

**Розділ: Психотерапія та культура**

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**ON THE ISSUE OF BIBLICAL RESOURCES OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN PEDAGOGY – THE IMAGE OF ELIJAH AS THE PATRON OF „THE BURNT OUT” BY THE POST-MODERNITY****Roman B. Sieroń**

Ця публікація з посиланнями на дослідження джерел антропології та християнської педагогіки розроблена, щоб показати пророка Іллю як альтер его сучасної людини - втомленої постмодерною добою, вікові зміни, часто втрачається в тонкощах і глибинах віртуального світу, який повинен жити в реальності пост-християнської Європи, у війні культур, релігій і цивілізацій. Ілля, який, незважаючи на кризи (депресію) залишається непохитної віри в істинного Бога, і в кінці кінців не вмирає (переноситься на небо) та може бути покровителем "відпрацьованого" постмодернізмом. Опис психологічного характеру Іллі, що з'єднує реальність єврейської Біблії та християнської Біблії заснований на дослідженні видатних сучасних учених області італійської мови: Бруно Secondin і Джанфранко Равазі.

**Ключові слова:** Ілля, антропологія, християнська педагогіка, покровитель «вигорілого» постмодерну

This publication referring to the research program of the sources of anthropology and Christian pedagogy is designed to show the prophet Elijah as an alter ego of modern man – tired of post-modern era, age-related changes, often lost in the intricacies and depths of the virtual world, who has to live in the reality of post-Christian Europe, in the war of cultures, religions and civilizations. Elijah, who, despite the crises (depression) remains unbending faith in the true God, and in the end does not die (is transferred to heaven) can be the patron of “the exhausted” with postmodernism. The description of the psychological character of Elijah connecting the reality of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible is based on the research of outstanding contemporary scholars of the Italian language area: Bruno Secondin and Gianfranco Ravasi.

**Key words:** Elijah, Anthropology, Christian Pedagogy, the patron of “the burnt out”, postmodernity

Эта публикация со ссылкой на исследовательскую программу источников антропологии и христианской педагогике разработана, чтобы показать пророка Илию как альтер его современного человека – усталым от постмодернистской эпохи, возрастные изменения, часто теряется в тонкостях и глубины виртуального мира, который должен жить в реальности пост-христианской Европы, в войне культур, религий и цивилизаций. Илия, который, несмотря на кризисы (депрессию) остается непреклонной веры в истинного Бога, и в конце концов не умирает (переносится на небо) может быть покровителем "отработанного" постмодернизма. Описание психологического характера Илии, соединяющего реальность еврейской Библии и христианской Библии основан на исследовании выдающихся

современных ученых области итальянского языка: Бруно Секондин и Джанфранко Равази.

**Ключевые слова:** Илия, антропология, христианская педагогика, покровитель, «выгоревший» постмодерн

### **Introduction**

The senior of Polish biblical scholars, the expert in the problem of the presence of the Bible in the world culture and the author of an impressive collection of publications on this issue priest professor Thomas B. Jelonek from Cracow notes that „religion unquestionably is one of the important factors of each culture, while the Bible is primarily a religious book, which not only shows the religion of the chosen people and the beginnings of the Christian religion, but to even greater extent, for these religions is the normative basis. They derive the principles of faith from the Bible and it establishes their shape, internal and external organization. Shaping religions, the Bible also has an enormous cultural role”[1].

Christian faith – as defined by the Catechism of the Catholic Church – is not a „religion of the book”. Christianity is the religion of the God’s “Word”, not the written word and silent, but the Incarnate and the living Word. For the words of the Holy Scripture not to remain a dead letter, it is needed that Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, through the Holy Spirit enlighten our minds to “understand the Scriptures” (Lk 24,45; CCC 108).

But the Bible is also one of the oldest “textbooks” knowledge about man in the human history; inexhaustible and true, as inspired by God, the source of anthropology and Christian pedagogy, Catholic educational theology, pastoral pedagogy. It is worth noting that the inspiration of the Bible is the starting point for ethics not only for the Roman Catholic Church, leading in Poland, but also for the Eastern Catholic churches, Protestant communities, the Orthodox Church and Judaism. The Bible – a unique theandric book – (Gr. *theos* – God, *aner* – man) about the origin of the divine and the human becomes the undisputed authority in conveying the truth about man. *Homo sapiens*, created on the basis of the image and likeness of God in the Bible, looks at his uprising, development, size, but also its degeneration and decline (free choice of evil – sin). Biblical man, a husband (wonderful and accurate translation of the Hebrew nouns *ish* and *ishah*) made by the “Polish St. Jerome” Uncle James SJ experience a profound and shocking truth that the measure of God’s omnipotence is he himself – the man.

For the compiling of the sacred books, God chose the men, who served as skilled and strong, in order thanks to His action in them and through them they as true authors passed in writing everything and only what He wanted (CCC 106). A characteristic feature of the biblical text is the fact that the inspired books teach the truth. This highlights the most important document of the Catholic Church with biblical themes of the last half-century – conciliar constitution *Dei Verbum* (God’s Word): “since all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers claim, should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the biblical books firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth, which by the will of God, should have been put into the Holy Scripture, for the sake of our salvation” (DV 11, CCC 107).

Among the characters pointed by the inspired text of the Bible the person of the prophet Elijah stands out. So the patron of the Catholic University of Lublin, Saint Pope John Paul II characterized the biblical Elijah: “This is a courageous prophet and friend of God. He lived in God’s presence and silently contemplated his presence, interceded for his people and boldly

announced God's will, he defended the rights of God and defended the poor against the powerful of this world (cf. 1 Kings 18-19)" (VC 84). Elijah –as the Pope Francis says –"shows us the way how to make God the centre of your life and follow to the ends of geographical and existential borders"[2]. The figure of the prophet "whose word burned like a torch"– to use the term of the first Elijah's biographer biblical Syracusa (48.1) stands out significantly on the pages of the Holy Scripture, combines the environment of the Old and New Testaments, while still being fully human, experienced by human weakness. The expert of the person of Elijah and biblical scholar, Italian Carmelite Bruno Secondin writes: "Today, the figure of the prophet Elijah and his story attracts interest as it used to in the past centuries. His actions are part of the conflict between tradition and modernity, between fundamentalism and indifference – the attitude always present in the history of religion. Every year there are new books, which, taking into account new exegetical issues and existential questions, analyze the human history of Tishbe, denouncing the fiery words and having the soul of a frightened boy"[2, P.15].

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Who is the prophet Elijah?

Elijah is one of the most famous prophets of Israel – the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible). The etymology of the name Elijah is derived from the Hebrew language – a kind of semantic code of the Hebrew Bible. It means literally El-i-yahu (Elijah) "my God – the Lord is Jehovah (YHWH)"[2, p 62]. According to the Greek Bible – the Septuagints (LXX) and the Bible of St. Jerome – Vulgate's name that means Elias – Elijah "Yahweh is my God"[3]. This prophet, whose nickname "Tishbite" (according to the Millennium Bible: from Tishbe) indicates the origin of the village Tishbe in Gilead, in the mountainous country of Gilead (1 Kings 17.1). Currently it Kirbet El-Istib (Isbit), lying east of Jordan, in the eastern Jordan, northwest of the present-day village of Aglun, several kilometres to the north of the brook Jabbok. Nothing is known of his birth and the first years of life, nor is his father's name known. He was called "Chariot of Israel and its rider" by his successor Elisha (2 Kings 2:12). The prophet acted in the name of Yahweh in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of King Ahab (873 - 853 BC), Ahaziah (853 - 852 BC) and Queen Jezebel[4]. He is not the author of any prophetic book, but stories about him, found in 1 Kings 17-19; 21 and 2 Kings 1.1 – 2.17, give him great importance. This is sometimes an excessive legendary intake of life and deeds of this truly oriental character, so that it is difficult to extract strictly historical facts from him. Stories of Elijah contain many elements of theological and historical concepts and literary tastes of later biblical authors.

To illustrate the character of Elijah against biblical narrative let us list the summary of his story. God was angry with King Ahab and sent several years of drought. Elijah lived by the brook Cherith for some time. Ravens (symbolic image: haorebim – ravens or haarebim – Arabs, Bedouins) brought him food there. When the brook dried up, God commanded him to go to Zarephath near Sidon. There lived a widow with her son. Elijah stayed there. His mission was

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accompanied by extraordinary signs of miracles (multiplication – no depletion of flour and oil, resurrection, recalling the intervention of Yahweh, the separation of the waters of the Jordan). In the third year of drought Elijah said to Ahab to give the order to gather all the people of Israel at Mount Carmel, and four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah. There Elijah ordered to make two sacrifices. One was made by the worshipers of Baal, the second by Elijah to God. The Prophet said – to which victim a fire is sent that god is real. The sacrifice to Baal was not burned with fire, though the priests sang, danced and performed a ritual incision on the body. On the other hand, God accepted Elijah's sacrifice by sending fire on it. The people of Israel became frightened and gave glory to God Yahweh. Elijah ordered to kill the worshipers of Baal. That day ended the drought and the longed rain fell (1 Kings 18). At the news of the death of the priests of Baal, Queen Jezebel decided to kill Elijah, but he fled to the desert, gripped with mortal fear and discouragement. There the angel brought him food. By means of that food, Elijah walked forty days and nights to Mount Horeb.

Soon God advised him to anoint Hazael the King of Aram, Jehu the King of Israel and Elisha the prophet after Elijah (1 Kings 19). After the death of Ahab, Elijah made a miracle, separating the waters of the Jordan. Elijah and Elisha crossed the dry river bed (2 Kings 2.8). Elisha wanted to get from Elijah at least two-thirds of his spiritual gifts. Elijah said that if Elisha saw him go into heaven, it would be a sign that he received spiritual heritage. And so it happened. Elisha saw Elijah in a whirlwind taken in a chariot of fire (it was the fiery chariot with fiery horses) to heaven (2 Kings 2,9-13)[5].

Elijah was considered to be the one who in times of greatest religious crisis rescued the legitimate faith in God Yahweh. For this reason, he has become a symbolic figure, the defender of the true faith. According to the biblical texts, Elijah did not die, but “a whirlwind ascended him to heaven” (2 Kings 2:11). Judaism considered him to be still alive: his appearance is to precede the coming of Yahweh's judgment day (Mal 3,23n). Sage Jesus Syrach (II BC) gathered all his deeds done for Yahweh and expected his new occurrence in the last days (Sir 48,1-12a). Today some Jesus Christ people believed him Elijah, who returned (Mk 8:28). The New Testament claims that the raised from the dead Elijah is John the Baptist: he precedes Jesus (Mk 1,1-8; 9,11-13). Elijah appears next to Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mk 9,4n)[6]. It is no wonder that many of Elijah's features were found in the life and work of John the Baptist (Mt 11,7-14; 17,10-12; Mk 1,1-4; 9,11-13; Lk 1,16-17.76) who resembled him in dress and teachings (cf. 2 Kings 1,7-8). John, however, flatly denied that he was Elijah (Jn 1,21.25). Others saw Elijah in Jesus (Mt 16,13-14; Mk 6,14-15; 8,27-28; Lk 9,7-8.18-19) along with Moses.

The patron of „the exhausted” by postmodernism – psychological portrait of Elijah

Elijah is, according to the biblical account, a man “like us”, who acts in the name of God, but advocates and is unanimous with people[7]. Despite experiencing his own weakness (fatigue, depression, fear of loss of life) he succeeds in complete trust in God, and so he addresses the theological virtues: faith, hope and love. Elijah draws his heart to the anticipated and marked by the hope future and ensures that God is faithful to every human being. Elijah is “next to people like him in every century and reminds them of their right to hope” (E. Wiesel)[2, p 193].

Looking at the final stages of Elijah's life, it must be said that he is “the prophet in the path”[2, p 197]. His actions are always associated with the journey – but not only this earthly, but primarily are related to the course inspired by the Word of God. In this sense, he is a true

anticipation of Jesus Christ, which is “a man who wanders”. Elijah also becomes a kind of icon of modern homo viator – the surfer on the World Wide Web or overcoming thousands kilometres a day aboard the jets – oscillating between the crisis (always hidden) and capabilities (which are always at the disposal). This dimension of “being on the path” or pilgrimage occurs very often in the teaching of Pope Francis[8].

Elijah was “a man of fire”[9], his whole existence was like the Biblical fire (cf.. Sir 48,1-11) and so is the patron – as well as the model to follow after the therapy for “people with no fire in their eyes and hearts”, burned professionally or in life, suffering from depression, struggling with behavioural addictions[10].

The uncompromising Elijah’s attitude is a part of his life program. The Prophet preached and gave testimony that the Yahweh is the true God. Fulfilling his mission, not being afraid to speak against the rulers and pagan prophets, he like others experienced moments of weakness. Among thousands of biblical characters he stands out having the feature of strange (although in today’s realities) more widespread “bipolarity”. “Sometimes we see him bitter, disgruntled, resigned – then he is so similar to us, and tired of the struggle against injustice, which does not produce the desired effects. Sometime later he is sitting among the weary, listening and crying or is leaning toward the ground at the top of Mount Carmel and is begging for rain for the tormented people and parched fields (cf.. 1 Kings 18.42). On another occasion, he participates in anguish and joins the call of the humble of this world[2, p 16].

Bruno Secondin in his exegetical-theological research notes that Elijah is an unpredictable man: he appears unexpectedly in strange circumstances. He goes into action by performing specific gestures or making reproaches; moreover, he is quite undiplomatic, explodes bitter and considered. He impresses by his harshness and severity in the blurred and apathetic society (Gianfranco Ravasi)[2, p 7]. Another eminent contemporary scholar of the Bible Gianfranco Ravasi complements the characteristics of Elijah’s psychological profile: “This figure is alone like oak torn by storm, but also a man of flesh and blood, who experienced depression and even the temptation to surrender to sweet death under the sun in the desert, where, however, God himself picks him up and runs toward the most important meeting on the mount Horeb – Sinai. It is in this pilgrimage to the roots of Israel as a nation and to the sources of biblical faith that Elijah gets a mission again”[2, p 10-11].

### **Conclusions**

The summary of this article may be the words of contemporary Italian biblical scholar Bruno Secondin on Elijah – one of the most remarkable characters of the Bible, and thus the world of contemporary culture. He spoke them at the end of the retreat in 2015, which were pronounced to Pope Francis and members of the papal home. “Elijah himself wrote nothing, and Biblical passages about him do not proceed with the full story of his life. They are more like great biographical representations. And yet we found great truths about our lives, the path of authenticity and truth in these details of his life. There appeared light in our lives and provocative questions that touched him, which lead us toward authenticity and healing that God was truly our God and we are His servants and prophets inflamed with zeal”.

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