



13

SCHRIFTEN  
DES OSTKIRCHENINSTITUTS  
DER DIÖZESE REGENSBURG

**Darko Anev / Dejan Borisov / Dietmar Schon (Eds.)**

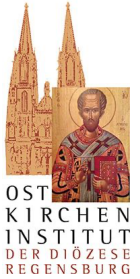
# Orthodoxy in Today's North Macedonia

**Historical experience and current challenges**

**VERLAG FRIEDRICH PUSTET**

Anev, Darko / Borisov, Dejan / Schon, Dietmar (Hg.)

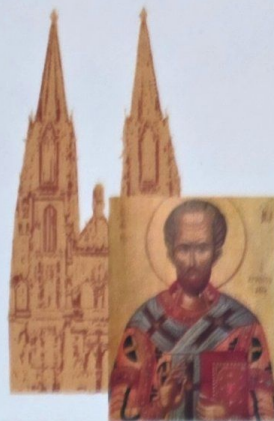
 VERLAG  
FRIEDRICH  
PUSTET



## Orthodoxy in Today's North Macedonia - Historical experience and current challenges

Die Orthodoxie hat den südlichen Balkan und insbesondere das Gebiet des heutigen Staates Nordmazedonien nachhaltig geprägt. Eingebettet in eine wechselvolle historische Entwicklung erwies sie sich als prägende Konstante. Das Erzbistum Ohrid avancierte zu einem überregionalen Bildungszentrum und gilt zu Recht als Träger einer orthodox geprägten Kultur. Damit verbunden sind vielfältige Erfahrungen, die bis heute Impulse zu geben vermögen. Der reichen Tradition und den zahlreichen Errungenschaften der regionalen Orthodoxie steht die bedauerliche Tatsache gegenüber, dass sie im Westen weitgehend unbekannt sind. Hier gilt es, eine Lücke zu schließen und fruchtbare Querverbindungen, auch zu Kirchen westlicher Tradition, aufzubauen. Ziel ist eine vertiefte Wahrnehmung der Geschichte und Gegenwart der regionalen Orthodoxie.

Православието изврши суштинско влијание врз јужниот дел на Балканот, а особено врз територијата на денешната држава Северна Македонија. Вгнездено во бурниот историски развој, тоа се покажа како трајна константа, која ја обликуваше културата. Охридската архиепископија прерасна во натрегионален образовен центар и со право се смета за носител на културата втемелена во православието. Со тоа се поврзани разновидни искуства, кои и денес можат да понудат силни импулси. Наспроти богатото наследство и бројните достигнувања на регионалното православие стои жалниот факт дека тие во голема мера му се непознати на Западот. Овде е неопходно да се пополни таа празнина и да се изградат плодни врски, вклучително и со црквите од западната традиција. Целта е продлабочено согледување на историјата и на современото живеење на регионалното православие.



13

SCHRIFTEN  
DES OSTKIRCHENINSTITUTS  
DER DIÖZESE REGENSBURG

**Darko Anev / Dejan Borisov / Dietmar Schon (Eds.)**

# Orthodoxy in Today's North Macedonia

**Historical experience and current challenges**

VERLAG FRIEDRICH PUSTET

# The Understanding of Missionary and Theological Mission in Johannine Theology

## Insights from Theophylact of Ohrid

*Darko Anev*

### 1. Introduction

One of the main themes of the Fourth Gospel, according to Theophylact of Ohrid, alongside ecclesiological unity and communion with God, is also the mission and action of the Christian in the world (mission as life and action). Examining the exegetical concept of Theophylact of Ohrid reveals his emphasis that Christ comes into the world, completes His work (mission), and returns to the Father. Christ, who descends from heaven and returns to the Father, is the Sent One, who simultaneously establishes the foundations of the missionary concept of Christian life (the missionary activity is rooted in the very act of being sent). Christ obediently submits to the Father, fulfilling the purpose of His mission into the world. Christ would never turn His gaze away from the mission given by the Father. This mission occupied every sphere of His activity.

For Theophylact of Ohrid, this concept of the Fourth Gospel serves as the foundation and model for understanding every action of the person who has read this Gospel.

The characterization of the missionary community in the Gospel according to John is a viable field of research within religious and theological studies. This study attempts to analyze the characterization of the missionary community in the Gospel according to John, depending on how the mission fulfills its role and theological significance for Christ's followers and for every individual. Emphasizing textual study and hermeneutical approaches, this research explores how the Gospel according to John portrays the community as mediators of God's message, and in

what way the community is tasked with spreading the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ throughout historical generations and even into the contemporary world.

A notable aspect of this study is the integration of the views of Theophylact of Ohrid, whose theology emphasizes mission as the expansion of the Christian community throughout the world while preserving unity as a principal factor in missionary work. Theophylact portrays the mission of the apostles and their followers (and even makes an appeal to every Christian) in the Gospel according to John as a continuation of Christ's own mission, with an emphasis on their life and action in the world.

Through a systematic analysis of selected passages and narrative interactions, this text attempts to explain the specific characteristics and strategies employed by the community for its missionary approach. Moreover, it aims to distinguish the theological themes that support the mission in the Gospel according to John, including the themes of salvation, redemption, and universal love. By situating the description of the community within the overall theological framework of the Gospel according to John and basing it on the understanding of mission presented by Theophylact of Ohrid, the study provides a comprehensive view of the missionary identity outlined in the Gospel.

## 2. Approaches to the Johannine theology of mission

When it comes to mission in the theological vocabulary of the Evangelist John, it must be mentioned that there is no systematically coded way of structuring missionary work, but rather the Evangelist refers to a theological narratology, which gradually aims at a full knowledge of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ and in His acceptance contains the missionary element as following and preserving the value of the gospel word through and in faith. In this way, it can be said that the Evangelist John creates a missionary view, which is realized in missionary work as a new existential state of living and accepting God.

One of the striking aspects of this study is the incorporation of the views of Theophylact of Ohrid, whose theology is profoundly mission-oriented. Theophylact presents the apostolic mission as a continuation of Christ's mission, emphasizing the spread of the faith and the expansion of the Christian community, while also addressing the challenges posed by false teachings concerning Christian life.

The Gospel of John, for Theophylact, serves as a guide for the mission of divine revelation, illuminating the path of faith and salvation for all who seek the depths of Christ's teaching. Through a careful account of the life, teachings, and redemptive ministry of Christ, the Gospel proclaims the eternal Word made flesh, who dwells among men to guide and elevate the world back to God.

In his interpretation, Theophylact emphasizes the intimate connection between Christ's mission and the commission given to His disciples. As Christ said, "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you" (John 20,21), Theophylact regards it as a sacred task for all believers to continue the divine mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the earth. At the same time, he highlights the true purpose of the disciples' missionary work: οὐχ ὥστε νεκροὺς ἐγείρειν καὶ δυνήμερις ποιεῖν, ἀλλ' ὥστε ἀφιέναι τὰ ἁμαρτήματα – *for He granted them a particular authority and spiritual grace, not to raise the dead and perform miracles, but to forgive sins*<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, Theophylact recognizes the Gospel of John as evidence of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, who empowers and encourages the faithful in their testimony to the truth. Through the indwelling of the Spirit, believers are called to emulate Christ's self-giving love and wholehearted service, thereby fulfilling the great task entrusted to them.<sup>2</sup>

Essentially, Theophylact understands the mission of the Gospel of John as a call to personal communion with the divine – a journey of faith guided by the revelation of God's boundless love and mercy in the person of Jesus Christ. His interpretation emphasizes that the mission of the community is the seamless continuation of Christ's own mission, deeply resonating with Johannine theology, which affirms that Christ chose and prepared His community to go out into the world and proclaim the Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

Theophylact's detailed exegesis of the Gospel often provides insight into the missionary strategies employed by Christ and His followers.<sup>4</sup> Theophylact's approach was deeply rooted in the patristic tradition, combining literal and allegorical interpretations to clarify the meaning of the text.

<sup>1</sup> Theophylact, Joh. 20 (Theopilactus, enn. in Io. ev. 20,19–23 [=PG 124, 236 D, 237 A]). In the following text, the abbreviation Migne, PG [volume], [page] will be used to reference Patrologia Graeca when citing the interpretations of Theophylact of Ohrid.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Migne, PG 124, 237 A.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 237 B.

His insights often delve into the spiritual and moral lessons of the Gospel, offering a deeper understanding of the narrative encounters involving Christ and His disciples, thus providing a rich source for interpreting the missionary motif in the Gospel of John.

### 3. The Evangelist John on faith as the entrance into the unity of missionary fellowship

John 3,16 is often considered a foundational verse with soteriological significance and is frequently used in evangelism. However, the theology of mission in John is not limited to John 3,16; for Theophylact of Ohrid, the theology of mission in John goes beyond the confines of John 3,16.<sup>5</sup>

In the theological landscape of the Evangelist John, mission takes on various dimensions: it includes the salvation of souls (redemption) and the growth of the Church (ecclesiological foundation), the quest for truth, and dedication to liberation and transformation. John's perspective on mission differs from that of the Apostle Paul's Epistles, as it does not focus on personal experience and growth in faith as found in the writings of the Evangelist John. While the ministry of the Apostle Paul emphasizes his own status and identity in bearing witness to Christ, the theological background of the Evangelist John extensively focuses on Jesus Christ Himself (both God and man).

While Christ, the incarnate Logos, directs attention to God the Father, John emphasizes Christ and His earthly ministry, which is deeply rooted in the heart of God the Father. Here, Theophylact summarizes the theological concepts of the evangelist:

- Christ did the will of His Father (John 4,34).
- Christ's words were not His own, but the Father's (John 14,24).
- Christ's teaching was not His own, but the Father's (John 7,16).
- Christ's works were not His own, but the Father's (John 14,10).
- Christ fulfills the purpose for which the Father sent Him (John 6,38).

The core of John's theology of mission is the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Theophylact of Ohrid emphasizes that the key revelation from the examination of Christ's image in the Gospel according to John is the emphasis that the fourth evangelist placed on the uniqueness

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Migne, PG 123, 1212 BC.

of Christ.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the evangelist Matthew, who begins with the genealogy of Jesus, or the evangelist Luke, who begins with the preparation of John the Baptist, the Evangelist John emphasizes the incarnation – portraying Jesus Christ as both fully divine and fully human, as stated in the verse “The Word became flesh” (John 1,14). For Theophylact, the primary focus regarding Christ is His identity and nature.<sup>7</sup> In the Gospel of John, those around Christ were not only curious about His identity but also made significant decisions based on His origin. Jesus’ disciples, the crowd, individuals, and even Jesus Himself were all involved in understanding who He was. It is crucial to emphasize that, in Theophylact’s exegesis, Christ’s persona and actions, along with His identity, serve as key motifs in understanding various themes, especially those related to the mission. Therefore, understanding His identity is fundamental to grasping the Evangelist John’s perspective on missionary endeavors. In other words, Theophylact concludes: some chose to betray Him, deny Him, or stone Him, while others accepted and followed Him (John 8,59)<sup>8</sup>. Christ used vivid imagery to describe Himself: bread, the light of the world, living water, and the shepherd. Therefore, Christ, in His

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1164 CD, 1165 A: “The Evangelist brings us such sublime dogmas, such extraordinary rules for life, and such wisdom, as can only be possible for one who proclaims from the very depth of the Holy Spirit and reveals as one who has just descended from heaven itself. Through the Evangelist, God Himself proclaims to the human race.”

<sup>7</sup> Theophylact of Ohrid does not forget, when it comes to identity in the Gospel of John, to create an apologetic stance and confront erroneous teachings in his interpretation; cf. Migne, PG 123, 1156 CD, 30–43c: “Καὶ ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο.” Εἰπὼν ὅτι τέκνα γινόμεθα Θεοῦ, εἰ θέλομεν, οἱ πιστεύσαντες εἰς Χριστὸν, ἐπιφέρει καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν τοῦ τηλικούτου ἀγαθοῦ. Τί γὰρ, φησὶ, προεξένησεν ἡμῖν τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ταύτην, βούλει μαθεῖν; Τὸ τὸν Λόγον σάρκα γενέσθαι. Ὅταν δὲ ἀκούσης, ὅτι “Σὰρξ ἐγένετο,” μὴ νομίσης ὅτι ἐξέστη τῆς οἰκειᾶς φύσεως, καὶ ἐτρέπη εἰς σάρκα· οὐ γὰρ ἂν Θεὸς ἦν, εἴπερ ἐτρέπετο καὶ ἡλλοιοῦτο· ἀλλ’ ὅτι μένων ὁ ἦν, ἐγένετο ὁ οὐκ ἦν. Ἀπολλινάριος δὲ Λαοδικεὺς ἐντεῦθεν αἵρεσιν συνεστήσατο. Ἐδογματίσε γὰρ ὅτι ὁ Κύριος καὶ Θεὸς ἡμῶν οὐκ ἀνέλαβε τὴν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου φύσιν τελείαν, ἤγουν σῶμα μετὰ ψυχῆς λογικῆς, ἀλλὰ σάρκα μόνην, ψυχῆς λογικῆς καὶ νοεῶς ἄμοιρον.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Migne, PG 124, 37 BC, 26–37bc: ἰκανῶς τε γὰρ αὐτοὺς ἐδίδαξε, καὶ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τοῦ Πατρὸς, καὶ τὴν ὄντως εὐγένειαν καὶ ἐλευθερίαν τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑπέδειξε, καὶ ὅτι μόνη δουλεία αἰσχρὰ ἢ τῆς τίας, καὶ ἀπλῶς, οὐδὲν τῶν δεόντων ἐνέλειπεν· αὐτοὶ δὲ καὶ λιθοβολοῦσιν αὐτόν. Διὸ καὶ ἀφίησιν αὐτοὺς, ὡς μηκέτι δεχομένους διόρθωσιν. Ἐπεσήμηγε δὲ, ὅτι οὗτοι οἱ λιθοβολοῦντες αὐτόν, αὐτοὶ ἦσαν οὐς εἶπεν ὁ εὐαγγελιστῆς, ὅτι εἰαν Ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν οὕτως ἄρα ἢ πίστις αὐτῶν οὐ πίστις ἦν, ἀλλὰ πρόσκαιρός τις καὶ ψυχρὰ συνδιάθεσις ἐπὶ τοῖς ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ λεγομένοις.

incarnation, is both the ultimate revealer and the revealed, embodying both the symbol and the reality of God.

Christ's missionary activity was intricately linked to His identity. For Theophylact, Christ revealed Himself to those around Him, embodying a paradox between this world and the world above. Although Christ lived in this world, He was not of it.<sup>9</sup> Theophylact does not forget to mention that the identity of Christ is also the Glory of God, and he directly connects the knowledge of that glory as the beginning of understanding the Kingdom of God (Theophylact in relation to the interpretation of John 3,3). However, how this glory is known is directly linked to spiritual rebirth ("Ὡστε καὶ σὺ, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἐγεννήθης οὐπω πνευματικῶς, διὰ τοῦτο οὐ βλέπεις ἐμὲ, τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ, καθὰ δεῖ, ἀλλὰ ταπεινὴν δόξαν ἔχεις περὶ ἐμοῦ<sup>10</sup>).

For Theophylact, the entire spiritual rebirth is the illumination of the soul (φωτισμὸν ἐμποιοῦσα τῇ ψυχῇ), and it represents an island and a treasure for every person with the newly acquired existence (γέννησις).<sup>11</sup>

When it comes to the Kingdom of God in the Gospel of John, Theophylact immediately connects it with the time of Jesus' interrogation by Pontius Pilate. Jesus affirms His reign and kingdom, saying: "ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου· εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἦν ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ, οἱ ὑπηρέται οἱ ἐμοὶ ἠγωνίζοντο [ἂν] ἵνα μὴ παραδοθῶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις· νῦν δὲ ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐντεῦθεν" (John 18,36).<sup>12</sup> This statement about His kingdom fulfills the Old Testament prophecies and introduces a new, previously unrecognized form of kingdom. His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension were confirmed by witnesses, demonstrating the dismantling of the existing royal juridical order, while simultaneously revealing the synagogal juridical concept of the complete process of condemnation.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Migne, PG 123, 1204 AB, 14–17ab: Ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω σοι, ὅτι καὶ σὺ, καὶ ἄλλος ὁστισοῦν, εἴαν μὴ ἄνωθεν καὶ ἐκ Θεοῦ γεννηθέντες, τὴν ἀξίαν δόξαν περὶ ἐμοῦ λάβοιτο, ἔξω τῆς βασιλείας ἐστέ.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 24–27b.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Regarding John 18,36, Theophylact particularly emphasizes the conversation between Christ and Pilate. In this context, Pilate's invitation to speak privately with Christ is explained as a puzzling uncertainty and an attempt to learn something new from Christ about the new kingdom, which Pilate was unable to understand. See more extensively in Migne, PG 124, 257 BC, 25–28b: Ἐφώνησε τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὁ Πιλάτος κατ' ἰδίαν, ἐπειδὴ μεγάλη μὲν περὶ αὐτοῦ ὑπόληψις ἦν ἐβούλετο δὲ μαθεῖν ἀκριβῶς ἀπηλόγαμνος τοῦ θορύβου τῶν Ἰουδαίων.

Theophylact emphasizes Christ's authority in empowering His disciples through the giving of the Holy Spirit, transforming them from *this world* into bearers of the new testimony. Therefore, John's theology of mission is not just about saving lost souls, but simultaneously calls believers to discover the divine nature of God, inviting disciples and followers to come and see, to know God, and to become a community with God, living in this world. For Theophylact, he underscores that the driving force behind the missionary activity and portrayal of the Evangelist John is belonging to a kingdom that is not rebellious and does not fall under manipulative Jewish influence, and at the same time, this kingdom does not strive to fight against Pilate's kingdom.<sup>13</sup> For Theophylact, the actions of man are a call to the primordial beginning of humanity and unity with God, i.e., the original existentiality, and in this relation, he describes being born from above in the Gospel of John.<sup>14</sup>

Theophylact emphasizes that Christ's status as one who is sent does not imply acting independently. He was not merely sent as the supreme messenger, but as the incarnate message itself<sup>15</sup>, while those who heard and saw this message serve as witnesses and heralds. In the act of sending lies the very foundation of missionary work, which Theophylact fully supports on Christological grounds.<sup>16</sup>

Theophylact adds by saying: Christ instructed His disciples and entrusted them with missionary work (“καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ πέμπω ὑμᾶς” [John 20,21b]). The disciples were sent to proclaim the Christ-centered Gospel, a mission initiated by the Holy Spirit. By receiving the Spirit, the disciples would become witnesses of Jesus (John 15,26–27). Theophylact does not forget that at the heart of witnessing

<sup>13</sup> Migne, PG 124, 257 D, 54–59d: Ὡστε μὴ δέδειθί με ὡς τύραννον καὶ στασιαστήν. Εἰ γὰρ ἦν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἡ βασιλεία μου, οἱ ὑπηρεταὶ οἱ ἐμοὶ ἂν ἠγωνίζοντο, ἵνα μὴ παραδοθῶ. Ἐνταῦθα δὲ δηλοῖ καὶ τῆς παρ’ ἡμῖν βασιλείας τὸ ἀσθενές, ὅτι ἐν ὑπηρεταῖς ἔχει τὴν ἰσχύον· ἡ δὲ ἄνω αὐτάρκης ἐστίν.

<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Migne, PG 123, 1204 C, 36–44c: Πῶς δύναται ὅπερ ἀπιστίας ἐστὶ σημεῖον. Ὅπου γὰρ πίστις οὐκ ἐστίν, ἐκεῖ τὸ Πῶς τίδε; καὶ Διὰ τί τόδε; Διὸ καὶ καταγέλαστα τὰ τοῦ Νικοδήμου ῥήματα φαίνονται. Οὐ γὰρ ἐνενόησε γέννησιν πνευματικὴν, ἀλλὰ γαστρὸς σωματικῆς μέμνηται. Ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἠκουσετὸ. Ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν, ἐνόμισετὸ ἄνωθεν οὕτω λέγεσθαι, ἀντὶ τοῦ, ἐξ ἀρχῆς, ἐκ δευτέρου ὥστε εἶναι τὸ λεγόμενον τοιοῦτον.

<sup>15</sup> See further in Migne, PG 123, 1152 C, 40–42c: ὁ αὐτὸς καθ’ ὑπόστασιν ἦν ὁ τε τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγος, καὶ ὁ τὰ πάθη.

<sup>16</sup> See further *ibid.*, 1152 ABCD, 45–47d: Ὡς μέγα καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐννοίαν ἀνθρωπίνην, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτόν, δύο ταῦτα κερδάνῃ ἐν μὲν, τὸ μὴ ἀπολέσθαι ἕτερονδὲ, τὸ καὶ ζῶν ἔχειν, καὶ ταύτην αἰώνιον.

and mission lies the keeping of the word of the apostles, that is, of the ones sent (“The Paraclete will bear witness about Me. He, says [Theophylact], is a trustworthy witness” – ὁ Παράκλητος, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ. Αξιόπιστος, φησὶ, μάρτυς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν<sup>17</sup>). Thus equipped, the disciples are sent to continue Jesus’ work in the world through words and deeds. Furthermore, the mission of the disciples is sustained by the ongoing empowerment and guidance of the Holy Spirit, as emphasized in John 20,22, which highlights the role of the Spirit in the apostolic mission. Thus equipped, the disciples are sent to continue Jesus’ work in the world through words and deeds.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the mission of the disciples is sustained by the ongoing empowerment and guidance of the Holy Spirit, as emphasized in John 20,22, which highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in the apostolic mission.

In his interpretation, Theophylact emphasizes that the disciples, along with all who adhere to Christ’s teaching, become part of the group that is sent, serving as witnesses from the very beginning (being with Me from the beginning – ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ὄντες μετ’ ἐμοῦ<sup>19</sup>). He highlights their destination by referring to Christ’s own sending by the Father, showing that the disciples are likewise sent into the world and that they themselves are witnesses. (Τοῦτο δὴ τὸ Πνεῦμα μάρτυς ἔσται τοῦ κηρύγματος.<sup>20</sup>) This emphasizes that the world serves as the arena for missionary efforts aimed at fostering communion with God.

#### 4. Theological implications of the mission in Johannine christology

The directive of the Evangelist John regarding love serves not only to promote unity within the community in an ethical and ecclesial sense but also, from a mission-oriented perspective, to attract new members into the unity of faith. This expands the interpretation of Christ’s act of foot washing in John 13, in terms of Christology and Ecclesiology. Theophylact does not fail to address the symbolic gesture of Christ washing the feet of the

<sup>17</sup> See further in Migne, PG 124, 204 BCD, 18–20b.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 22–25b: “Ὡστε ὑπὸ τοῦ Πνεύματος ἐλεγχόμενοι, ὅτι ἀναπολόγητα ἁμαρτάνουσι, παραδέχονται τὸ κήρυγμα. Καὶ ὑμεῖς δὲ μαρτυρεῖτε, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ὄντες μετ’ ἐμοῦ, ὅ ὅτι καὶ λόγοις καὶ ἔργοις ἀπροφασίστους αὐτοὺς ἐποίησα.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 23b.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 205 D, 53–57d.

apostles, but rather shows how Christ's mission leads to the establishment of a community of disciples characterized by love, which serves as a place where God's love can be constantly experienced and realized, even in the most self-denying actions of humanity. The disciples, through a practical example, are entrusted with the task of demonstrating love and humility in the world. They share an immediate connection with Christ as members of the community of disciples, while partaking in Christ's condescending glory.<sup>21</sup> The metaphor of the harvest, already highlighted in John 4,35–38 and John 12,24–26, emphasizes how the mission of the followers is parallel to the mission of Christ. In Theophylact's interpretation, Christ's sacrifice is noted in relation to the metaphorical statement as a necessary consequence for the increase in the number of Christ's followers.<sup>22</sup> The metaphor of the vine further clarifies how Jesus' followers must contribute to the expansion of the community of disciples even after His departure, with the pre-Easter community serving as a model for the post-Easter community. Theophylact does not fail to mention in his interpretation of the vine metaphor that it is taken as an appeal for the missionary work of the apostles, and emphasizes that "the work of the vineyard represents a context of trials in which humanity is tested."<sup>23</sup>

A significant aspect of the mission in John's theology, emphasized by Theophylact of Ohrid, is the missionary discourse from John 4,1–26. He notes that although this dialogue addresses important missionary themes, such as communion (v. 9 and 20) and the concept of the *gift of God*, these themes are not extensively developed. Theophylact highlights the metaphor of the mission presented in Christ's encounter with the Samaritan woman and her subsequent engagement with the Samaritans in the city, portraying the mission of the disciples as similar to the harvest, where

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 148 A, 2–4a: οὐδὲ ἐλαττωθήσεται ἡ δόξα αὐτοῦ, νίπτοντος τοὺς πόδας τῶν μαθητῶν.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Migne, PG 123, 1248 BC, 24–31bc: Αἰνιγματωδῶς δὲ φθέγγεται πολλάκις ὁ Κύριος προσεκτικωτέρους ποιῶν τοὺς ἀκροατὰς, καὶ διεγείρων αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ἐρωτῆσαι καὶ μαθεῖν τὸ συγκεκαλυμμένως λεγόμενον. Βρῶσιν δὲ ὀνομάζων τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίαν, διδάσκει τοὺς μαθητὰς, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ, ὅτε δὴ χειροτονηθῆεν διδασκαλοὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης, περὶ ἐλάττονος ποιοῖντο τὴν σωματικὴν βρῶσιν, ὅλην τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν πρὸς τὸ σῶζειν ἀνθρώπους μετενέγκοντες. See further *ibid.*, 1249 A, 8–10a: Καθάπερ γὰρ οἱ στάχυες, ὅταν λευκανθῶσιν, ἔτοιμοι εἰς θερισμὸν, οὕτω καὶ οὗτοι πρὸς σωτηρίαν εἰσὶ παρεσκευασμένοι.

<sup>23</sup> Migne, PG 124, 193 BCD, 53–54d: Ἐπεὶ γὰρ αἱ θλίψεις δοκοῦσιν εἶναι, οἷον ὁ λέγουσιν οἱ γεωργοὶ; *ibid.*, 195 A, 1–3a: δεῖκνυσιν αὐτοῖς ὁ Κύριος, ὡς διὰ τῶν θλίψεων γονιμώτεροι γενήσονται, ὥσπερ καὶ διὰ τῆς κλαδείας τὰ κλήματα.

both the sower and the reaper rejoice together (v. 35–38). For example, in John 4 (the encounter with the Samaritan woman), Theophylact explains how this encounter signifies the overcoming of ethnic and religious divisions, a key element of the missionary endeavor in the Gospel according to John.<sup>24</sup>

Theophylact's exegesis of this passage reveals a nuanced understanding of the encounter between Christ and the Samaritan woman. He notes that, based on appearance, clothing, body posture, and conversation, the Samaritan woman identified Christ as a Jew. She recognizes that Jews do not associate with Samaritans, rather the opposite. Furthermore, Theophylact observes that the woman, considering Christ's actions to be contrary to established norms, attempts to correct what she perceives as an unlawful interaction<sup>25</sup> (John 4,9).

Theophylact offers a detailed narrative analysis of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. In John 4,7, he emphasizes that the Samaritan woman is engaged in an everyday, existential task – drawing water, necessary for sustaining life. In v. 10, Theophylact connects this action with the gift of God that Christ offers her, symbolized as life-giving water (v. 11). This gift symbolizes a life enriched with new values, culminating in v. 14, where Theophylact emphasizes that this new existence is personally granted by Christ and is equivalent to eternal life. Theophylact highlights this new existential reality as a personal and communicative relationship with God.<sup>26</sup>

Theophylact further explains that the Samaritan woman initially associates this eternal life with ritualistic practices and the geographical location of Jerusalem (the temple). He notes that Christ's missionary action here serves to overcome legalistic limitations, revealing a new existence characterized by action in spirit and truth. Theophylact notes that the Samaritan woman, lacking a clear recognition of Christ's identity, places her hope in the expected Messiah, only to receive direct revelation from Jesus, thereby confirming a personal relationship. This mo-

<sup>24</sup> See more extensively in Migne, PG 123, 1225 CD, 30c–49d.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1232 BC, 24–30b: Ἀπὸ τοῦ σχήματος καὶ τῆς στολῆς ἴσως, καὶ τῆς ἄλλης περὶ τὸ σῶμα διαθέσεως, καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς ὁμιλίας, ἐνόμισεν ἡ Σαμαρεῖτις Ἰουδαῖον εἶναι τὸν Κύριον διὸ καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν λέγει Πῶς σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὢν, καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς. Οὐρα δὲ πῶς διεσκεμμένον ἦν τὸ γύναιον. Εἰ γὰρ ἔδει φυλάξασθαι, τὸν Κύριον ἔδει, οὐκ ἐκείνην. Οὐ γὰρ εἶπεν, ὅτι Ἰουδαίους οὐ συγχρῶνται Σαμαρεῖται, ἀλλ' Ἰουδαῖοι Σαμαρείτας οὐ προσίενται. Ἀλλ' ὁμως ἡ γυνὴ οὐδὲ οὕτως σιγᾶ, ἀλλ' οἰηθεῖσα τὸν Κύριον πρᾶγμα παρά νομον ποιεῖν, διορθοῦται τὸ μὴ κατὰ νόμον γινόμενον.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 31–40c.

ment, as Theophylact observes, marks the beginning of the missionary seed of personal relationship and the affirmative identification of Christ. In other words, Theophylact implicitly points out that identity and the knowledge of Christ form the foundation for missionary implementation in the Christian life. Concerning the living water, Theophylact categorically affirms that it is the ennobling of the human soul.<sup>27</sup>

Theophylact identifies another key aspect of Christ's missionary activity in His conversation with His disciples in John 4,34–39, while also noting that the conversation with the Samaritan woman constitutes the initial planting of the seed for missionary work and is connected to God's omniscience.<sup>28</sup> He reflects on John 4,42, where the people, after hearing and recognizing Jesus as the Savior, experience an awakening of faith. Theophylact emphasizes that missionary work is essentially the communication of the words heard and understood, which in turn awakens faith and confirms salvation. This interpretation highlights the transformative power of Christ's words and their role in the mission of spreading the faith.<sup>29</sup>

In relation to John 4,35, Theophylact notes Ἐπάρατε οὖν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑμῶν – referring to the rational and spiritual eyes – to perceive the multitude of Samaritans and their souls, disposed and ready for faith. Theophylact further emphasizes the importance of listening to the spoken word with the heart, as it is the source of inspiration for mission.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, Theophylact describes the spoken words of the Gospel as imbued with an innate attractiveness that inspires contemplation and a readiness to embrace a new existence through missionary action in Christ's word.

## 5. Love as the central theme of Christ's Farewell Discourse

The teachings of Theophylact of Ohrid offer valuable insights into the centrality of love in Christ's Farewell Discourse, particularly concerning

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1232 BCD, 41–42d: Τὴν χάριν δὲ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ὕδωρ φησὶν εἶναι, διότιτε καθαίρει καὶ πολλὴν παρα ψυχὴν χορηγεῖ.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 45–50d: Ὁ δὲ Κύριος, γινώσκων ὅτι ἡ Σαμαρεῖτις μέλλει ἐπισπάσασθαι πᾶσαν σχεδὸν τὴν πόλιν πρὸς αὐτὸν, καὶ ὅτι πιστεύσωσιν αὐτῷ οἱ Σαμαρεῖται.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1252 AB, 16–18a: ὄθεν καὶ πολλῶ πλείους αὐτῶν ἐπίστευσαν διὰ τὴν διδασκαλίαν αὐτοῦ.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1252 D.

the condition of the disciples in the post-Easter period. Just as Christ communicates with His followers about His inevitable departure and the subsequent era of the disciples in the passages spanning chapters 13 to 17, Theophylact's interpretations shed light on the significance of love in fostering a lasting community between Christ and His disciples after Easter. His commentary provides a deeper understanding of how love serves as a fundamental element in maintaining the spiritual bond between Christ and His followers. At the beginning of the meal scene, it is noted that love constitutes the central content of Christ's mission (John 13,1-3; cf. 3,16-17).<sup>31</sup> Theophylact points out that love is intended to dwell within Christ's followers (John 17,20-26). The various relationships between God, Christ, and His followers are characterized as relationships of love. God loves Christ (John 14,31; 15,9; 17,23-24, 26), and Christ loves the Father and abides in His love (John 14,31; 15,10). Christ loves His own (John 13,1-34; 14,15-21; 15,9-12). Theophylact emphasizes that Christ's love is the perfection of unity. Christ's love for His own corresponds to God's love for Christ (John 15,9). The concept that God Himself loves the disciples is found in John 14,21-23; 16,27; and 17,23,26. The disciples' love for Christ is discussed in John 14,15,21. 23,28; and 16,27. Christ calls His followers to abide in His love (John 15,9-10), just as Jesus abides in the Father's love (John 15,10). Theophylact explicitly states in his interpretation of John 15,9 that love is an inexhaustible source of unity.<sup>32</sup>

Theophylact further emphasizes that Christ's followers are given the commandment of mutual love, which is to correspond to Christ's love for them (John 13,34-35; 15,12; cf. 15,17). Through their mutual love for one another and the abiding of the love of God and Jesus within them, God's love remains present even after Christ's departure within the community of His followers, visible to the world and recognizable as the driving force of Christ's mission (John 14,14-24; 17,21-26). According to Theophylact, the foundation of the missionary aspect in the Gospel of John begins with Christ, who brings God's love into the world and aims at its salvation (cf. John 3,16-17; 17,23 - these three verses from John's

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1212 B, 25-28b: τοὺς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἄλλοι εἰσὶν αὐτοῦ ἴδιοι, Ἀβραὰμ καὶ οἱ πατριάρχαι, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐξεδήμησαν γὰρ ἐντεῦθεν. Τούτους δὴ "τοὺς ἰδίους" αὐτῷ τοὺς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ, τελείαν ἀγάπην εἰς αὐτοὺς ἐνεδείξατο.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Migne, PG 124, 197 C, 45-46b: Ὡσπερ οὖν οὐκ ἐλαττοῦται ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκ τοῦ πάσχειν ἐμὲ, οὕτως οὐδὲ ὑμεῖς ἦττον ἀγαπᾶσθε ὑπ' ἐμοῦ, κὰν ὑμᾶς.

Gospel form the basis for Theophylact's missionary theological reflection). Thus, the coming into the world as an expression of the greatest divine love for humanity constitutes the foundation of the missionary aspect in Johannine theology. According to Theophylact, coming out of love and coming to realize the fullness of humanity within a community of love is a characteristic that the community must extend to the world.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, for Theophylact, missionary work is essentially the encouragement of community within a community of love. In this mission of Christ, the community of followers is also included during the Last Supper. Christ's final prayer integrates the relationships of love into a comprehensive vision: based on the love between the Father and the Son, which existed before the creation of the world, the mutual relationship of love and immanence between God, Jesus, and the disciples is described (John 17,21–26). This relationship leads to the inclusion of new members into the community of love (John 17), where each person within this missionary sphere is called to come to faith and knowledge (John 17,21,23; corresponding to John 13,35; 14,31).

For Theophylact, after Christ's departure, the missionary work of the community of followers is to be the place where the world can experience love toward God. John 15,12 and 13,34 are both cited and reinterpreted. John 15,1–17 constitutes the first part of Christ's long monologue (John 15,1–16,4a), addressing the situation of his followers after his departure: their lasting relationship with Christ and God (15,1–8), the fulfillment of their mission (John 15,12–17), and the world's reaction (John 15,18–16,4a). Considering the missionary theological significance of the commandment of love, the meaningful connection among these three aspects becomes evident: by faithfully abiding with Christ (John 15,1–8), they remain within the community of love with God and Jesus, thereby fulfilling Jesus' command (John 15,9–11) and thus accomplishing their mission (John 15,12–14). As a result, they are recognizable in the world as messengers of Christ (John 13,35) and will experience both acceptance (John 15,20c; cf. 13,20) and rejection just as Christ himself was accepted and rejected by the world (John 15,18–16,4a; cf. 13,16).

The central statement in Chapter 15, as interpreted by Theophylact, is particularly striking. He emphasizes love as the foundation and guiding principle, serving as the normative framework for the formation of the

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 240 BC: τὸν Πατέρα φησὶ διὰ αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι ἐν τοῖς μαθηταῖς, ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος, ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας.

missionary theological background of the Evangelist John. Theophylact especially highlights John 15,16, pointing out that missionary work is a divine election rather than an independent human decision. It is a lasting, active endeavor that bears – and will continue to bear – fruit of enduring value.<sup>34</sup>

For Theophylact, missionary work acquires yet another essential characteristic: it is a matter of divine election, which demands a personal response to the call. He emphasizes that the chosen missionary is never alone on this journey and receives continuous support from God. In every situation, the missionary can seek help from God in the name of Christ (John 14,13–14; 15,16; 16,23–24). Concerning chapter 14 of the Gospel of John, Theophylact stresses that Christ comforts (*παραμυθεῖται*) His disciples and appeals to them: Christ's departure to the Father is not an end, but the beginning of glory; the disciples are empowered with strength to perform great works, and prayer in Christ's Name becomes an effective and constant assurance in the missionary activity of the disciples. This can be briefly summarized as follows:

- παραμυθούμενος αὐτοὺς – encouragement;
- οὐκ ἀφανίζεται μετὰ τὸ θανεῖν – permanence and continuity; Christ does not disappear after death;
- ἀλλὰ μένει ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκείας ἀξίας – Christ remains in His own dignity and affirms His unity with the Father;
- ὅσα ἂν βουλευθῆτε, δώσω ὑμῖν – perseverance and encouragement (here Theophylact confirms that missionary work is a continuity of obedience and assurance).<sup>35</sup>

Theophylact interprets verse 16 as a confirmation of the security and divine protection necessary for effective missionary work, emphasizing the need for continuous, active engagement: *I appointed you to go*. This interpretation highlights the theological foundation of mission as authorized and supported by God. Theophylact understands the missionary commissioning of Christ's disciples as an act of friendship, representing the highest trust in their obedience. Within this friendship, Theophylact makes sure to mention that the words by which the disciples are authorized are not only Christ's words but preserve the Trinitarian structure (ὁ Πατήρ δίδωσι δεξιὰ δὲ αὐτοῦ ὁ Υἱός) within his theological interpretation. Thus, Theophylact reaffirms that salvation is a gift, not an achievement.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 17c–24c.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 200 D, 1a–49d.

ment. Employing an agricultural metaphor (Ἔθηκα ὑμᾶς, τουτέστιν, Ἐφύτευσα ὑμᾶς), Theophylact explains that Christ's followers are not only chosen but also rooted, placed upon firm spiritual ground, and are to continually grow and bear the fruit of salvation. Additionally, the missionary gift is the word (Καθαροί ἐστε διὰ τὸν λόγον, ὃν λελάληκα ὑμῖν), which purifies, and in this purification lies the readiness for action and the acceptance of Christ.<sup>36</sup>

Until His departure, Christ preserves His followers so that they may not fall (John 17,12); now He entrusts them to God's care (John 17,15). God must safeguard them in the world so that they may fulfill their mission there (John 17,18; cf. 15,26–27). The mutual relationship of love among the disciples becomes the place where love for God and for Jesus remains present in the world even after Christ's departure (John 17,18–21). Theophylact emphasizes that Christ speaks from a forward-looking perspective; it does not mean He is departing immediately, but He speaks in advance to announce His departure, doing so with full knowledge of the disciples' condition, entrusting them to the Father and integrating them into God's divine plan. The purpose of missionary protection for the disciples, according to Theophylact, lies in the unity of their reasoning (τὸ ἐν φρονουῖντες) and their will (τὸ ἐν θέλοντες), highlighting that the highest expression of unity is achieved through love and harmony (Ἡ ὁμόνοια ... τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν φυλακτήριον – *harmony ... is the true safeguard*).<sup>37</sup>

For Theophylact, the symbolic language has both messianic and misiological significance. The Evangelist John presents these profound symbols in his portrayal of the person of Christ. The theology of the Evangelist John uses symbolic language to convey deeper truths along with tangible realities. He presents vivid images such as "I am the bread of life" (John 6,35), "I am the light of the world" (John 8,12), "The gate for the sheep, the good shepherd" (John 10), and "The resurrection and the life" (John 11,25–26). Theophylact of Ohrid observes that in the end, all of these symbols point to Christ as the authentic God and the source of life. For Theophylact, it is particularly important to understand faith as a relationship in the understanding of Christ's identity and words, thus establishing the foundation of the mission in the world as a community, since unity with God, according to Theophylact's interpretation, is a condition for spiritual invincibility.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 201 AB, 1a–25b.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 231 CD, 20c–53d.

Theophylact further elaborates on the role of the disciples in the mission. He suggests that while the disciples play a crucial role, their involvement is inherently secondary to the unique mission of Christ. However, it is of essential importance to recognize that in the missionary activity of the disciples, they undergo a process of promised renewal and continuous support from God, as emphasized throughout the narrative of John.

Furthermore, the role of the Holy Spirit holds significant importance in the Johannine theology of mission. The Evangelist John uses it four times (John 14,16,26; 15,26; 16,7) to reference Christ's description of the Holy Spirit, who will continue His service to the disciples.<sup>38</sup>

Theophylact further elaborates: The Spirit serves as a witness, strengthens the believers, and purifies them. For Theophylact, the Holy Spirit is the guardian and guide of the missionary activity of each believer in the community, and he emphasizes the ongoing transformative work of the Spirit in the lives of believers as they engage in the mission and act according to the Gospel. Theophylact clearly points out that sorrow, fear, and anxiety are not expressions of love for Christ,<sup>39</sup> standing firm in the words of the Gospel is persistence and mission. In other words, for Theophylact, fear is insecurity and a true indicator of whether one truly loves Christ or not.

Theophylact takes another step further in his interpretation and mentions that the Spirit, as the Comforter, is the One who will enlighten the minds of the apostles. In this way, he also presents the foundation of missionary work as enlightening.<sup>40</sup> He also explains the incapacity due to the fear of the disciples of Christ to retain all that was left to them by Christ (ἡ διὰ τὸ νοθεῖς τοῦ λογισμοῦ οὐκ ἠδυνήθησαν κατασχεῖν τῆ μνήμη οἱ ἀπόστολοι), because the act of missionary work is the fullness of remembrance (τῆ μνήμη) which was passed down as a legacy to the apostles for future generations.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 180 ABCD.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *ibid.*: Οὐ τοῦτο, φησὶν, ἔστιν ἀγαπᾶν με, σκυθρωπάζειν, καὶ ταραττεσθαι, ἀλλὰ τὸ πείθεσθαι τοῖς παρ' ἐμοῦ λεγομένοις [...]. Πῶς οὖν, μὴ φυλάσσοντες τὴν ἐντολὴν μου, ἀλλὰ φοβούμενοι τὸν θάνατον, λέγετε ἀγαπᾶν με; – "This, He says, is not love for Me to be sorrowful and troubled [...] but to obey the words I speak. How then, if you do not keep My commandment but fear death, can you say that you love Me?"

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 188 CD.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, D.

For Theophylact, missionary work is remembrance in constant continuity for the life and work of Christ. It is a form of testimony alongside the Holy Spirit: *Θαρρεῖτε οὖν· οὐ γὰρ ἀμάρτυρον ἔσται τὸ κήρυγμα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα συνεπιμαρτυρήσει σημείοις καὶ τέρασι, καὶ ἀξιόπιστος ἔσται μάρτυς· Πνεῦμα γὰρ ἔστιν ἀληθείας*<sup>42</sup>). In this part, Theophylact points out the pastoral care in missionary work, emphasizing that the action will not be without witnesses,<sup>43</sup> and in doing so, he emphasizes the confirmation of God's faithfulness in missionary work in the world, which continually shows negative tendencies toward the Gospel.<sup>44</sup> In order to prevent the missionary activity of the apostles from being seen as merely abstract, Theophylact mentions *σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα* – signs and wonders – as confirmation from the apostolic era that the mission is based on tangible realities, which will serve as proof of Christ's actions in the world. Here, Theophylact refers to the visibility and tangibility of missionary work in the world, affirming in his interpretation that missionary work is not merely communication through words, but also represents a mystical presence of Christ in the activity.<sup>45</sup>

Summarizing John's theological narratives concerning the Holy Spirit, it becomes clear that the essential ministry of the Spirit permeates security, confirmation, redemption, and constancy in missionary work. His active role represents an integral aspect of soteriologically oriented Christianity and the preservation of Christ's work. The observation by Theophylact is that Johannine Christianity, being dynamic by nature, draws its power from the Holy Spirit; that is, the Spirit is the One who enables the missionary activity not only of the apostles but also of every believer in the community.<sup>46</sup>

From the early stages of the Christian experience, the influence of the Spirit is immense in the process of renewal and the development of faith. Believers are assured of the presence of the living Spirit, which is crucial

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 205 BC: "Therefore, be courageous: for the preaching (κήρυγμα) will not be without testimony, but the Spirit will also testify together (συνεπιμαρτυρήσει) with signs and wonders, and He will be a trustworthy (ἀξιόπιστος) witness – for He is the Spirit of truth."

<sup>43</sup> Theophylact uses the term for testimony, *συνεπιμαρτυρήσει*, which signifies mutual action, thereby giving an encouraging tone that the vision is not left solely to human strength and capability. The term *συνεπιμαρτυρήσει* in Theophylact's interpretation is a sign of personal and confirming participation in missionary action.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 205 BCD.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *ibid.*; cf. also Migne, PG 124, 211 BCD.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 209 BCD.

for the work of testimony and the strengthening of missionary work. The Gospel of John provides many proofs for an elevated view of the Spirit. All of His work is closely related to the ongoing ministry of Christ, with the Spirit often depicted as a counterpart or *other self* of Christ, called the other Advocate.<sup>47</sup> Theophylact mentions that as a teacher and witness, the personality of the Spirit is implied because He cannot fulfill these roles as merely an impersonal influence or abstract principle. The intentional use of masculine personal pronouns (Ὁ Παράκλητος) further emphasizes the evangelist's focus on the personal characteristics of the Spirit, despite the use of the neuter gender τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον (John 14,26) / τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας (John 15,26).

The note of Theophylact is that: The meaning of the coming of the Paraclete, as Christ speaks in the discourse between John 13,3 and 16,28, aligns with the action of God in the world. The Son came into the world from the Father and is now preparing to return, to be glorified alongside the Father. In this framework, Christ mentions the coming/sending of the Paraclete. Although Christ will depart, He promises to send a replacement: καὶ ἐρωτήσω τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἄλλον παράκλητον δώσει ὑμῖν, ἵνα μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ᾗ, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὃ ὁ κόσμος οὐ δύναται λαβεῖν, ὅτι οὐ θεωρεῖ αὐτὸ οὐδὲ γινώσκει· ὑμεῖς γινώσκετε αὐτό, ὅτι παρ' ὑμῖν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται (John 14,16–17). The phrase *another Paraclete* suggests (as confirmed in 1 John 2,1<sup>48</sup>) that in His absence (the absence of Christ), the *other* Paraclete will take His place. When Christ departs, He will send the Paraclete to the disciples (John 16,7). Just as the Son came “from the Father” (John 16,28), the Paraclete will also come *from the Father* (John 15,26). Therefore, like the Son, the Paraclete is a divine figure who was with the Father in heaven and will personally be with the disciples. The Paraclete, like the Son, originates from the Father and is sent to be with the disciples as the *other* Paraclete, ensuring the continuity of the active mission of Christ's disciples.<sup>49</sup> In

<sup>47</sup> Cf. F. Porsch, Art. παράκλητος, in: EWNT III, 64–67; J. Frey, How did the Spirit become a Person?, in: idem / J. R. Levison (ed.), *The Holy Spirit, Inspiration, and the Cultures of Antiquity. Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Ekstasis 5), Berlin/New York 2014, 343–371.

<sup>48</sup> 1 John 2,1: Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἀμάρτητε. καὶ ἐὰν τις ἀμάρτη, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. H.-C. Kammler, *Jesus Christus und der Geistparaklet. Eine Studie zur johanneischen Verhältnisbestimmung von Pneumatologie und Christologie*, in: O. Hofius / H.-C. Kammler, *Johannesstudien. Untersuchungen zur Theologie des vierten Evan-*

this way, the Spirit is presented as the successor of Christ after His return to the Father. The term Paraclete must be understood as referring to a divine person, rather than merely a force or power. Theophylact, in relation to the Paraclete, mentions (Λίαν ἐβαρύνθησαν τῇ λύπῃ οἱ ἀπόστολοι)<sup>50</sup> the fear and sadness of the apostles from impending fears, i.e., he emphasizes their inner turmoil. He also highlights that the replacement in the absence of Christ was not mentioned from the beginning, as pastoral care requires constancy and gradualness (Συνεχύθητε ... ἔκστασιν πεπόνθατε<sup>51</sup>). The state in which the disciples found themselves is described as ἔκστασιν, a condition of being outside oneself, a complete bewilderment or disturbance in spirit. For Theophylact, the departure and the message concerning the Paraclete are referred to as τὸ συμφέρον, that is, something beneficial or advantageous (ἐγὼ τὸ συμφέρον ὑμῖν λέγω<sup>52</sup>), in this way, Theophylact emphasizes discernment in missionary work – not what the disciples themselves desire, but what is truly beneficial for their mission. He also does not fail to include a Trinitarian interpretation, noting that both the Paraclete and Christ act with free will (αὐτεξούσιον – συννεύσις)<sup>53</sup>, thereby affirming the unity of God in the divine activity guiding the missionary future of the apostles and their successors. At the same time, Theophylact offers a deeply soteriological interpretation: the missionary act of the apostles is conditioned by the redemptive mission of Christ.<sup>54</sup>

## 6. Aspects of deliverance

The Johannine concept of soteriology, as interpreted by Theophylact, is structured around four distinct dimensions: sin and judgment, reconciliation, faith, and eternal life.

geliums (WUNT 88), Tübingen 1996, 87–190; E. Haenchen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, ed. by U. Busse, Tübingen 1980, 571; idem, in: *ThLZ* 89 (1964), 895–898.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Migne, PG 124, 209 BC.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *ibid.*: Ἐάν γάρ ἐγὼ μὴ ἀποθάνω ὑπὲρ τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ ἀπέλθω πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα, θυσίαν καὶ ἰλασμόν ἑαυτὸν δοῦς ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τοῦ κόσμου, ὁ Παράκλητος οὐκ ἐλεύσεται. Πῶς γὰρ ἂν ἐπέλθῃ, ἐάν μὴ ἡ ἔχθρα λυθῇ, τῆς ἁμαρτίας θανατωθείσης, ἐάν μὴ καταλλαγῇ ὁ Πατὴρ τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει.

Sin and Judgment: In the specific teachings of Christ and within the narrative framework of the Evangelist John, a unique portrayal of the world emerges – depicted as diametrically opposed to the divine order.<sup>55</sup>

Theophylact's exegesis of the Johannine Gospel clarifies that the term κόσμος does not merely refer to the physical cosmos, but symbolizes humanity's defiance against God, marked by deep moral inconsistencies.

Christ enters this antagonistic world – already estranged from God – as emphasized in the prologue of the Gospel. Regardless of how the verb in John 1,5 (κατέλαβεν) is interpreted – whether as “overcome” or “comprehend” (καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν) the profound antithesis between light and darkness remains indisputable. The world stands in opposition to the Word (John 1,9–10) and is portrayed as being under the influence of the devil (cf. John 12,31; 16,11; cf. 1 John 5,19).

To grasp the nature of Christ's mission, Theophylact emphasizes that understanding sin is essential – particularly because sin is intrinsically linked to the rejection of Christ.<sup>56</sup> Christ himself affirms that his coming and teaching expose the sinfulness of humanity (John 15,22–24), and the Spirit convicts the world of sin because of its refusal to believe in him (John 16,9). However, in Johannine narratology, sin is not confined merely to unbelief; it extends to the forgiveness of repeated transgressions (cf. 1 John 1,9). Furthermore, sin is clearly characterized as lawlessness (1 John 3,4). It appears that both context and audience influence the definition of sin.

In the Gospel passages, Theophylact observes that Jesus does not directly elaborate on the nature of sin, but focuses instead on unbelief, underscoring its gravity by equating it with sin. Nevertheless, Theophy-

<sup>55</sup> The Evangelist John uses the term κόσμος 78 times. Through this terminological expression, John presents the world as: God's creation, the object of God's love, a sinful and fallen system, the place where salvation and redemption of humanity are realized, and as a realm characterized by a diametrical hatred toward God (cf. John 15,18; 1 John 5,19). Cf. H. Balz, Art. κόσμος (kósmos), in: EWNT II, 765–773.

<sup>56</sup> In Johannine theology, the term ἁμαρτία is mentioned 17 times. Understanding this theological term is of particular importance, as the Evangelist John weaves the relationship between humanity, the world, and God into a theological narratology that portrays the fall and the world's estrangement from God, as well as the actions of humanity within the world. It is also especially significant that the Evangelist John, through the term ἁμαρτία, portrays not only a moral transgression but also a rejection and unbelief toward God (cf. John 16,9: περὶ ἁμαρτίας μὲν, ὅτι οὐ πιστεύουσιν εἰς ἐμέ).

lact does not neglect to highlight a profound soteriological foundation based on the term ἔχθρα (enmity), asserting that ἁμαρτία (sin) constitutes the greatest enmity, not only against humanity, but directly against God. Thus, for Theophylact, overcoming ἔχθρα means redemption from sin; and ἔχθρα can be overcome only through a personal relationship with God. In this sense, Christ is both θυσία and ἰλασμός – sacrifice and propitiation (cf. John 1,29 – ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου). John's depiction of the world (κόσμος) requires that sin be understood as rebellion against God. This perspective is closely tied to the concept of judgment (κρίνω), contrasting salvation with condemnation (John 3,17). Simply put, judgment is not to be understood as something imposed directly by God, but rather as the result of human choice (cf. John 3,19). Sin leads to condemnation, and since humanity is incapable of changing its condition on its own, redemption becomes imperative. This dichotomy is further emphasized by the contrast between eternal life and judgment (John 5,24), where the rejection of Christ leads to condemnation (John 12,48). This condemnation is linked to divine wrath directed toward those who do not listen to the Son (John 3,36). For Theophylact, judgment (κρίνω) is not merely the violation of moral norms, but the unveiling of truth through the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>57</sup>

Summarizing Theophylact's exegetical segment regarding judgment, it can be said that the Holy Spirit will expose or convict (ἐλέγξει) the world concerning: sin, righteousness, and the fact that the ruler of the world (κοσμοκράτωρ) has already been condemned. Theophylact concludes that after Christ's ascension, the world will be judged by the Holy Spirit (ἐλέγξει) through the works that remain in the world.<sup>58</sup> In this way, the apostles' action (mission) will be an effective engagement to undo the enmity with God (ἔχθρα).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Migne, PG 124, 212 AB: Καὶ περὶ κρίσεως, ὅτι ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου κέκριται. Δηλοῖ, ὅτι καὶ διὰ τοῦτο δίκαιος ἐγὼ εἰμι, ὅτι ὁ κοσμοκράτωρ ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ἐκρίθη καὶ ἠττήθη. Ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἔλεγον ὅτι δαιμόνιον ἔχει, καὶ ἐν τῷ Βεελζεβούλ ποιεῖ τὰ σημεῖα, καὶ ὅτι πλάνος ἐστίν· ταῦτα πάντα, φησὶν, ἐλεγχθήσεται ματαιότης, ὅταν φανῇ ὁ διάβολος κεκριτῶς καὶ ἠττημένος, καὶ δειχθῇ πᾶσιν ὅτι ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ἐκρατήθη, ὅπερ οὐκ ἂν ἐδύνατό, εἰ μὴ αὐτοῦ ἐγενόμενον δυνατότερον καὶ πάσης ἁμαρτίας ἀλλότριον.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

## 7. The Johannine concept of reconciliation as a fundamental aspect of Theophylact's missionary thought

Like the other Evangelists, the Apostle John addresses the fundamental mission of Christ to respond to the needs of humanity and His actions in the world. In his interpretation, Theophylact makes a special note that, at the very beginning, the Evangelist outlines the basic contours of the mission – how it should be understood and from which parts it gradually develops narratologically.

The recognition of St. John the Baptist of Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1,29) immediately connects Christ's mission to both sin and its opposition. The image of the Lamb suggests a sacrificial interpretation. Although the Greek word for lamb used by John differs from the Septuagint's in Isaiah 53, the sacrificial meaning remains intact. This sacrificial mission is portrayed as universal, not just emphasized for a certain group of people, but directed toward the holy as a whole.

Christ's statement after the cleansing of the temple "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2,19), shows that His mission will culminate in death at the hands of men, but will be followed by resurrection. The promise that the Son of Man must be lifted up (John 3,14–15) points to the manner of His death. The declaration of God's love (John 3,16) is significant because it establishes the divine action, which is love. The emphasis on love in Christ's mission in the Gospel of John surpasses any other Gospel text. This emphasis is linked to Christ's statement: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15,13), highlighting the connection between love and sacrifice. Christ's discourse on the bread of life (John 6,51–53) can be interpreted as a reference to a mystical sacrament, which should serve as the foundation for missionary action. The voluntary giving of His life in death is emphasized in John 10,11. Christ explicitly states: "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10,18), emphasizing the necessity of His mission. Caiaphas' remark that one man should die for the people (John 11,50) is recognized by Theophylact as prophetic. For Theophylact, Christ's death signifies spiritual benefit for many, pointing to a redemptive sacrifice (*ἰλασμόν*). For Theophylact, Christ's metaphor of the grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying

(John 12,24) refers to His own death, emphasizing the necessity of this sacrifice for the success of His mission.

Regarding the approaching hour of glorification, Theophylact notes that it is profoundly emphasized in Christ's prayer, underscoring that His mission was directed toward the well-being of humanity and the world. Christ's statement that Pilate's power over Him was given from above (John 19,11) highlights God's orchestration of events up to His crucifixion. Christ's cry on the cross, τετέλεσται (John 19,30)<sup>59</sup>, marks the completion of His salvific mission and the beginning of a newly established mission through faith in His followers.

A particularly important observation in Theophylact's commentary is that these features deserve attention in the Gospel, which predominantly focuses on judgment and the redemption of the world, as they emphasize the salvation of humanity amid the prevailing forces of evil. Theophylact especially highlights the unique narrative features of the Apostle John, particularly noting the frequent use of verbs in specific contexts related to faith. The emphasis is on the verb rather than the noun, which underscores the active aspect of faith. The Gospel aims to cultivate faith, while the First Epistle aims to deepen knowledge in faith. Jesus' teachings are replete with exhortations to believe and promises to the faithful. Faith establishes a living relationship with Jesus Christ, which leads to life, whereas unbelief leads to condemnation.

Of particular significance is the frequent occurrence of the preposition "in" after the verb "to believe" when Jesus is the object of belief, indicating a personal trust that goes beyond mere belief. In other words, it can be concluded that Theophylact clarifies faith in Johannine theology both as unity and communion, as well as a call to sacrifice. To sustain such communion, self-sacrifice becomes essential. Just as self-sacrifice is crucial for maintaining a relationship with God, it is equally vital for fostering a loving community that reflects the role of mission and missionary work. Accordingly, mission is not only about spreading a message but also embodying the values of love and self-sacrifice, which lie at the heart of the Gospel message. This perspective aligns mission with the ultimate goal of life: for man to engage in a self-giving, personal relationship with God and with others.

<sup>59</sup> John 19,30: ὅτε οὖν ἔλαβεν τὸ ὄξος ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν τετέλεσται, καὶ κλίνας τὴν κεφαλὴν παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα.

By understanding mission as both a call to share Christ's message and to live out the principles of self-sacrificial love, we see a comprehensive approach to mission. This approach ensures that mission is not merely an external endeavor but an inner transformation that builds a community rooted in divine love and mutual self-giving – toward every person and toward God.

Theophylact of Ohrid teaches that the true meaning of life is to attain unity with the uncreated God in a communion of love characterized by self-sacrifice. He emphasizes that sustaining any community of love requires self-sacrifice, reflecting the essential nature of our relationship with God. Thus, mission, as understood through Theophylact's insights, is not merely the dissemination of Christ's teachings, but the embodiment and preservation of these principles of self-giving love within the community. This mission calls us to live out Christ's message through deep, sacrificial commitment to God and to one another.

## 8. Conclusion

The Johannine theology of mission reveals both attractive and repelling characteristics, indicating that mission prompts missionaries to engage in various cultural contexts while drawing individuals closer to a reconciled and renewed relationship with God and the world. Theophylact emphasizes the overall theological orientation of the apostle John's missionary work not merely as the act of proclaiming the Gospel, but as a lived reality in communion with God. This communion is to be regarded as the foundation and distinguishing mark of evangelistic missionary activity. Specifically, John does not view missionary work solely as an act of sending, but as a living and actualized gospel truth embedded in daily life. Thus, the missionary testimony of Christ is expressed through this devoted experience.

According to Theophylact, it becomes evident that mission is not merely a task to be completed, but a way of life with Christ. The missionary aspect of Johannine theology is presented as revealing, affirming, and convicting – with the aim of overcoming enmity toward God. Theophylact shows that mission surpasses ordinary duty or accomplishment; it becomes a profound way of life, interwoven with the abiding presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel according to John does not explicitly describe the concept of mission or the individual roles within it. Instead, it gradually leads readers into an understanding of their condition, their relationships with others, and the integration of their entire lives into the messages conveyed in and through the evangelical text.<sup>60</sup>

In the entirety of the patristic tradition up to Theophylact – and in his own thought as well – it is affirmed that the teachings of the Gospel provide a framework for a dynamic community (τὰ μείζονα ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις ἐνεργῆσαι), a community that is in constant transformation and actively contributes to the world around it. In this way, Theophylact of Ohrid develops his missionary concept based on the Gospel of John as a pastoral-theological apologetic in relation to soteriology and pneumatology, while consistently emphasizing the Trinitarian dimension of the Gospel words within the context of mission.

---

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Migne, PG 124, 216 AB: μετὰ τὸν ἐμὸν θάνατον τοῦ ἐμοῦ ὀνόματος λάμποντος μᾶλλον.