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SPECIALIZATION  
NEW TESTAMENT**

**THESIS OF DOCTORATE  
SUMMARY  
CHURCH MISSION EVANGELIC FOUNDATIONS  
IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

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# SUMMARY

## **KEY WORDS : MISSION, GLOBALIZATION, SECULARIZATION, CULTURE, PRIEST, DE-LOCALIZATION**

I have chosen this specific theme for my thesis as, being a God's priest, I consider Church mission in the contemporary world of greatest importance. Church mission in the world is clearly stated in the Bible since mission means sending the Church into the world: 'As you go, proclaim this message: The kingdom of heaven has come near.' (Mathew 10, 7-8), in order to enlarge God's kingdom which was founded by Jesus Christ on earth by His passions and resurrection through Crucifixion and –seenly-by the sending of the Holy Gohst on to the earth: "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.' (Mathew 16, 18) and again: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' (Mathew 28, 19) Church mission has its point of departure in the very God's intimate life, in Father's Love movement towards Son and through Him towards the whole world.

Our work is meant to support and promote the collaboration and cooperation between Church and all other institutions belonging to the civil society regarding and with social, cultural or education activities. Church implication in the social can be achieved in many and varied ways. Some of them are to be focused on and described in this doctorate thesis which begins by defining, theoretically and theologically, the terms of philanthropy and charity, develops and arrives at more practical, technical and concrete notions which are specific to contemporary world as well. I will present modern ,present-day methods of implementing a social project or program of the mission Church has nowadays. We will also speak about Church specific tools and instruments or strategies as Church ought not to have any complex in accomplishing this social desiderate being well equiped and possessing high resourses of intelligence and skill.

This work tries to synthesize some definig features of post modernism, as a necessity for a proper contextualization of the orthodox Church and wishes to be a useful guide (without being exhaustive) in a good understanding of postmodernism challenges and provocations. The state of being of the nowadays society can not surprise the Church. It is Itself called to open its message towards people both as individuals and as social groups. Therefore it is for the Church to use all and every mission strategies and to adapt them to the postmodern vector for defining the new

type of humanism through which we can state: 'let us rediscover the deep relationship between freedom and holiness', Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.' (Mathew 4, 17).

The Church lives in society being itself a moral-religious society. But it is more, as it is the society of the faithful to God people, with God and through God together. Using a familiar term, Church is Christ's body, a body brought to life by Christ's spirit and possessing both an immanent, visible dimension and a transcendental, invisible one. Being part of Christ's life, it is eternal and has as a final end salvation, happiness and perfection through Christ: 'For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.' (Mathew 18, 20). As a visible society it works and lives in history and society, influences them both and is influenced by both. But, those seen and those unseen are united inside it, as it follows that those unseen work through those seen. That is why, we can see permanently changing elements in the visible aspect of the Church, elements which are socially and historically conditioned.

The Orthodox Church needs a contemporary clarification of its faith teaching as an internal, didactical and pastoral necessity and as an obligation as well.

Today, the Church develops missionary and social assistance activity through its own system, having as a support the state laws and promoting the social policies and the measures for social protection which are to be found in the society, by offering the human resources and the logistics it owns. The church offers through its clerical people (who has a leader position in society) a certain mobilisation and training of the people as a community and a direct implication in solving the problems at a needed moment. The implementation of the social policies through Church is to be done through a collaboration of speciality at the level of the two institutions which should militate together for a better society and for a level of life in accordance with the European and international requirements. The social and missionary activity of any priest is seen in the parish he administrates and shepherds. The Church philanthropic and of social assistance work is part of the 'dimension of the devotion to your fellow human' and it is one of the main aspects of the Christian theology, with deep implications in the Church life, both in the pastoral and social apostolic life. (Mathew 28, 19). In this light, the social and human service is part, as a fundamental truth, in the Biblical revelation, in the Saint Fathers tradition and in the history of the Christian Church.

According to the teaching of the New Testament, philanthropy comprises Law and The Prophets, being the most important from Law. (Mathew 22, 37-40). All these synonyms have a

basis, love. Being incompatible with human love, love towards God is to accomplish and follow His Commandments and love among human beings.

The Romanian Orthodox Church is an apostolic church, the Romanian people was christianized by Saint Apostle Andrew. With the Romanians, the Christianity is almost two thousand years old, being the only people who was born christian. The history of the Romanian people is contemporary and parallel with the history of the Embodied Logos. In the beginning of the Christian life, the social assistance took the form of humanitarian activities which had a profound religious character. Thus, the social assistance activities can not be separated from Church, developed, as the education and teaching did, near and around churches and monasteries.

As a work of the divine justice, the Church philanthropy is a profound theological, spiritual and pastoral act. It is not similar or comparable to the human justice or any other form of social and human manifestation. But, the first mission Church has is to make The Word of God known to all Christians, to pray permanently, to undergo the divine services, to listen to God's Word, to urge the believers to do the good deeds. 'But when you give to the needy, do not let the left hand know what your right hand is doing,' (Mathew 6, 3).

An important aspect which is to be followed is the way new specialists are formed and trained in this field through theological education. The church hasn't absorbed yet in its system of social assistance activity the graduated people in this specialisation of the Faculty of Theology..From the case study I did, I concluded that most of the graduated people who work in this field, have been absorbed by the state institutions, not by the Church ones. The idea of created such a specialisation inside the Theological Teaching was originated by the fact that the social assistance has a character and by the fact that the students attending this speciality are more open to the problems and hardships of their human fellows, develop a higher sensitivity and are more bent on helping others.

The results of our research presented in this thesis make us state that the Romanian orthodox Church social services are facing some limits and lacks which we have identified both theoretically and practically. There is a reduced philanthropic activity in the church social assistance field, our research revealed a resource lack in providing sufficient desirable efficient and sufficient services in communities. A certain philanthropical amateurism might also be one of the limits since there is a large number of clerical personnel who don't still have the necessary training in providing these services. A certain philanthropical particularism is to be noticed, but not as typical limit; there is less

confession discrimination as we discovered. We should speak more about the philanthropic paternalism which is manifest in the circumstances when the Church establishes a unilaterally the domain of the services it offers, not taking into account the existing social factors and their necessity and desirability. Another manifestation of the philanthropic paternalism is to be seen in their organizational and quality standards. The professionalization of the personnel and services could be one of the ways of surpassing these limits. Nowadays, when the role of the community is essential in improving the social life, priests should find modern modalities in focusing and using the energy of communities.

Therefore, I will state that the missionary role of the Church is based on the concept according to which the Church is not only the large community but also the one with few members and in which resides the Evangelists' testimony of living our life into Jesus Christ, our Lord'. We can notice in this way that the Orthodoxy is a form of Christianity, unsecularized in essence and content and whose refinedness, noblesse and genuinity is known by few today.

„Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?; and not that he should return his ways and live?“ (Ezekiel 18, 23). This the message the Romanian Orthodox Church tried in vain to transmit during almost half of a century to communist regime, in a totalitarian and socialist state, insensitive to the determination and attitude of the Saint Synod through its decisions regarding the spiritual, moral and material needs of the Romanian people. But the Church was always isolated and kept aside. Miraculously, the Church survived grace, mainly, to its believers and clergy people. What will have meant the dark communist era without the presence and life of the Church?

A lot of people found relief and peace in front of icons or confessing to priests enduring thus more easily a reality of lies and imposture. We must emphasize the special role the family had in transmitting and preserving, during the communist era, the Christian faith sense'

Besides the fundamental work achieved by Him, the Saviour Himself through His death and resurrection, He also offered to humankind the law of love towards and for all human fellows, as sons and daughters of the Same Father. Following their Teacher, the Saint Apostles, without neglecting the work of the sacrament or the didactical mission, bent with love on the sufferings of the people. After epochs of persecution, martyrdom and sufferings for preserving and defending its faith, the Edict of Mediolanum (313) meant among others the moment when

the Church charitable activities were revived, this time in an institutionalised, organized and more complex form.

The Church is not a close and limited organism. It works and collaborates with all the society compartments for the good. In this respect, after the fall of the communism, the Hierarchs of the Romanian Orthodox Church tried and succeeded in enlarging the mission given them by God, beyond the walls which, until lately, seemed to be resisting and without the blessing of the Holy Ghost.

Today, priests are present in prisons, on military camps, in hospitals and schools. The Orthodoxy has again appropriated itself the mission in the light of a more determined ecclesiological perspective. This perspective includes some fundamental elements like

- The Church is an integrant part in the Evangile message as becoming a believer is nothing more than being incorporated in Christ's Body, as a personal answer to God's Word, which is the seed and the content of faith. (Mathew 13, 1-30). The visible, physical, historical Church has as an example The Holy Trinity communion. God is communion of persons and the Church is called to re-live in its life this trinitary and unitary communion with God. It is the human community who lives in the first divine communion which is the Holy Trinity. Its whole mission and mainly the Holy Sacraments, are towards this. The Initiation Sacraments- the Baptism, the Holy Onction, the Communion- making a unique rite and being realized only related to the Liturgy, are Sacraments incorporated into a liturgical community determined by its being real part of the God's people. The ecclesial character of the church mission is not to be understood in an instrumentalist way. The ecclesial character is a criterion of the Church and there is no true Church outside mission. In the Orthodox perspective, the Church is principle and condition of the mission in the same time.
- The raising and accomplishment of the Body can not be a goal in itself. The Church is not only 'God's people' gathered through the listening of God's word but also the sign, the sacrament of God's presence for all the humankind. The Church mission is ecclesiocentric but not ecclesiomonistic as the Church in its nature is sacramental being witness to God's kingdom. The church is called to discover the true and undoubted of the kingdom which are: spreading God's Word, forming a genuine local

community,rediscovering a healing community, one of support and real love, which welcomes the foreigners, gives hopes to the desperate and courage to the weak.

- The church does not have the monopoly on the historical signs of the Kingdom through which Christ's presence manifests. Although the Church is called The Sacrament of the Kingdom, signs of the the kingdom can be found outside it, in the world.

Until now, there is no a theology of the mission, an orthodox missiology, to express the concrete missionary practice of the Orthodox Church. This type of presentation is more than necessary nowadays when the missionary testimony is essential for the tradition mediation in time and space.between misiologie ortodoxă, care să exprime practica misionară concretă a Bisericii Ortodoxe. Theology is nothing else than a verbal articulation of the practice in the local church and it can not be indiferent to the way in which that local church dwells with the Gospel Word and with the accomplishment of the life in Christ, in the place and time it sent to be.

From the very beginning, Church mission was engaged in two directions: the ad intra or internal mission-it dealt with those who were baptised organizing their internal, liturgical and social life and the ad extra or external mission that is the Church spread the Gospel to those who were outside it, entered the ones who were not circumcised and date with them.(The Apostle Deeds 11, 3). Thus the Church appears as an eucharistic community.The church has in this way two arms with which it actualizes the economy of salvation:the pastoral one, having its own eucharistic internal discipline and the missionary one having its own apostolic project-to spread Gospel word.

After 1989, the Romanian theology, a theology of the Church and of its mission in the contemporary society is facing certain cultural factors representing a true challenge to it. One is secularization, a problem troubling the Western Christian world for some time now. The essence of secularization consists in turning man's eyes from the world of supreme spiritual values,from God, to the terrestrial and mortal values of this world transforming the man in their slave. It is true that the secularization helped science and technology to have developed more than the supporters of the 18th century Enlightenment expected. But it also deepened man into a serious and profound spiritual crisis which prevents the humankind to become real masters of the benefits of the contemporary world.

In order to support Church mission, theology should and ought to fight with two opposite tendencies: on one side the sectar prozelitism which pushes the believers to isolated themselves into a pietist spirituality, on the other hand it should fight with the believers of a secularized, violent and aggressive christianism and who want to transform religion in politics.

To discover the true sense of the christian mission in the contemporary society, theology should get rid of the dualist separation between spirit and matter –of philanthropic origin- which lies at the basis of the pietism and social activism.

In my thesis, 'Gospel Foundation of the Church Mission in the Contemporary Society', I tried to emphasize the mission the Church has today, in this contemporaneity-postmodernity. In social life, family life, ecumenical view, in a world of globalization and secularization, the life of a church servant and his preparation for his future mission and following Christ's commandment 'Go and make disciples of all nations' (Mathew 28, 19).

Mission can not be conceived without priesthood and the latter without mission and service. When saying that priesthood is service I think at its supreme hypostasis: the Holy liturgy. Only in front of the Saint Altar a priest is a servant and becomes a missionary. The Holy Liturgy is the mystery work of God on earth and in the world through which the Son of God himself receives us for the kingdom feast, properly introducing us the Holy Ghost. The Holy liturgy gifts us with the gift of the Eucharist through which we receive the Holy ghost.

Any mission is based on a testimony. Since early Christianity the Holy Liturgy remains an inexhaustable source of the power of God's Word. Liturgical service has a lot to do not only with mission in its proper meaning but with culture as well, as a means of fulfilling the Christian mission. ( Mathew 10, 32 ),. It is the essence of the Christian cult, the way we worship God and are given by Him the power of transmitting His word to others, as His witnesses. Culture is related to cult having the same origin. If we are to refer to the manifestation of the Christian life in Orthodoxy we will find that with us, the religious culture is fully found in the development of the acts inside the Holy liturgy.

Dogmatics and morals (in the Holy Books and in the service books), songs and poetry , architecture and painting are all jewels in the treasury of the orthodox cult. As an officier of the orthodox cult, the orthodox priest ought to understand the significance of all acts and gestures he performs and of all objects he uses. A God's servant, wherever he might find himself, should

be anchored inside such a high culture that sometimes he even can not perceive . Anyway, it is his duty to raise the level of this culture bringing honour to his dignity as well.

According to orthodox view, the Holy Liturgy was and is the main source of inspiration for the true religious, theological and missionary culture. Saint Paul the Apostle teaches us that serving the ,old law' which was serving death and penitence ( II Corinthians 7,9 ) was changed into ,serving the Holy Ghost' and justice, being abundant in glory and bringing eternal life ( II Corinthians 3, 6, 8, 9, 11 ). It is full of grace and God's grace is eternal life into Jesus Christ.' (Romans 6, 23). In this light and grace, the believers have all the elements of the culture the Church gives to them: sacred architecture, sacred paintings, poetry, music, wisdom and philosophy.

The Holy Liturgy shared grace, the glory which Saint Paul the Apostle speaks about flows from above downwards. While culture which welcomes it, its soul, responds acting from downwards upwards. The meeting of the two, coming from different directions makes appear the cult inside which man collaborates with God. From this point of view it is a sublime, glorious and teandric culture. Its value does not reduce itself to the moral or esthetical one.

Somewhere on the way uniting these currents which make from the religious culture a living one, stands the orthodox priest between Christ and believers. It Jesus Christ who performs the Saint Liturgy and He does it for us and with us and for us. It is also for the believers to take part in it. All soul movements are directed to heavens in order to elevate themselves to the upper Altar. In this process of transfiguration, spiritualization, transformation and unification into Christ, their power are supported by the power emanating from the artistical, cultural and esthetical works such as: words and rite display, icons and even the architecture of the church. This power is not sufficient for the believers as it has its limits. In order to raise to the Absolute, to God we need the work of the servant priest, the only one gifted with the power of transcending and elevating them beyond the human limits. This is only for the priesthood, through God's work, to give life to the religious culture and bring upon it a specific and unique value. The orthodox priest is the first organ who makes culture efficient, who change it from a human creation and tool, a true expression of a teandric work.

It is his way and duty to both understand and incorporate it in his own being transforming it into a permanent source of power for his mission. If Jesus Christ comes to this eucharistic

celebration as He did with His Apostles in the Resurrection Night, granted His servant of today His light, peace and joy, He would not leave him after the holy service. He will accompany him the whole life as He did with the Apostles on the way to Emmaus.

In its mission, Church does not invent the Evangelists, but restitutes any time and place "the faith which was given to saints in eternity." (Judas 3). Church teaching is exclusively based on the discovery of Christ. 'God's word issued of silence'. God revealed Himself in It in a definite and eschatological way. 'No one knows the Father, except the Son, and no one knows the Son, except the Father.' (Matth 11, 27). Saint Paul the Apostle says that God's word spreading and following is nothing but a word about Christ and from Christ. (II Corinthians 4, 5). Thus, the Church is in an Apostolic succession through its perfect agreement with the Apostles' dogmas and with the wholeness of Christ's Evangelist. Today's church is in connection with the Apostles' community and with the Saints' future community through its unchanging and firm faith through the Holy Spirit. The Saint Tradition is the warmth which is radiated by the Saints and the believers.

The visible church has as a model the communion of the Holy Trinity which is to be transmitted to its believers, as God is a communion of persons and the Church is meant to reproduce in its life this trinitarian and unitary communion of God. It is the human community who lives from the first divine communion which is the Holy Trinity.

The tendencies of globalization, syncretism, a certain concern for the social activities are ways of trying to re-group the individuals even if they are not always in an institutionalised form. The church can assume these tendencies trying to 'wake them up' from their sleeping religiousness. Using social, ecological, missionary, cultural programs, pilgrimages, activities and programs or projects for youth, the advantages of the internet and mass-media the church can easily find a way to touch the souls of those who need it.

The whole doctrinal, moral and of cult Orthodox inheritance is an invaluable and intangible treasure. The Church should and must take part in ecumenical, multilateral to express firmly and openly its faith to the Truth and to a doctrinal gift which is not subject to syncretical negotiations. It rejects in the same time, as being strange, unconceivable to it, any heretical ideologies, the so-called feminist emancipation and any moral deviations.

The voice of the Church should sound firmly and permanently in order to uncover and reveal the imposture and impertinence inclusive the ones of certain minorities. The Pluralism

might be a challenge for the Church while it helps to filter the true teaching in contrast with the postmodern offer. The Pluriconfessionalism urges the Churches to admit dialogues, and, in the same time to firmly combat the adverse proselitism. There is also a necessity for the central and local higher ecclesial structure to become more responsible for a more proper ability in recognising and solving the synopses or crises in the missionary activity which might touch the Church.

The Holy Tradition is and remains a norm for the Church although there still are voices which claim that there is an irreducible antagonism between tradition and modernism. Although it remains faithful to the doctrinary, moral and cult inheritance the church is not frozen in the past. On the contrary, it welcomes the present day challenges, adapting its discourse and missionary strategies inside and to it. Speaking about applying the attribute of modernity to the Church theology, the Christian message need not any changes or additions. It expresses the fullness and roundness needing only to be explained to people. The Church is the treasurer of the Evangelical truth which Christ transmitted to the Apostles and by them to us, through all the Church servants.

The church has an important role inside the family, through its mission and relationship with it. As love between two people, man and woman which drives them to marriage, is under the human law of destruction and perissability. It receives power through the Sacrament of Marriage which enlarges and deepens it up to the dimension of the love God has for the world. It transforms the family into a *little church*. The marriage between man and woman is planted inside Christ's great sacrament with the world elevating the new born family at becoming Church.

Their marriage is a *little church* or a part of the Church as Saint John Chrysostom said since the Church itself is built with such units blessed by the Holy Ghost. 'This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the Church. (Ephesians 5, 32), Saint Paul the Apostle says.

The Church is important in the education and support of a community but it should be assisted and accompanied by the institutions which have a similar role in civil life. Because the **social milieu** has a relevant influence as well. Saint John Chrysostom advises parents who bear the greatest responsibility in educating youth to protect and keep them far from the cunning and vicious people. Christ Himself tells us to avoid this kind of people: 'If your right eye causes you

to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.' ( Mathew 5, 29). It is not to harm your body that the Evangelists speaks about. It is about friends and human fellows who can be harmful to us and to our salvation. ' And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.' (Mathew 10, 28).

Parents, on one hand, should clean any negative thing upon the youth, and on the other hand, they should feed them with good intention. Thus, if the education is properly done in the family, and sustained through generations, there is a fundament for salvation.

Thus, following the aspects and principles of the religious moral life and listening to the words of the Gospels in the Church by its priests, we will accomplish Saint Apostle Paul's words, saying 'follow my steps as I follow Christ's steps.'

The ecclesial character of mission should not be understood in an instrumentalist or eclesiomonist meaning. The Church is not a mere instrument of the mission. The mission is a criterion of the Church and it does not exist true and genuine Church outside mission. In the orthodox view, the Church is the goal of the mission, being principle and condition of the mission in the same time.

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