

„Ovidius” University  
Faculty of Orthodox Theology „Sf. Ap. Andrei” Constanța  
The Doctoral School

## PhD THESIS

*The challenges of the Christian orthodox missionary in  
the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

**Professor coordinator**

**Professor Gheorghe Istodor, PhD**

**Doctoral candidate**  
**Pr. Pîrcălabu Florin Constantin**

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## **Introduction. Actuality and theme necessity**

I chose this topic because of the multitude of doctrinal "offers" in the religious field, of which bookstores, stalls and televisions abound, for every pertinent faithful man is "required" the re-evaluation of its position to the manner in which it is concerned and relates to own religion.

This veritable "counteroffer" to the bi-millennium teaching of Christian Orthodox Church is based on a simple logic: humanity must return to the Gospel message of the early Church transmitted by the Apostles.

The times we live in today, almost two thousand years since the first Christianization, if it were considered in the light of the Gospel dynamism, it should, according to some, show the complete triumph of living according to the teachings of Christ. Whether we look geographically or statistically, Christianity did not become the religion of the world but only for part of it. And if we look at traditional Christianity, the one sent directly by the Holy Apostles and their first offspring, we see so many divisions that we are tempted, at a superficial analysis, to admit a failure instead of a partial triumph.

But we know it is not like this as the vocation of salvation even if given to each individual human being is not equally suitable. And we know that, although Christian not all worship and adoration modalities lead to salvation, implicitly the methods and means.

„The Prophecy” of the philosopher Andre Malraux, "the third millennium will be Christian or not be at all" has not yet unrevealed its meanings. In a time when the Pope retires from his service as a director resigns as head of an institution, people declare themselves free but are increasingly enslaved by the way of life that they have created, a scientific paper, which takes the pulse and performs a radiography of the present justifies its necessity.

It is desired of the work presentation that any interested parties to see a honest analysis and as objective as possible of the moment of mission where we are today, to be a possible tool for missionary work or even a mirror in which to look before engaging in mission.

## **I. The Specific Orthodox missionary in the context of contemporary challenges**

Nowadays, the Church is, based on the places of worship and believers who adorn them, visible all over the world and the relationship between Orthodox Christianity, the western type, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism, favoured by various Orthodox Diaspora, is without doubt one of the major spiritual events of the 3rd early millennium. To live today in diaspora is also blessing and a challenge.

The twentieth century has brought globalization which, under the guise of streamlining the free movement of people and goods, puts a levelling of mankind in a way other than the communist one. Phenomenon in full swing today.

The fundamental characteristic of Christian mission is or should be love. A love manifested in real actions from man just as God himself planted through creation, love in the human being. Created according to the image of God in Trinity, man can exist only in communion. "There is no being without communion. Nothing is «individual», understandable and self-existent by itself.

The consciousness of evangelism, primordial part of the mission in Orthodoxy is given by the continuity and identity of the same belief, apostolic received from Jesus Christ, who founded the new human ontology through communion with God, in the pneumatic experience generating multiple spiritual gifts and through the new life anticipating eternal glory of the Resurrection, in His Church.

It is not difficult to understand that all of the early Church missionary activity is supported and guided by the Holy Spirit provided that one stays in the mission.

. From the very beginning of the Church witnesses to the Christian faith (missionaries) were all the baptized ones, it was their very way of life to make the Gospel known and it was paid in most cases with life itself. Today loss of life for the Gospel happens only in some mostly Islamic countries where terrorism in the name of religion is a practice for dechristianization.

All Christians are involved in mission but each participates according to the gift received from Christ. This appears clearly from the very words of the Lord: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5:16).

Mission and pastoral care lack razor edge, they are mutually interdependent.

For the Romanian Orthodox Church, the conditions in which pastoral activity and its objectives are developed in the present time are quite different than those existing almost twenty-five years ago, only to exemplify the differences between two close periods.

The major changes occurred in the Romanian society after the events of December 1989, created for the Church very special mission opportunities, but also brought new and important responsibilities and even challenges and prospects.

Although no organized mission to "the nations" are being organized, the Church is missionary in demand than ever, it is challenged by the new context to which it must respond pertinently and punctually. We know that Christ leads the Church to all truth, but also that the ministers must understand its purpose and mission, to serve it in order to fulfil its eschatological

Speaking then of foreign mission, I considered a very important challenge the sects, they deserves "a special place in this paper and, risking to seem out dated, I chose to present, quite succinctly indeed, the two monotheistic religions Judaism and Islam. I sat them in this order in view of their foundation considering timeline for Judaism King David as a reformer of the previous Jewish faith and Muhammad the founder of Islam.

Going through to unreached areas, we start to look that today Christianity does not have to "conquer" whole geographical areas where the Gospel has never reached. And we remember that in Africa and Asia there have been times when Christianity was flourishing. Arab invasions and conquests are those that have transformed the Christian face of the two continents in their Christian parties.

## **II. The context of the missionary in the 21st century. Overview**

If in the last part of the first chapter we showed the specifics of Orthodox Christian mission, otherwise specifically and always valid, thanks to its source, it is time to detail the missionary context because it has known changes and mutations related to the very evolution or involution of the world. World which in turn influences orthodox attitudes and feelings just as it brings new challenges.

A first specific mutation of the 21st century is the massive emigration of Romanians and other Orthodox (Bulgarians, Russians, Moldovans, Ukrainians, and recently the Greeks) from their own country to Western countries. By leaving the country of origin they become e-migrants for their country and get the status of immigrants in the country where they settle. The migration path is determined in a overwhelming majority of cases by the precarious economic factor and provided by the free movement of persons, the basic principle of the existence of Western democracies.

Why is it this a challenge for the Church and consequently for the missionary? Firstly because now the mission (confession) is no longer conducted in the context of a majority churches and a society that recognizes the same Orthodox values. The area where the mission develops is strongly imprinted by the postmodern Western civilization, whose main traits, or rather attitudes towards religion we saw.

In this context to lives ecumenically is no longer a "concession" that we, the Orthodox do to those from other religions but a necessity, a *sine qua non* condition to be able to confess our faith. Isolation and dumbness are exactly the opposites of the mission. Therefore the missiology of today will have to find answers and methods to provide to young theologian students, at Church level but also for the faithful ones from diaspora parishes as "The Church is mission".

The western world today easily accepts that not only Christianity is the holder of truth and considers that also the other monotheistic religions, including Buddhism, give man the truth about life and salvation. Post-Christianity may thus renounce to the Christian religion, to the Church and ultimately to God replacing them with a so called spirituality based on syncretism

completely desecrated. The current era can be defined by unbelief, uncertainty, confusion, despair, that Father Florovsky considers "the true root of modern tragedy (in the sense of contemporary, s.n.) lies not only in the fact that people lost convictions, but that they have forsaken Christ. "

. It must however be specified that this is a characteristic coordinate of Western Christianity, unlike it, the East faces more the phenomenon of "missing from Church", the removal of believers from the Christian lifestyle (non practicing Christian) and from the Church. "Today the postmodern man is a sinister summary of "homo ereticus" and "homo eroticus", so tackling heresy with all its derivatives is an necessary assignment of the Church, especially because there is an attempt not only to mitigate heresy in the contemporary society, but even of annihilation of its objective existence".

Then we see from history that migration is the one which generated diaspora and only then Mother Church, out of the care of its sons, is in charge of the mission and their pastoral care.

Today, however, we are witnessing the social challenge of the missionary work of the Church by the coming of immigrants from different causes, war, disasters, economic reasons, in Romania, ...a special challenge to the ecclesial mission, which has to do with social work is the migration.

To live together in the Diaspora space at the same time the need of the ecumenical inter-confessional dialogue arises. The term ecumenism signifies the movement which intends to unify all Christian churches, to restore the visible unity of the Church since the beginning.

My desire is to present comparatively in Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, the missionary coordinates to try extracting the response that these churches give, jointly or separately, to the proselytes of sects and to the new religious movements that they have faced in their common bi-millennium history. Also a presentation of sectarianism and the new religious movements, abundant nowadays can clarify the role of the Orthodox Christian Mission, and the difference between mission and proselytizing.

All elements of the Orthodox missionary activity are perfectly circumscribed to both aspects of Holy Tradition that they follow: steadfast and dynamic and is thus a proof of God's guidance.

However, contemporary religious fragmentation, referring implicitly to Christianity, has its cause in freedom misunderstood by man, but left by the Creator to show the perfection of creation (Gen. 1:31).

The revival of the esoteric occult sects in Romania has known development after the Revolution of December 1989 under a freedom understood by each in its own way. Esotericism intends to say that the meaning of something is inside a / some writing(s) or doctrine, and that the person or persons who can decipher are generally elected or enlightened.

Occultism is not proposing communion (dialogue) with God through love but a transmutation in divinity through personal thinking efforts in order of retrieval the divine ego able to know and understand the laws of the universe.

### **III. The challenges of the Christian missionary in the 21st century**

A clarification of the term atheism is absolutely necessary, firstly, because, as we see, can be both a phenomenon and an individual state. The term has its origins in Greek and means literally "without God."

While it is a challenge to contemporary times atheism is not a novelty nowadays, even early Christians were considered by the religion of those times, paganism, to be atheists. St. Gregory of Nyssa said in his time that the man who is not moved by (God) Holy Spirit would constitute a species, a different humanity.

The relationship science ideology, considered the father of Professor Istodor, like that between theology and ideology,, be seen in the broader context of relations between theology, science, philosophy. "

The new postmodern scientific paradigm shows that the researcher, the contemporary scientist, implicitly the scientific research, the scientism can be free of the ideological and materialistic atheistic constraints but the ideological naturalist dimension cannot be eradicated, naturalism has become integrant part of the modern and postmodern scientist' structure.

„God's particle” that scientists strive to discover and explain based on the atomic particle accelerator from Crozet in France, the EU's considerable financial effort would not bring, in my opinion, nothing new. It would explain the origin of life and God, it would not invent them.

In the science of matters, contemporary physicists responsible for the change of the paradigm mentioned, reduced devaluation of man and offered a more optimistic vision on man, quality of child of Light, unfortunately in the life sciences, man is still seen as a descendant of apes (in the science of matters, physicists have travelled a tortuous path from the vision of man as a „cosmic accident” to the one of „cosmic imperative” or „cosmic necessity” in the conception of M. Denton and C. de Duve)

After the events of 1989 a huge challenge was the need of an attitude of the Romanian Orthodox Church against abortion liberalization. This figure has become huge just in a few years, millions of innocent and defenceless victims.

Particular attention arises from the technology sphere, then the deviant behaviour of contemporary man connected to homosexuality, pornography, suicide, prostitution.

#### **IV. Contemporary missionary challenges from interfaith and interreligious perspective**

The universality of the mission in the context of post-modernity implies in turn, almost necessary, that ecumenism. By ecumenism and ecumenical movement we understand the striving to recover the visible unity of the Church, but not anyway, at any price, but by keeping the Church borders.

Christians have been divided, throughout history, due to theological and non-theological factors. The beginnings of the ecumenical movement are in the attempts of the Churches outside reform (16th century), to resume dialogue with historical, traditional churches.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century there were constituted systematic ecumenical bodies, which have resulted in the Ecumenical Council of Churches. This Council is an association of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as

Lord and Saviour according to the Scriptures and seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The dialogue with non-Christian religions is part of the ecumenical activity of the Orthodox Church, held at the local Patriarchates or even at the ecumenical ones but it only represents the openness of church to getting to know each other and to make itself known.

Love and tolerance are the defining elements of Orthodox ecumenism having to face two challenges. On the one hand the irenic nature but not the lax one and on the other hand the hermetic one, the closure and rejection of all forms of contact. Neither one nor the other generate ecumenical progress.

The orthodoxy participates in this kind of dialogue presenting itself as a religion of peace and love to the world with the stated aim to have a consistent and significant contribution to peaceful coexistence between the faithful ones of these religions.

## **V. Optimization possibilities of the Christian Orthodox Mission. Modern missionary ways and means**

The wide range of challenges encountered by the missionary and the Christian Orthodox mission, that emerges from observing the condition of 3rd Millennium world, calls for reflection and engagement. Undoubtedly the most remarkable character in generating and activating the mission is the bishop. The Bishop perpetuates Church and by this evangelization and Christianization of the world is fulfilled. The priest and the deacons fulfil missionary deeds with the bishop's blessing not lacking their own initiatives subscribed to the mission generated by the bishop.

Faithful laymen in parishes or monks in monasteries become extensions of the implementation of the Church's mission, everything fulfilling according to the principle of cooperation in harmony existent in the model of the Trinity.

I saw in this work who generates the Christian mission, by whom is implemented, to whom is addressed, with what purpose, what effects it might have, what challenges can be

expected, therefore, a next and absolutely necessary step is to highlight the present possibilities of optimization of the mission highlighting the methods and means.

As shown, the mission in the Romanian space, in the country and in the diaspora, would be structured around two major perspectives, supported and enforced by the transformations undergone by Romanian society in the last decade:

- Revitalization and renewal of youth consciousness of belonging to a particular Christian community – especially the parish and the church in general –through programs and coordinated actions, relevant, engaging and consistent over time and rediscovering the importance of the relationship with the confessor by Sacrament of Penance, and through conversations, discussions, meetings etc.;

- New dimensioning of the importance of pilgrimages, especially in the footsteps of saints and holy places, as opportunities to rediscover the treasures of faith and Christian life.

To understand and solve at least some of the problems the Romanian Orthodox Christians face at the beginning of the millennium, the Missiology has a duty to express coherent programs, consistent and applicable to capitalize on a practical aspect the rich tradition of Orthodox spirituality noting that they must start as much as possible from the existent needs and realities.

Church uses today in completing its missionary efforts and means relatively recently arisen, namely the media: newspapers, magazines, almanacs, radio, television, websites, social networking and email.

Analysing the phenomenon of Internet communication, in the broader context defined with the new "digital revolution" the Roman Catholic Cardinal Christoph von Schonborn highlights, warns that the virtues of communication - listening to the other, helping and allowing, accepting and fighting one's one intolerances - cannot be experienced through the network, and the virtues you do not update get atrophied.

In the face of all this the Church seemingly offers "alternatives" if it were to look only to the institutional character but from his vocation and knowing the purpose for which the Church is engaged in mission we understand, transpires her care for the world and in this, the surprise and inclusion of as many groups of believers / unbelievers.

The present era is marked by an incredible inflation of language - especially in the media and advertising - language of needs artificially promoted (rarely expressions of an essential desire),

impaired speech, impoverishment of political language, abstractions vaguely esoteric of economic gibberish conceiving economy as idol and destiny, relentless search for "communication" in unreal and in language crisis.

This increases the hope in the word revival, liberation, revelation. Language is noise, word-modelling silence. Faith lives in word, in language dies. The real word is a living word, secret and shared only by initiates in a creative celebration.

The church was "obliged" to create and invent their media means.

For the Missionary today, equipped with technical means of communication, it is much easier to meet its mission. He knows who sends him on a mission, which is the foundation of his work, what expects God and the world of him, for what and for whom does the mission, what challenges will he face and what orthodox answers to provide to a world more confusing and opposing than ignorant about God and His will.

The account of the parish in social networks (Facebook, Twiter, Linkedin etc.), email address (e-mail), website, SMS, What's App, all can, and are, popular instruments, communication and facilitation for closeness of believers and also for those outside the church. There are also risks in their use but they are really helpful if used properly.

## Conclusions

More than being one of the activities of Christian Orthodox Church, the mission is its very essential work, an activity expressed in two stages: first to lead people to Christ, the second to accompany them on their Christian course to complete union with Christ. Viewed from the technical perspective, the clause above expresses the Church's objective, a goal that can be reached by the Christian Orthodox missionary's efforts.

But humanity is constantly evolving and progressing in terms of thinking and its social and political events, developments that induce changes in the mission context. Changes in the

missionary context entail adopting appropriate responses and more efficient methods and means, all remaining faithful to the foundations of the Holy Tradition which in fact expresses the Orthodox identity.

In this respect the today missionary starts from the awareness that there are primordial features and landmarks of Christian Orthodox mission inscribed to the reason and purpose of creation of the world: love and together living with God. One God in Trinity never absent or indifferent to humanity as demonstrated in the world history and the books of Sacred Scripture.

Knowing and understanding the missionary context are those which are preparing him for the optimum approach to doing its forward work. Compared to the past centuries missionary, the actual one has to face the massive migration the humans encounter in general and especially the Romanians generated by economic and political reasons. The emigrant today, faced with the challenge of diversity, will be the faithful who will beautify the church in Romania tomorrow. And figures of famous missionaries in the Diaspora today can awaken in the today missionary the yearning to follow their example. Diasporas in American and European continents by far the most representative numerically for this study, have characteristics that, currently well known, open horizon of development activities most suited to mission deployment.

Unlike previous challenges in the domestic sphere of missiology, the missionary also faces external challenges coming from the current state of the world, secularization and globalization with obvious effects of unbelief and atheism, militant or passively by removing the Christian from God. Also from science, especially medicine and biblical archaeology, come challenges likely to require response and involvement of the Church. Traditional family values are also discussed in the light of new religion, especially Western, the one of respecting the human rights. The man risks to be identified as an individual, as a statistic number statistics and less as image and likeness of God.

Identity in otherness of Orthodox mission supposes and obliges to adaptation to the amplified ecumenical context which the church encounters. Ecumenism if not characterized by Orthodox Church features may cause confusion, confusion that is far more dangerous than ecumenical inactivity.

All these emerge possibilities, ways, methods and means by which the mission implicitly the missionary activity may take place best and to which the technical inventions which the media uses can be complementary to them.

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