a mature and well-rounded person would correspond to an understanding of university education, which is to provide an overall development of the intellectual abilities and social skills. However, it is clear that under the current social conditions, it is not easy for an institution to retain the ideal of a holistic development of a graduate, if it does not have a clear focus on practice.

⁹ BECKER, Patrick: *Berufschancen für Theologinnen und Theologen*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2012.

¹⁰ POSSEL, Rene: *Berufe für Theologen*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004.

¹¹ JENÍK, Lukáš – SPIŠIAKOVÁ, Mária – ŽUFFA Jozef: Quo vadis Aloisianum – k vízií jezuitskej teologickej fakulty, In: *Studia Aloisiana*, 8, 2017, No 2, p. 35-60.

1. Methodology of research on the Catholic priests

The sketched probes into the parishes and theological education are intended to present in greater detail the context on which this research focused on priests was based. The research concentrated on the world of Catholic priests in Slovakia.

The questionnaire for researching the views of the Catholic priests was made up of 16 questions. The data was collected online using the download method¹². The questionnaire was sent via email addresses. In October 2018, a questionnaire link was sent to several priests asking them to forward it to their colleagues.

The collection of the responses was active for two weeks. The resulting number of priests involved in the research was 107. The identification questions show that in the resulting response database there are 70% of diocesan priests and 30% of religious order priests. Out of the total number, 67% respondents work in towns and 33% in villages. 12% of the respondents were ordained before 1990, 64% between 1990 and 2010 and 24% after 2010. The fourth identifier is regional; 44% of respondents work in Western Slovakia, 36% in Central Slovakia and 20% in Eastern Slovakia.

The following texts represent the first stage and results, as well as a simple typology of the respondents' opinions distribution. In some figures there are added results from the representative research on Slovak Catholics made by author in the year 2017¹³.

2. Differences of opinion

Society and the Church are in considerable dynamism of change. The priests were asked at the outset to give their opinion on several statements. The following graph (Chart 1) shows responses with values „completely agree” and „partly agree”. Significant consent of respondents can be identified with the perception of a need for open

¹² GILE, Krista, J. – HANDCOSK, Mark, S.: Respondent-Driven Sampling: An Assessment of Current Methodology, 2010, p. 285-327. In: *Sociological Methodology*, vol. 40.

¹³ ŽUFFA, Jozef.: Katolíci na Slovensku. In: *Viera a život*, vol. 2., 2018.

communication with the modern world. The response to the second statement reveals that the priests are people with a high motivation in their profession. Answers to other statements provide space for finding reasons for lower respondents' consent.

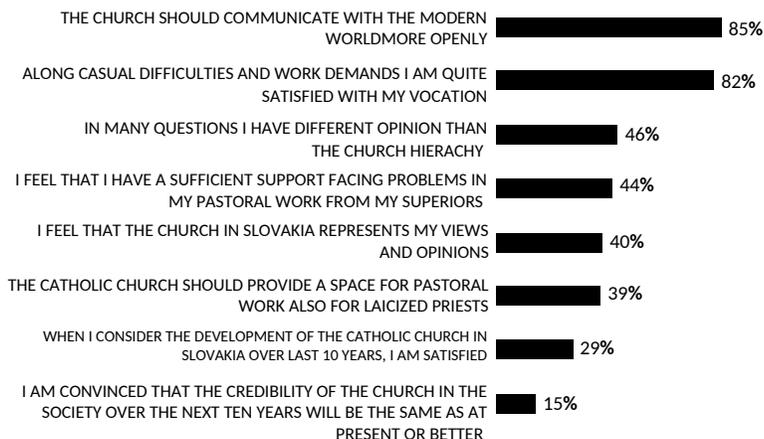


Chart 1. Positive reactions to the statements

Some priests used the space provided to express their opinions in answering an open question in the questionnaire. Their statements illustrate the diversity of opinions; for example, in the statement about the satisfaction with the development of the Church in the last 10 years: „The conduct of some colleagues is purely legalistic and moralistic, which further aggravates the differences between priests and believers. In this way, the spirit of clericalism, which is very significant in Slovakia, is enhanced.” Another respondent adds his answer to the question of opinion representation on the part of the hierarchy: “Personally, I don’t like the fact that bishops comment on the serious issues of public life very little. If they express themselves, they are shy and uncertain. It is, then, not surprising that there are

newly awakened groups within the Church that go to the extreme, which only causes harm”.

The evaluation of individual questions helps to identify the areas that are important for the priests and, as already mentioned above, one of them is the nature of the communication between the priests and their superiors. The most obvious manifestation of failure in the communication and social relationships are the differences of opinions seen between priests and bishops. This situation is not just a regional problem, or a problem of the Catholic Church. The same reproach for the superiors' failure to communicate with other members of the clergy appears in Bohemia, as well as within the Lutheran Church in Slovakia.

Despite the high percentage of respondents who are satisfied with their ministry, the low percentage of those who are satisfied with communication is very significant. Other statements confirm the skepticism and tension between the clergy and the Church's hierarchy.

3. Perception of the Church priorities

Another question, „What do you think the Slovak Church should promote more?” offered various choices as an answer (see Chart 2). Nine out of ten priests chose the answer „life based on the Gospel,” and seven out of ten „support for families and children”. Nearly half of the answers were „support for the poor,” and „fighting corruption and social inequality”. One out of the ten priests perceives the fight against extremism, and protection of nature as a priority. The same question was asked in the representative research of Slovaks who declared themselves Catholics. In contrast to priests, the highest priority for the Catholic public is support of families and children, followed by support for the poor; living their lives according to the gospel is a priority for half of the respondents in the sample group.

The “signs of the times” that the Church is facing today are the same as they were in the past. The dynamics of the society development that affects the Church's activities should not be a source of defeatist emotions that come from the imaginary conception of a static Church. The Church is necessarily engaged in a culture of which it is a part

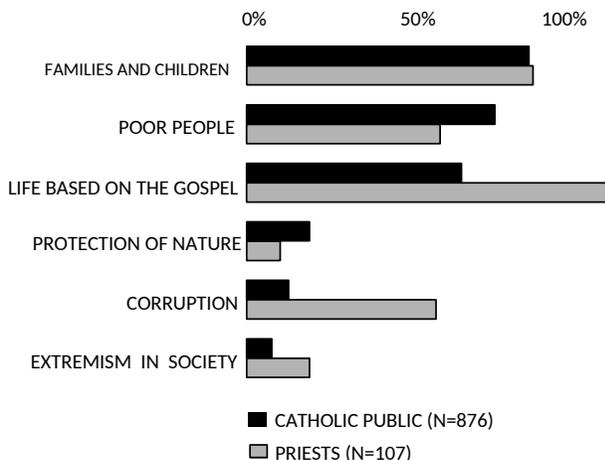


Chart 2. Expectations of more intensive Church priorities

and not its counterpart. Based on a number of surveys, today we have a relatively clear picture of the priorities of the society, believers, the young and the old. The Church has the right and duty to be an advocate of human dignity and to respond to political, social, and economic issues. This is not only about family issues, which form an important, but not the only one, theme of the Church's pastoral work. In this context, protection of the family cannot be taken away from the context of broader social and political issues¹⁴. Current phenomena such as migration, corruption or radicalization of the society towards nationalism or other extremes are not new in the history of the Western world and should be specifically reflected in a dialogue within the Church, which defends a human dignity.

The graph above captures the overlapping as well as different attitudes to pastoral challenges both from declared Catholics and Catholic priests. While a consensus can be seen on issues such as the

¹⁴ JENÍK, Lukáš – ŽUFFA, Jozef: Hodnotové rebríčky katolíckej mládeže. Náčrt perspektív a rizik. In: *Viera a život*, 28, 2018, no. 4, p. 65-79.

family and pastoral work with children, in the context of all the other topics the attitudes of the laity differ from those of the clergy. The comparison of the results shows that there is a higher, open interest in that area among priests, whereas laymen do not perceive the issues of corruption or extremism as a priority.

It should be added that the variance in the emphasis on some topics that are perceived differently by the laity and clergy is natural, and that the role of the survey is not to say whether the answers are good or bad. Differing attitudes towards an evaluation of the selected topics as a priority or as less important are influenced by several factors. It is the Church leaders, bishops, and priests who are not only private individuals, but have a responsibility to proclaim values that have the potential and ambition to change the attitudes of society. While there is a consensus between the two groups regarding family, in case of the other issues the survey results would be expected to show a stronger focus on the current pastoral challenges. If corruption is not a problem for most people, because they see it as an integral part of social relations, it is the Church that is supposed to reject such a “lifestyle” and to set an example. The problems of the present time cannot be solved within the pastoral paradigms of the Church in the past, when the Church did not face the phenomena of the contemporary society, and therefore an appropriate solution cannot be found in the tradition.

Several priests used an open question in the questionnaire and commented on the expectations regarding the Church priorities. Here are some examples: “We have confused the Gospel with clericalism. My biggest concern is that the behavior and unreflective engagements of many contributed to proliferation of clericalism among the ranks of the Church hierarchy and the promotion of neo-fascist populism among priests. Personally, I have been disgusted over the past ten years. I have lost confidence in the Church and I am often sick of it. My Church was not nepotistic and clientelist, but it has become such.” Another priest writes: “The Church must come out of the temple to the streets. Give answers and offer practical solutions to the problems of today’s people. Life and the Church are about tensions and paradoxes.

It seems to me that the Church in Slovakia perceives the present tensions as a threat, not as a positive challenge and a *locus theologicus*”.

4. Feedback for Faculties of Theology

The answers to the question: “Do you rate your training in a seminary / Faculty of Theology as sufficient for a pastoral ministry?” (see Chart 3) is particularly relevant for Faculties of Theology since 40% of the interviewed priests did not consider their training during the studies as sufficient for practice.

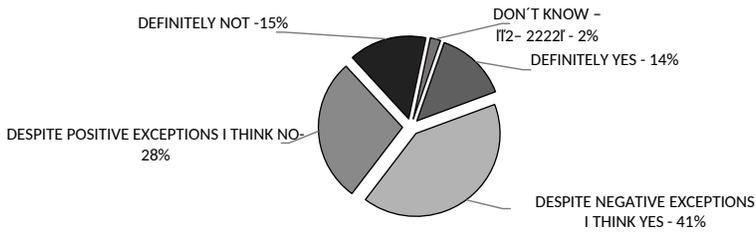


Chart 3. Adequate training for a pastoral work in a seminary/Faculty of Theology

One of the priests made the following additional comment in the free space provided in the questionnaire: “What I find most regrettable is that priestly seminaries work on the principle - you will be in the chapel in time and you have a vocation. Seminarians are trained as administrators of ceremonies – i.e. to say the Masses, administer the sacraments, and hear confessions, but no one teaches them how to communicate with people, and thus they become strangers. If someone has a sober view on the present world, he rather stays silent, because the time spent in the seminary is just a few years of worrying about the ordination”.

Character education is a tradition that can already be found in Plato and Aristotle. But is higher education a guarantee of critical thinking? It is one of the conditions, but not a guarantee. More than

50% of respondents tend to evaluate the education and formation at the theological faculties positively, while the remaining half does so negatively. One of the reasons for dissatisfaction may be the difficulty in studying philosophy and theology, but as the above-mentioned comment shows, the lack of critical thinking, academic freedom, and the like are more problematic than negative memories on the volume of study material. Weaknesses, such as the absence of education in social skills, guidance, and communication are related to educational ideals.

According to some authors,¹⁵ the current interpretation of the ideals of spirituality in education should lead to five key goals. The first is to develop people's talents and help them to overcome their cultural and social constraints and stereotypes. Education is supposed to help escape from being encompassed by unjustified assumptions and prejudices.

The second goal is to connect the student's autobiography with the history of the community. Education should help them to understand their cultural identity and perceive culture as something that changes over time, influences, and is in turn being influenced. Building on a tradition does not mean repeating it but drawing on the heritage that leads to the underlying goal, which is freedom and responsibility.

The third goal is a socially positive education. Education is not an objective that leads to exclusivity and social segregation, but rather an instrument to serve social inclusion. This dimension of education seems even more obvious if one applies it directly to a theological education, which is not a theoretical goal in itself, but a tool to help understand the needs of people who are marginalized.

The fourth goal of education is a perhaps atypical, but a necessary and often neglected emphasis on the formal aspect of the formation.

¹⁵ See O'MALLEY, John W.: Jesuit School of Humanities Yesterday and Today. In: *Studies in The Spirituality of Jesuits*, 47, 2015, art.1, pp. 1-30; also JENÍK, Lukáš: K teoretickým východiskám jezuitského vzdelávania. In: *Studia Aloisiana*, 6, 2015,4, pp. 5-27.

It should lead to such a form of communication that is attractive in its effectiveness of seeking the truth, not for a fear of obedience.

The fifth task of education is formation of “mildness”, which expresses itself in a careful and sensitive differentiation. This, of course, does not mean separation from the underlying goal, i.e. freedom and responsibility.

Educational goals or ideals provide food for thought about the issues of education at the Faculties of Theology - as these goals are being implemented within the framework of the education in pastoral and systematic theology in Slovakia. Here, questions arise how to measure the topicality of pastoral theology or, more specifically, the effectiveness of the learning process resulting in pastoral skills. Should it be measured by the current literature used as part of a syllabus, or by the publishing and scientific activity of lecturers, or by the level of academic debate on current issues, conferences, etc.? The research in this context asks questions that open the door for further, wider discussion.

The question of the readiness of the theology graduates for practice is: “In your opinion, what qualities do priests lack the most?” Respondents chose a maximum of three of the default responses to “after graduation” and “in pastoral practice”.

The survey of the qualities that priests lack the most was also done among the Catholic public. To compare the answers, the results are presented in Chart 4.

The priests’ evaluation of their colleagues, and the evaluation of priests by the lay public put a lack of communication skills on the first place. The need for communication is described by a priest’s statement in a comment column of the question: “Otherwise, I am better able to accept ‘no’ from the superiors when I feel the spirit of a dialogue and a friendly exchange of arguments, or the reasons for a particular decision. On the other hand, it was difficult for me to accept decisions from ‘above’, without any explanation or accompanied by formal phrases, behind which I felt questions and prejudices of the superior, caused, as I see it, by others, unfortunately, my fellow brothers, rather than openness and sincerity”.

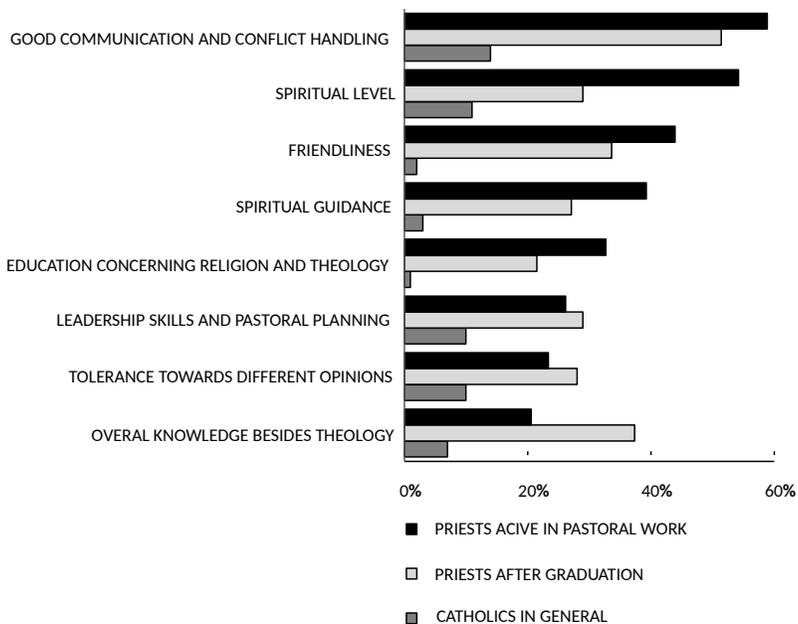


Chart 4. Qualities that priests lack the most

5. The Church-institutional optimism and pessimism

The statistical analysis showed that, based on the responses to four statements¹⁶, two categories of respondents can be formed by statistical cluster analysis. The measured coefficients show that there is a group of priests who think differently than the Church hierarchy, are dissatisfied with the evolution of the church over the recent past, do not expect to gain higher credibility in the future, and they do not feel that the Church leaders represent their views. The same goes

¹⁶ Looking at the Catholic Church in Slovakia, I am satisfied with its development over the last 10 years; I believe that the Church will have the same or higher credibility in society in the next 10 years than it does at present; In my opinions and beliefs I feel being represented by the authorities of the Church in Slovakia; On many issues I think differently than the Church hierarchy.

for the second group, whose answers to the four statements overlap in the opposite direction. In other words, it is possible to create a typology of priests based on their perception and attitudes towards the Church. The analysis shows that half of the priests (51%) in Slovakia are Church-institutional optimists, and the other half are Church-institutional pessimists (49%).

There are no statistically significant differences between religious orders and diocesan priests with regard to ecclesiastical optimism / pessimism, based neither on the year of their ordination, nor the region of their activity. Differences can be seen in evaluating the preparation at Faculties of Theology. Priests, who are convinced that the preparation for pastoral practice was sufficient, compared to those who consider it insufficient, are more optimistic about the Church.

In looking for further factors, it was found that the priests who were ordained before 1990 agree more strongly that the Church should communicate more openly with the modern world than those ordained after 2010. On the other hand, priests ordained after 2010 agree, more strongly than those who were ordained before 1990, that the Catholic Church should allow some space for pastoral practice also for laicized priests.

When interpreting the survey results, several issues can be mentioned that open up a need to have a debate, as well as of further research. If we look at the image of the Church portrayed by mass media, there seems to be a relatively unified approach and view of cultural and social problems. The Church is relatively united (even in agreement with other Christian denominations) regarding cultural and ethical issues. This relative unity can be seen on issues that resonate in the Slovak mass media such as humanism, gender theory, family protection, criticism of the LGBTI agenda +, but also the relationship between the Church and state, the historical responsibility of the wartime Slovak Republic and so on.

In general, it appears that Christianity and the Church in Slovakia form a highly coherent and consistent community that exists with a profiled worldview and identity. Of course, unity is a desired value. On the other hand, without an honest social and internal debate in

the Church, unity can only become a marketing brand, which does not reflect and interpret the Gospel values into the current common good. Examples of several debates that have taken place in the Slovak Church do not constitute an internal institutional debate, such as can be seen at the German-speaking theological forums. Nevertheless, it is clear that the experiences of believers with various priests, as well as the plurality of attitudes within the clergy point to a persisting, even if implicit, disunity. The question is whether such disunity is something unwanted or, on the contrary, a desirable pluralism, which should also be pushed, from the bottom up, into the media discourse. Indeed, such pluralism does not necessarily have to mean disunity but rather a rejection of the imaginary dogmata of uniformity. Here we come back again to the nature of the Church as an institution that not only educates, but should primarily educate towards freedom and responsibility, which, naturally, requires the ability to differentiate. Thus, unity cannot be guaranteed by uniformity, but by the community that communicates.

It is worth returning to the problem described above, which is the nature and objectives of pastoral practice and education at Faculties of Theology. If the concept of conscience is the last instance of decision-making and “*the most hidden core and a sanctuary of man, where he is alone with God whose voice is heard within him,*”¹⁷ it seems that a key mission of the Church is to bring other people to this knowledge¹⁸. This idea explains also the demands for the required qualities, the priests’ education, and their abilities and social skills, which will enable them to the task of bringing the Gospel values into the current culture – through emphasizing the uniqueness and dignity of a human person, whose token is freedom.

Pastoral work is always about the nature of communicating the contents of the faith, and the way how to evangelize cannot be based on the exclusive image of the Christian community, nor bowing to the mood of a crowd. In this tense situation - between optimism, which

¹⁷ Katechizmus Katolíckej cirkvi. Trnava : SSV, 1998, §1776, p. 450

¹⁸ Cf. JÁN PAVOL II: An apostolic constitution *Sapientia christiana*, §4.

is based on the fact that people's cooperation with regard to life-style is very attractive, and pessimism, which we can also observe at the contradiction between the views of laity and priests - it cannot be assumed that the Church may be optimistic or pessimistic.

* * *

It turns out that it remains a major challenge for the religious communities in Slovakia to deal honestly and critically with the rapid changes in society and not to see the "world" as an enemy, in order to identify themselves as co-creators of culture, and to seek a partnership approach in forming it. Here, it is also possible to show the potential for the core themes of theology - focus on human dignity, tolerance, freedom and a dialogue.

In this process, Churches and religions in Slovakia as well as in Central-Eastern Europe have a special role to play. It seems necessary to introduce a consistent development phase of societies in post-communist countries - a stage of hope. The understanding and implementation of hope in a society is one of the key values of the Gospel that a society needs.

Since pluralism offers wider choices also in the area of religious faith, human beings of today seek and choose what suits them in this area as well. Thus, a religious belief is no longer only a fate that individuals inherit from their social environment. If the Churches want to be effectively present in today's society, they are, from the sociology of religion perspective, called upon to constantly update their tradition and lifestyle in their reflection, both at the cultural, institutional and personality levels. Churches have to realize that they have lost their monopoly on religious issues. Plurality in religion has become fully accepted. Post-modern human beings are therefore forced to choose their religion, to build their "home of faith" from various religious traditions and practices. Individuals decide the interpretation of faith for them, and do not accept it exclusively from one Church.

With the pontificate of Pope Francis came also his calls for a new grasp of the pastoral practice of the Church: "There are countless topics

related to the evangelization of today's world that must be the subject of study and appropriate deepening"¹⁹. Elsewhere he adds: "I invite all to be courageous and creative in the task of redefining the goals, structures, style, and evangelization methods of communities"²⁰. He calls for a new theological reflection, which will respond adequately to the questions and needs of people in today's society. He stimulates the reflection on the essence of the Church life at the universal, diocesan and parish level, and also its aims, structures, styles and methods.

The current clash of religious faith and secular culture is unsolvable without a permanent dialogue. Despite a superficial impression, the Church in its history does not have a tradition of a monologue, but a plurality within and a dialogue with the surrounding society and culture. At present, a permanent tension can be observed, both inside and outside of the Church, between the so-called progressive thinking and its opposite – a traditionalist or conservative approach. The debate about progressivism and traditionalism is very often sharp, which makes a critical dialogue impossible.

Summary

Under the liberal-democratic conditions, it is not expected that the Church would withdraw from a public debate, nor would it argue only from behind the imaginary walls, but would welcome an open, public space as an opportunity to testify about its topics, and thus get the public on its side. In order to do that, the Church should serve as an example for the secular society. To get these skills is necessary to discuss about the contents and methods of Faculties of theology by preparing their students. They are forming people they can be qualified for the discussion about the development and trends in the society. This need for continuously update of the academic theology is one of the results of the survey on catholic priests in Slovakia.

¹⁹ FRANZISKUS: *Evangelii gaudium*, Art. 16.

²⁰ *Ibid*, Art. 33.

Streszczenie

W warunkach liberalno-demokratycznych nie ma oczekiwania, że Kościół wycofa się ze sfery dyskusji publicznej, czy też że będzie przemawiać zza niewidzialnej ściany. Wprost przeciwnie, Kościół zamierza zaznaczać swoją obecność w przestrzeni publicznej, traktując to jako możliwość publicznego przedstawiania swoich idei, zachęcając społeczeństwo do ich zaakceptowania. Aby to osiągnąć, Kościół powinien służyć przykładem dla społeczeństwa świeckiego. W tym celu należy dokładnie omawiać poszczególne dziedziny nauk teologicznych, przygotowując studentów do wkroczenia w sferę publiczną celem odnoszenia się do trendów rozwijających się w społeczeństwie. Taka zatem potrzeba nieustannego rozwoju edukacji akademickiej w zakresie teologii jest wynikiem badań przeprowadzonych wśród katolickich księży na Słowacji.

Słowa kluczowe: teologia akademicka, rozwój społeczeństwa, dialog religijny

Key words: academic theology, society development, religion in dialogue

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Biogram

Doc. dr teol. Jozef Žuffa: Assistant professor w dziedzinie teologii duszpasterskiej na Wydziale Teologii Uniwersytetu w Trnawie; kierunki badawcze: zachowania religijne wśród społeczeństwa, rozwój usług socjalnych, programowanie duszpasterskie. E-mail: jozef@zuffa.eu