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Some Elements of the Relationship to the Holy as a Challenge for Contemporary Pastoral Activity

Nekateri elementi v odnosu do Svetega kot izziv za sodobno pastoralno dejavnost

Abstract: The pastoral activity of the Church represents a constant effort to actualize as much as possible of the determinants of the Christian concept of the Holy, which concerns the totality of the relationship to God. The Holy in the Christian milieu is understood precisely as the totality of the determinants of the Christian relationship to the divine. That is why the activity of the Church is essentially determined by the specific elements of the relationship to the Holy. These elements and determinants in today's pastoral and socio-cultural circumstances are marked by some special emphases that represent considerable challenges and sometimes serious problems for concrete pastoral activity. This work is determined by the theological-pastoral discernment of some challenging components of contemporary Christian frameworks of the relationship to the Holy. Based on this, the influence of the mentioned elements on pastoral activity is studied. The intention with which the paper was written is reflected in the effort of theological-pastoral discernment of elements that are important for the improvement of pastoral activity today. That is why part of the main goal of the research is to point out some distorted concepts and experiences of the Holy in contemporary cultural and pastoral contexts. At the same time, the paper tries to promote a correct attitude towards the Holy and following the more mature living of faith.

Keywords: Holy, pastoral activity, individualism, syncretism, culture, modernity

Povzetek: Pastoralna dejavnost Cerkve predstavlja njeno nenehno prizadevanje, da bi čim bolj udejanjila določila krščanskega pojma Svetega, ki zadeva celovitost odnosa do Boga. Sveto v krščanskem okolju razumemo prav kot celoto determinant krščanskega odnosa do Božjega. Dejavnost Cerkve zato bistveno določajo posebne prvine odnosa do Svetega. Te prvine in determinante v današnjih pastoralnih in družbeno-kulturnih okoliščinah zaznamujejo nekateri posebni poudarki, ki za konkretno pastoralno dejavnost predstavljajo precejšnje izzive in včasih tudi resne težave. To delo določa teološko-pastoralno razloče-

vanje nekaterih zahtevnih sestavin sodobnih krščanskih okvirov odnosa do Svetega. Na podlagi tega je proučen vpliv omenjenih elementov na pastoralno dejavnost. Prispevek je nastal iz prizadevanja za teološko-pastoralno razločevanje elementov, ki so pomembni za izboljšanje pastoralne dejavnosti danes. Zato je eden temeljnih ciljev raziskave opozoriti na nekatere izkrivljene koncepte in izkušnje Svetega v sodobnih kulturnih in pastoralnih kontekstih. Hkrati skuša prispevek spodbujati k pravilnemu odnosu do Svetega in zvestejšemu doživljanju vere.

Ključne besede: Sveto, pastoralna dejavnost, individualizem, sinkretizem

1. Introduction

Although the Holy is one of the basic terms for understanding man's relationship with the divine, its understanding in today's contexts is very challenging. In this paper, we limit ourselves to the study of those derivatives of the understanding of the Holy that represent a challenge for concrete pastoral practice. The concepts discussed here are not explored in detail in themselves, but the emphasis is placed on exploring their echoes on pastoral activity. Based on this, special emphasis is placed on the elements of possible improvement of pastoral activity. In this regard, we mainly investigate those elements of the topic that are more noticeable and influential in concrete action, while trying to recognize their origins and place them in the context in which they arise and from which they develop. The relevant components are primarily the problem of the individualistic understanding of the Holy in contemporary culture, then the problem of syncretism concerning the Holy, secularization of that relation with a pragmatic sign, and some obstacles that, from the same context, stand in the way of the modernization of pastoral activity today, etc.

2. Terminological Definitions

To be able to start discerning the meaning of some elements of the Holy in contemporary pastoral activity, it is first necessary to briefly deal with its semantic meaning. The term 'Holy' is very close to the term 'Sacred' and the term 'Saint', and some others are also related to it such as the term 'Numinous' (Stausberg 2017, 549). The meaning of these concepts, and especially the concept of the Holy, was dealt with in particular by phenomenology, especially starting from the first half of the twentieth century. Even then, the emphasis in the interpretation of the Holy (in the context of the understanding of religion) was essentially placed on the relationship with the divine reality (Jukić 1997, 54–55). That's how it becomes clear that the Holy predominantly denotes the dimension of relation. The second fact, which is important here, especially from a theological perspective, is the one that points out that the Holy is a designation of mediation whi-

ch, from the domain of creation, signifies a relationship with a divine reality that transcends the entire created reality, even the Holy as such (Eliade 2002, 10–11). Among some representatives of philosophical and theological thought who deal with this topic, there is no complete agreement about the exact meaning of the indicated expressions and their derivatives; moreover, there are entire debates about it. Nevertheless, viewed as a whole, the above initial interpretations of the term can be regarded as relevant (Shah 2011, 279–298).

Although they are related in meaning and often used interchangeably, there is a subtle difference between the terms 'Holy' and 'Sacred'. The meaning of these terms echoes some old expressions. Without going into the roots of meaning from other ancient languages, it should be pointed out that they are primarily etymologically related to some old words. The origins of the meaning of the expression can be found in the entire group of old words such as Old English *halig*, German *hailig*, etc. However, the echoes of the meaning are also related to ancient Roman expressions *sacer* and *sanctus* which come from the expression *sancire*. This term ultimately designates the activity of creating a favourable and correct environment for a relationship with the divine (Jukić 1997, 31). The echoes of the meaning of the mentioned terms are to some extent related to the general meaning of the term Holy since they indicate the characteristics of the relationship with the divine. Holy is thus more of a label for a relationship with the divine that also includes a personal dimension. It is a more used and somehow more general term. The term 'Sacred' indicates some details, sometimes predominantly (but not exclusively) in the sense of some objectified and objectifying elements in terms of the realm of the divine or connected with the divine. Holy represents one of the key markers of understanding of the divine, but also relations within the spectrum of religious reality. It could be described as the totality of links and relationships that include human, specifically cultural designations which mark and indicate man's connection with transcendent reality. In a certain sense, these terms point to that reality itself which always remains until the end unattainable, i.e. transcending for man (Ubbiali 2005, 1187–1188). Holy and the same can be said for Sacred, is often presented as the antithesis of the 'profane', i.e. as a form of understanding and behaviour that requires very specific forms of practice (1187–1189).

Concerning its most complete understanding and definition, it should be emphasized that the Holy is understood and experienced as a reality on which man depends, i.e. in which his salvation and fulfilment are hidden (Vorgrimler 2013, 642–643). Therefore, the experience of the dimension of the Holy includes many elements that reflect the complexity, richness, and dynamics of the human being. This may imply feelings of worship and holy fear, cultic relationship and penitential action, sacred places and objects, etc, which, once again, enter the realm of the Sacred too. Therefore, it is understandable that the Holy is often understood as a kind of event of a 'numinous' character that draws a person into the sphere of the divine. In particular, it should be mentioned that Holy as such enables contact with definitive reality, for which sacred ritual is the key symbolic form (Zuesse 2021, 295). In this way, the points of contact of the meaning of the

terms Holy and Sacred are reached again. That's why in this paper, the respective topic is primarily discussed in connection with the meaning of the term Holy, while in some segments the meaning of the term Sacred is also implied.

3. The Specificity of Christian Term Labels

The term Holy in the Christian milieu is essentially characterized by the components of the relationship with the heavenly Father, which was manifested by his Son Jesus Christ, and which the Church through the centuries recognized, deeply understood, and shaped in different ways in terms of the permanent relationship of man with God. Thus, the Holy in the Christian atmosphere took on very specific contours concerning those in other religious traditions. In this regard, it is important to emphasize the specificity of the Christian relationship towards the Holy. Here, therefore, the Christianly understood Holy is distinguished in the way of the totality of markers of that Christian relationship with divine reality under the specific aspect of Catholic-marked living and action. To understand this, it should be emphasized that the difference in terms highlighted above indicates the fact that Holy, obviously as a slightly more abstract concept, primarily denotes a personal and communal relationship with the divine, in the context of which the term is placed. The term Sacred is sometimes more related to some concrete objectifying elements strictly separated from the worldly, although this term is also an important sign of relation and action, i.e. holy acts. Holy means a gifted relationship that implies a personal testimony (Zuccaro 2002, 1463). In this sense, the meaning of the term 'Saint' is close to it. The gifted relationship indicates the New Testament truth about the source of holiness, which is God himself, and the possibility that he offers people to participate in it in Christ, through the action of the Holy Spirit (Auneau 2005, 1206).

In this sense, it is understandable that the understanding of the Holy is ultimately inseparable from the way of living, i.e. from the way of realizing the practice of faith, which necessarily includes the dynamism of the Church's pastoral activity. These dynamisms are numerous and quite complex, especially concerning the actualization of the relationship to God and the community as the primary themes of the actualization of the relationship to the Holy. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that this paper certainly does not exhaust the discernment of all modalities of pastoral action in terms of understanding and actualizing the reality of the Holy, or that of the Sacred, but only some key elements. Of these elements, those concerning folk piety as one of the most eminent and important expressions of faith and with it indicators of the understanding and living of the relationship to the Holy, are especially discerned (Mastantuono 2014, 34–42; Šimić 2019, 19–32). Some important components of regular pastoral activity in the parish community and some other forms of pastoral engagement whose dynamism is particularly interesting in terms of the respective topic are also discussed here. For it to be possible to treat this kind of theological-practical topic as comprehen-

sively as possible, it is necessary to treat it in the light of certain major challenges that are noticeable in various pastoral dynamics and to distinguish precisely these challenges under the prism of the relationship to the Holy. Challenging elements of the contemporary relationship to the Holy in the environment of Catholic practice often represent a burden on that same practice and overall pastoral activity. This is precisely the special reason for the research undertaken.

4. Holy Under the Prism of Individualism

Among the first related challenges that partially characterize the totality of the living by the faith the problem of an individualistic approach to the Holy (and then to faith as such) is certainly highlighted, which is especially emphasized in contemporary culture. This problem is certainly not the only one regarding the true living of faith, but it should be discerned theologically and pastorally at this point since all other pastoral problems highlighted here in some way either arise from it or are essentially connected with it. The individualistic tendency about the Holy in the Christian milieu is nothing new. In the Catholic world, such outgrowths of the relationship towards the Holy today are more the result of more recent pragmatic inclinations in the realization of the life of faith, while in some other Christian communities, they are more tied to beliefs based on a different relationship to God as such. In this regard, it should be pointed out that in the protestant tradition, this issue is linked to the very origins of the original Reformation criticism of the Catholic practice, which will very quickly lead to the predominance of an intellectualist and subjectivist way of understanding and acting in the religious field (Kovačević 2021, 176). However, most understandings of the Holy later came under a strong influence of enlightened and modern versions of the philosophical criticism of religion, and especially some offshoots of the process of secularization, desacralization, and anthropocentric criticism within which the criticism of the Holy as the antithesis of freedom, rights, and prosperity of the subject resonates strongly. All this is in some way connected with certain attempts to revalue the Holy but in an individualistic sense (177–178).

But what exactly is meant by an individualistic approach to the Holy in this context and what are the pastoral consequences of that? In this context, an individualistic approach to the Holy primarily refers to such a relation towards certain components of religious life that, in its practical implementation, narrows almost the entire horizon of concrete engagement to a single person and the question of her sanctification and salvation. In other words, religious practice, including ways and models of relationship to the Christianly understood Holy, strives to be actualized in the essentials under the prism of the subject's personal relationship with God, i.e. predominantly in the form of personal salvation. To some extent, this fact could obviously be connected with the effort to act in the way of adjusting

the divine sphere to the personal inclinations of the subject.¹ Such understandings are recognized in so many other challenges, especially in those discussed below.

4.1 Some echoes of the individualistic approach in practice

It is logical that among the first dimensions violated in such theological and practical constellations is communion. This dimension, within which one completes, fully designs, and ultimately realizes the fulfilment of life, is under attack from flawed and wrong attitudes and practices regarding the realization of the life of faith and the understanding and relationship towards the Holy. Although it must be admitted that the cry for a true and sincere interactional relationship within a religious community should often be recognized as a justified reaction to the predominance of the formalistic-bureaucratic mentality, it is important to note that the offshoots of such a cry are also frequently actualized from undisguised individualistic and useful motives, which at first glance may appear religiously justified (Mastantuono 2014, 38–39). Such an attitude towards Holy and religious practices as such are very easily placed under the almost exclusive dominance of the realization of the subject's simple and current needs in terms of solving emotional, health, family, professional, or other problems and needs. In this way, the relationship with the divine is almost completely placed under the prism of immediacy and concreteness, with the least possible use of abstract concepts or with the least significant mediation of any immediate authorities (39).

If therefore the reality of the Holy is understood predominantly in an individualistic way, the community as such will not play any special role in religious life. Its role will most often be seen as religiously beneficial, i.e. her pastoral elements will be taken and actualized by a subject, but without his active and conscious involvement in the dynamism of a true communion of faith. Moreover, sometimes the offshoots of individualistic tendencies in the understanding of the Holy will be presented in other, more destructive ways for the community. Namely, partly connected with some aspects of experiencing and realizing folk piety, and partly with some other aspects of acting from faith, there is an effort sometimes to distinguish the so-called 'Church of the people' which is born 'from below' and that one which is led by the hierarchy. This effort is most often connected with the inclination to reduce the relationship to the Holy to the needs and possibilities of understanding the largest part of the faithful, while, allegedly, more theologically sophisticated ways of understanding the Holy would still be left to the so-called more elite groups of believers (Mastantuono 2014, 37). Although it must be ad-

¹ In this context, the meaning of the answer to an important religious question can be mentioned as an illustrative example. This is the data from the last wave of the *European Values Studies* from 2017–2018 in Croatia, which, with regard to the question about one of the fundamental religious beliefs regarding the existence of a personal God, showed that there is still a fairly high percentage of respondents who believe in this truth (44%), but it showed also that the belief about the existence of "some kind of spirit" or "life force" is also significantly present (38%). If we take into account the fact that there is a considerable cognitive and then practical undefinedness of "some kind of spirit" or "life force" in people in general, and the truth that a personally understood God requires a fundamentally different relationship and practice of a believing subject, the possible level of individualistic tendencies in terms of understanding and experiencing the divine in general becomes more comprehensible (Baloban, Črpić and Ježovita 2019, 92).

mitted that the need for permanent education and catechesis concerning an ever more complete and mature understanding and living of faith is felt today as never before as an imperative of religious life, it must nevertheless be asserted that the above inclinations essentially represent a danger in the sense of introducing unnecessary and damaging split in the religious community. This community will always need a certain legitimate diversity in terms of the modalities and intensity of understanding and experiencing religious life, but this should not be an incentive for structural division of the community as such.

4.2 Regarding the Relationship to Suffering

The subject of suffering is very broad. It is linked here to the theme of religious individualism for one specific reason. Namely, today is very noticeable the effort to actualize the relationship with the Holy only or mainly as an attempt to solve the problem of suffering. That's why understanding the Holy in an individualistic sense especially concerns the relation of a religious subject to the reality of suffering. Although we do not go into the different dimensions of the theological discernment of the respective phenomenon here, it should be pointed out that, in the context of the individualistic relationship to the Holy, religious practice is often encouraged under the guise of personal confrontation with suffering only, i.e. in those situations in which, due to a motley spectrum of reasons, the believing subject faces suffering in one way or another. These reasons are mainly connected to the question of sickness and death, but there could be other reasons for suffering as well. But why is the question of suffering such a strong motive for individualistic inclinations regarding the relationship of a person to the Holy?

First of all, suffering is something that practically cannot be avoided by any person. Every person, in one way or another, is forced to face her suffering regardless of its causes. Although coping in less frequent cases implies the denial of suffering, this too can be taken as a way of coping with it. The elements of religious life, and with it the understanding and experience of the Holy, more often come into play under the prism of a strong tendency to face suffering. In other words, religious elements are most often excluded from their primary context of relationship with God and turned into only one of the ways of dealing with suffering, i.e. solving the problem of suffering on a personal level. Thus, in a way, a certain type of religious pragmatism is actualized, which takes from the respective area only what someone needs at a given moment. In the pastoral sense, this usually means neglecting the theology of the cross and looking for 'Christianity according to the subject'. In other words, that way the atmosphere and mentality of religious illusionism is created. This kind of utopian reality leaves very harmful consequences for both the person and the community (Vranješ and Seletković 2021, 90).

In addition to this, one should add here another rather challenging element of trying to actualize religious practice by people who have not been actualizing it for a long time or who have never seriously actualized it, and that's only because of facing suffering. In this way, a religious practice almost directly becomes just one of the elements of facing suffering, but most often almost completely outside the

context of deepening a true relationship with God. This very often hidden religious pragmatism, albeit in the context of the painful issue of suffering, very easily leads to great religious disillusionment and often to the abandonment of religious practice as an outcome. Fortunately, for many people, an encounter with the divine enables progress on the path of faith and life maturity. But, for many other people tendencies like these lead to a kind of spiritualism which is supported by the belief that all life's problems can be solved by spiritual means. This is especially dangerous in the face of illness since many people have this mentality to abandon medical treatment (Vranješ and Seletković 2021, 91). The harmfulness of such approaches in the practice of the sacraments should be emphasized here. Namely, in many cases, it is noticeable that the sacraments are sought only for the challenge of dealing with suffering and this can harm the true religious encounter with God in the respective celebrations. Wrong approaches to sacramental practice as well as unrealistic expectations lead to disappointment for many.

5. Holy in the Shadow of Syncretism

The echoes of individualistic inclinations regarding the understanding and realization of the relationship with the Holy are closely related to another challenge that is encountered more and more often in practice, which is the problem of religious syncretism. This phenomenon in itself is multi-layered and is presented in different ways. In principle, it means an attempt to uncritically connect concrete elements and characteristics of different religious (and sometimes philosophical) traditions, again most often from individualistic and utilitarian motives. These tendencies are related precisely to the area of the understanding of the Holy and the practice of relating to it (Vorgimlér 2004, 680).

For a deeper understanding of contemporary religious syncretism, it is necessary to highlight the fact that it is rooted not only in the complex efforts of individual religious subjects but also in some philosophical-sociological signs of recent currents of thought regarding the understanding of religion and the Holy as such (Devčić 2023, 110–111). Namely, from a philosophical and sociological point of view, especially from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, the Holy began to be strongly observed in typically immanent frameworks as an essential component of human culture, without special supernatural markers. This is one of the reasons for the actualization of syncretistic tendencies in certain religions, and then also in Christianity, which, both theoretically and especially at the level of practice, becomes a suitable arena for syncretistic behaviour (Kovačević 2021, 178). They are most often characterized by an effort to connect elements of Christian religious practices with those of other religions or worldviews, which leads to certain life syntheses, most often again on an essentially individual level. For the church community, this can represent a special pastoral challenge when people try to achieve the so-called double affiliation, i.e. belonging to both the Christian community and other communities or even sects (Devčić 2023, 110).

The problem of syncretistic influences in pastoral reality is very complicated. These influences are mostly recognizable on a personal level of life. However, sometimes they are also related to the activities of certain communities. Such influences are most often associated with different syncretistic forms of experiencing and expressing spirituality. Their offshoots usually branch out through different emotional states and inclinations through which many people try to experience the encounter with the divine more strongly. This is exactly how many people fall into the trap of reducing their religious life almost exclusively to emotional states (Vranješ and Seletković 2021, 89–90). Such efforts leave many painful traces on the lives of individual people. Although challenges of this type of concern are predominantly in the typically spiritual realm, their pastoral consequences are significant. Since the pastoral area is inextricably linked with the typically spiritual one, their mutual influences are always noticeable. That is why it is possible and necessary to point out the influences of syncretistic tendencies in pastoral activity as such.

6. Holy under the Prism of Superstition

Although religious syncretism and superstition are essentially related, here the latter problem is considered somewhat separately. Some of its syncretistic origins are self-evident, but superstition as such is a very specific and complex problem. It is, on the one hand, connected with religious syncretism, and on the other, it is its offshoot. However, it should be emphasized that superstition is not primarily a positive theological concept, but rather an indication of the understanding of wrong religious beliefs and practices. In this sense, it is essentially connected to the area of understanding the Holy in a broader sense (Vorgrimler 2004, 715). This phenomenon in itself is related to different periods of history, as well as to different beliefs and practices. It should be mentioned the connection of this phenomenon with a series of other phenomena that determine it, starting from esotericism, astrology, and occultism up to some derivatives of illuminist understandings.

Nevertheless, the presence of the phenomenon in Christian circles is not insignificant. Although in the medieval period the conflict between Christianity and the offshoots of phenomena characterized as superstition was significantly emphasized, even today it is possible to recognize expressions of similar phenomena differently. Their recognition in pastoral practice is usually somewhat blurred. But they affect the lives of so many people. Among the expressions of this phenomenon, the authors thus emphasize some dangers associated with a wrong interpretation of the Holy in the Christian milieu, such as the understanding and use of blessed things as talismans, misunderstandings related to the relics of saints and their intercessions, etc. (715). Among others, there is certainly the effort to understand and actualize the relation to the Sacred and Holy from the motive of a kind of superstitious exploitation.

The superstitious understanding of the Holy is to some extent always imbued with an overtone of magic. This means that superstitious motives for approaching

the Holy most often border on the understanding of magical and instrumentalist behaviour in the sense of human attempts to control the area of the Holy and use various elements from that area for current religious or other needs (Mastantuono 2014, 39). Although we do not want to enter into a broader interpretation of the phenomenology of superstition as such, for this work it is important to emphasize that even in recent times the Church has expressed itself about the influence of similar tendencies on some of the most practical areas of religious life, such as popular piety. The highest Church authority has long since noticed problems of this kind in religious practice and warned about them. This was done, for example, by Pope Paul VI regarding distortions of religiosity in the form of superstition in the context of speaking about the importance of folk piety (Paul VI 1975, n. 48). Theological writers and authors warn of similar phenomena today (Mastantuono 2014, 3–41; Šimić 2019, 196).

Today's pastoral context in some cases confirms some other elements and characteristics of a pragmatic magical and superstitious relationship to the realm of the Holy. Although their characteristics are always theoretical, their practical meaning is more than noticeable. First of all, it should be emphasized that superstitious behaviour as such is always to some extent an expression of certain religious anthropocentrism, often motivated by emotional exaggerations and sometimes by psychological deviations too (Mastantuono 2014, 41–42). However, especially related to magical inclinations, one more important element should be emphasized. It is about the way of understanding and relating to created reality and its positioning about the Holy. Thus, in some cases, it is possible to recognize the behaviour motivated precisely by an inappropriate attitude towards created reality, and especially towards natural elements that become the scene of religious manipulation (44). In this way, it becomes understandable that some magical inclinations represent motives for many people to experience and actualize some elements of Christian faith and practice. This in some cases becomes a serious pastoral and spiritual, and sometimes a psychological problem as well.

7. Secular Exploitation of the Holy

Secular understandings of the Holy, as well as its exploitation in a secular sense, in the beginnings and during the process of secularization, became a sign of different philosophical, and especially sociological patterns of relationship to this reality (Kovačević 2021, 179–182). That's why it can be argued that contemporary secular exploitation of the Holy is nothing new. Philosophical and sociological influences of this type on the concept of the Holy are numerous and complex. It should be emphasized that together they contributed to the creation of a social climate of the modern and postmodern secular basis of understanding and exploitation of the Holy. The influence of Durkheim's sociological thought and understanding can only be mentioned here. According to him, the Holy is reduced to a completely logical factor of social cohesion, which is related to man and society as such (Jukić

1997, 37–38). Based on this and a whole series of other sociological influences, the Holy found itself under the attack of various forms of secular exploitation, of which we are warning here about those that more closely characterized the relationship with pastoral practice.

The challenge of secular exploitation of the Holy today is most often related to the relationship with the political community and its influence. That is why the search for the correct way of the relationship between representatives of the church community and state structures, but also the political community in a broader sense, should be seen as an important pastoral issue. Certain representatives of political and social life try, sometimes openly, to exploit many elements of the Christianly understood Holy for political purposes. This problem is multifaceted and has different ramifications. One of the key ones is certainly the effort to restore, or else create a new form of secular power of the organized religion (Mardešić 2007, 99). It should certainly be added here that different political circles often try to drag believers and the Church itself, or at least some of its representatives, into their accusations of competition and power acquisition, marked mainly by populist tendencies, which is particularly noticeable in some European societies today (Lob-Hüdepohl 2015–2017, 53–54). This type of influence leads not only to the disruption of the spiritual and pastoral purposefulness of the Church's activities but can also leave numerous negative consequences on a broader social level. One of the most difficult consequences of negative secular approaches to the Holy is certainly the modern attempt to drag it into the clash of cultures (Gmainer-Pranzl 2015–2017, 66). Today, it is primarily manifested in terms of the attitude toward the migrant issue in Europe and toward some other issues.

Political and most often populist exploitation of the Holy area of the public space of society is very often connected to certain inclinations within religious communities. It is mostly (although by no means exclusively) about right-wing populist tendencies that manifest themselves differently in the public space. These inclinations are most often hidden under the effort to protect true values, of which only some are regularly proclaimed, while some others, also true values, are regularly written out. Emotional rhetoric and strong socio-historical connection with elements of national culture most often serve as powerful means of promoting such understood elements of the Holy. Mentionable efforts can be observed in different segments of the activity of religious communities, starting from public discourse to elements of concrete engagement in different areas of activity (Gmainer-Pranzl 2015–2017, 66).

8. In Line with the Need for Constant Modernization of Pastoral Activity

As already noted, misinterpretations of the Holy have quite concrete consequences for the Church's pastoral practice. In principle, the understanding of certain monolithic forms of practical action, and some rather rigid efforts to 'ossify' certain

changing forms of engagement, which, supposedly, should prevent 'unnecessary' and even 'harmful innovations' in pastoral activity, could initially be connected with a certain misinterpretation of the theological foundations of the practice of faith. Some of these interpretations are related to the belief that faith should be lived exclusively by a constant mental-spiritual return to the past, which in itself excludes a true commitment to changing reality for the better in the current moment, and above all, a true commitment to recognizing the value of new realities. This is about nostalgia for the return to the so-called 'perfect experience of the beginnings of time' or nostalgia for the original Holy, which takes on very special characteristics in Christianity (Mardešić 2007, 99–100).

Such, often unconscious and non-thematized settings are in many cases an obstacle to the modernization of the changing elements of pastoral activity as one of its key assumptions. In this sense, we should especially warn about certain traditionalist tendencies today, which should be distinguished from tradition as such. Such tendencies are most often found in attempts just to repeat the old models of pastoral activity, which in new circumstances have almost no effect (Vranješ 2011, 38–40). When you add to this the problem of language and the deficient formation (especially permanent) of so many pastoral workers, the extent of the problem becomes more than noticeable. These tendencies are most often an expression of clericalism and pastoral conformism, but cognitive and spiritual roots can always to some extent be linked to distorted understandings of the Holy.

9. Conclusion

This article is dedicated to the theological-pastoral discernment of the relationship between certain elements of the understanding of the Holy and the concrete pastoral activity of the Church. The author's intention is reflected in the attempt to recognize and research those elements of the understanding of the Holy that represent a challenge for contemporary pastoral practice. The study of these elements is based on certain terminological clarifications, primarily of the difference in the meaning of expressions Holy and Sacred. The indicated elements that are specifically studied here are the problem of the individualistic approach to the Holy, then the problem of religious syncretism, the magical approach to the Holy, and the mundane exploitation of the Holy. These challenges are connected with several others, of which the issue of violating the communal dimension of religious life, the wrong understanding of the subject of suffering, and the issue of permanent modernization of pastoral activity about some understandings of the Holy are highlighted in this paper.

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