

Principles of Orthodox Missiology

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Abstract:

The article explored on the Principles of Orthodox Missiology as reflected in our Theology, the Sacraments, liturgy spirituality and the orthodox culture.

The first part of the study focuses on the ontology of Christian mission, Missio Dei or Missio Trinitatis taking into account the missional work of the three persons of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit in their dynamic and kenotic openness to the humankind for salvation in and as Church, centered to Christ as His mystic body. The relation between Church and Mission is treated in the Orthodox in the sense of the interaction because the mission is a central action of the missionary Church.

The second part of the study treats about the relation between Christian mission and Liturgy and spirituality and the cultural aspect of the problem. We point on to the fact that the relation between doctrine and worship has been insufficiently marked out by researchers not only in the Romanian Orthodox tradition but also in other Christian traditions. The article is concentrated on the relation between dogma and worship as it was stated by St. Irenaeus Bishop of Lugdunum. In his theological view our dogma is in full concordance with the Eucharist and the Eucharist confirms back our dogma, which means that the proclamation of our faith is a liturgical act while the dogma gives content to prayer. This relation between dogma and prayer has been influenced the development of the Orthodox worship from the very beginning till now. Next part is demonstrating how the structure of the Sacraments reflects by hymns, prayers and rituals this relation. We conclude saying that the Church dogma and its prayer are so deeply intertwined that each and every one of them could be without confusion identified and assimilated to the other.

Keywords: *Orthodox Church, communion, ecumenism, liturgy, mission, proselytism, sacraments, spirituality, witness*

Introduction

The Orthodox Church clearly distinguishes between *Mission*, in the sense of fundamental apostolic vocation of the universal Church to proclaim the Holy Gospel and *missions*, as evangelizing activities of a

confession or denomination in a non-Christian space. The latter activities were often related to the colonizing process, i.e. “cultural and political oppression” (Bria 1980: 3).

The Christian mission for the Western world is especially a title of personal glory and evokes the idea of space, territory, geography and context, hence the visible extension of the Church by the establishment of new communities in countries with “unfaithful” people; however, that necessary inner fusion between the Christian tradition and local cultural peculiarities to a real interculturalization is not always reached. For the Orthodox Church, the object of mission was

rather to hold the people to the faith in a permanent historic continuity. The Orthodox Church has tended to condemn those who have left the Church rather than to judge those who are still outside the Orthodox faith. The command to mission is based on the invocation and adoration of the name of the Lord: *Hallowed be Thy Name!* Proclamation is identified with doxological *martyria*, with leitourgia; hence the insistence on tradition and on the apostolic succession (Bria 1980: 4).

Therefore, until recently the Orthodox Church was considered to be a *non-missionary Church* in the Western world and by many Orthodox Christians, as well; furthermore, it was deemed to be a space for mission, i.e. “terra missionis”. Despite all this, it was still necessary to clarify the fact that “mission methodology was different in the Eastern world, as opposed to the Western one”; in fact, the missionary imperative of the Orthodox Church is more obvious, the preaching of the Gospel and the Eucharist are directly related, the centre of missionary work is the Liturgy and Orthodoxy “in its liturgical structure is a Missionary Church in itself” (Lemopoulos 1993: 179).

Today, the Orthodox Church is present everywhere in the world due to the local Churches canonically depending on a mother Church, e.g. Constantinople, Moscow or Bucharest (Petraru 2013: 251-282) and it pretends to be the most faithful paradigm of the Church of the Apostles and of the Church Fathers of the first Christian millennium.

The Orthodox mission means the preaching of the Gospel as a *doxological testimony* of the integral divine discourse in Liturgy and prayer (Wolterstorff 1995: 21). God is praised for the redemption of the man in the Christian tradition as Christ’s Church in the communion of grace with God as Trinity. This clarifies and explains the insistence of

Orthodox Church on Tradition and apostolic succession. The biblical text that reflects the essence of the Orthodox mission is the one from St. John the Evangelist; “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3: 16) obvious related to the Great Missionary Commandment for the evangelisation of the entire world (Matthew 28, 19-20). Not involved so much in dialogue with the intellectualist Western theology, bringing unlimited and sometimes sterile arguments of some theologians with the issues of demythologization and remythologisation of the theology or the promotion of secularism, the Orthodox Church is faithful to the realistic hermeneutics, to the spiritual practice and to the divine Liturgy. The mission of our Church is totally faithful to Christ and His Church as communion to Trinity and to the saints, even in the sense of the “new kenotic-perichoretic relational ontotheolog” (Vanhooser 2010: 139).

1. Ontology of Mission

1.1. Trinity and Mission. By mission, in the Orthodox sense, we understand the testimony on *God the living – the Trinity* that created and redeemed the world due to the divine eternal love that calls man to God. *Trinitarian Theology* shows that God is Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the life of perfect communion of the three divine Persons, calling humanity to share divine life as redemption in the eternal Kingdom of God preached by Christ and partly accomplished in His Church in the history of humanity.

Definitely, the sense of mission is not only to pass on or spread intellectual convictions, doctrines or knowledge and moral teachings, but also to transmit the life of communion in God to the humanity redeemed by Christ. It can be said that *Missio Dei* or *Missio Trinitatis* is a “program” of the Holy Trinity for the entire creation whose sense is to be the Kingdom of God. Therefore, “the inherent internal dynamics of the structure pertaining to every human being, in particular and the universe, in general is to be kingdom of God. True life is the life in the communion of the Holy Trinity, the source of human existence, in Christ through the Holy Spirit coming from the Father and going to Him” (Bria 1986; Bel 2010: 21). The “original model of mission” is the one from the

intratrinitarian life which is original reality, the unique reality that in a simple and necessary way (Dictionnaire 1987: 35), calls us all to redemption and unites all people in and as Church. Trinitarian theology is essential for Orthodox mission because the Church confesses God-Trinity, the truth and its life. Orthodox mission must be understood in the spirit of Orthodox Theology and ecclesiology. Orthodox theology is marked by the realist understanding of divine Revelation presented in the biblical text which narrates the History of human salvation from the beginning to Christ, the Incarnate God, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. God as living person is always present in His creation, but from Pentecost a

new reality came into being in the world, a body more perfect than the world, the Church founded in a twofold divine economy, that means the work of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, the two persons of the Holy Trinity sent to the world. The two works lie at the foundation of the Church and are necessary for us in order to come to union with God (Lossky 1993: 187).

So, one must take into account the Gospel and the entire Bible with the realistic and typological senses of its interpretations, that is the conscience and the feeling of the actual presence of the divine transcendence, theologically of the Trinity in the eternal uncreated energies in our life through the human face of Jesus of Nazareth into the Holy Spirit. The Christian person and community experiences this spiritual communion in the history of our salvation. As A. Yannoulatos writes, beyond the spirit of the world, including our historical cultures, the Church turns to the “constants of the Gospel” (Yannoulatos 2003: 114), that is the divine-human person of our Lord Jesus Christ incarnated, transfigured on Tabor Mountain, crucified, resurrected, and the Spirit that came into our world, the creation of the Father, named as such in Jesus’ prayer.

As a matter of fact, there is a trinitarian principle of Church mission, that is a divine project for the world to become the Church, a way in our life in history to the heavenly Kingdom promised in the New Testament by Jesus Himself. It is a historical, but also a spiritual and sacramental continuation of biblical Israel in the communion of the Trinity fully revealed in the Church and sharing the divine love and life to the mankind renewed in Christ and sanctified by the Spirit. In mission, the Orthodox Church stresses the importance of the Gospel, the beautiful

flavor of patristic texts interpreting God's Revelation in human history in an intellectual way, as noted by some missiologists (Bosch 1991: 206); this is also done in a sacramental, liturgical and spiritual dimension in unity of the faith and openness to the society of the constants of our historical and contemporary Christian witnesses.

The Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae stated that Trinity is "the structure of supreme love" (Staniloae 1978 vol. I: 282), i.e. the logical consequence of the biblical, ontological "God is love" (I John, 4: 8), the eternal love between Trinitarian persons revealed in the history of redemption. In the world, the Church is, really, the spread of this love through the grace of the Holy Sacraments given to the Christian people by the sacramental hierarchy that incorporates them into the Kingdom of God for redemption and joy in the uncreated light of the Trinity. Thus, the mission of the Church is, as St. Peter (II Peter 1: 4) claims and as patristic theology understood, the ecclesial sense of the world as

participation of the faithful to the deification in the communion of the Holy Trinity, which leads to their own deification; this is known to the ones that try to be more united in Christ by the imitation of His life as *holiness* (Staniloae 1991:13; Staniloae in Bria 1980: 50; Yannoulatos 2003: 26),

in fact the sense of internal mission of missiology.

1.2. Christ's Centrality. The confession of faith "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10: 9) or the invitation and the urge that "every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2: 11) is the foundation and the heart of theology. Therefore, sending the Son in the world, "for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3: 16) is the beginning and defines Christian mission accurately. The Word of God, the Incarnated One, Saviour of the world and the Creator is the *centre* in a double sense, ontological and dynamic; actually, this is a dynamic ontology that integrates man and the cosmos, without suppressing them, but giving them their true value and consistency in themselves in the divine order. As eternal Logos of the Father, He is the foundation and model, the sense of human existence. As human-divine person, as incarnated Logos, He is our partner in dialogue; by assuming human plenitude, He cures it, restores it, deifies it. Christ is

the Logos of all things and the Logos is the image of the Father. The world has an ontological foundation in God for all things are in relation with the Logos, “man being the face of Logos as person who thinks”, loves, has will and desire (Bria 1986: 4). Christ’s redemption has a cosmic dimension, in the sense revealed in the Bible, and Christ is the fulfillment of humanity’s expectation to be freed from its bondage of decay (Romans 8: 19-23). But as Christ’s mission took place in a world of “decay”, thus making unavoidable the passage to Resurrection, the mission of the Church

takes place in a context of the spiritual fight with evil, sin, implying conversion, paschal and baptismal passing of the world to a new creation. This is not a fight that only shows itself in people’s souls, but penetrates all social life and natural existence through pain, suffering and death (Bria 1986: 5).

Mission under the Cross, Christ’s sacrifice, cannot only remain at the dimension of calvary for Christ’s Resurrection brings light, grace and the love of God in the horizon of human and cosmic existence. So, although God is powerful, He finds the path of humbleness, kenosis in Christ in order to get closer to people, respecting their freedom in choosing Him and call them to the communion with the Self. God brings to date the kenotic Christic act through His Church. In its humbleness, the Church takes people to a graceful deifying state of communion with God in order know and love Him. The mission of the Church is, first of all, a victory on the powers of sin, selfishness, with the obvious social implications in history, not to mention cosmic nature. Above all, due to His sacrifice and the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is present and works in His Church, Christ saves us from spiritual death and eternal death; they are brought to us by sin with unfortunate ontological and cognitive consequences for man in the sense of losing the knowledge of God, the communion with Him for whom man was created from divine love by the Logos of the Father (John 1: 1-3). Yet Christ remains in a permanent state of sacrifice even after the unique Crucifixion on Golgotha, doing it for us and with all His Church, as Orthodox theology interpretes it according to Cyrillus of Alexandria (Staniloae 1978 vol. III: 107-108). We are set on the path of the Kingdom by His means, on the right side of the Father and the sacrifice of Eucharist by which we are united with Christ the real one for our own deification.

Secondly, Christian mission is not controlled by historical powers; it needs to be understood from an eschatological perspective, as well, in the Kingdom of heaven when all will be truly revealed and fulfilled. Christian mission can only be understood in the light of Christ's incarnation, it is Christocentric, in a permanent internal dynamic between Cross and Resurrection, pain and joy, hope and fulfillment. Christ's crucified love is the reason and power of the mission of his Church, of the missionary theologian engaged in mission, as Christ's witnesses in any historical context, be it in freedom, prosecution or even death. Missionary testimony is strong when fulfilled in weakness (2 Corinthians 12, 9) when Christ is with us. The purpose of the Church's mission is the anakephaleosis of the humanity and the universe in Christ, for Christ to be everything in all (I Corinthians 15: 28). Jesus Christ is the center of the new humanity, of human unity restored (I Peter 5: 1; Colossians 3: 4).

Evangelization implies the focus on Christ, Son of God the True, Who came to restore humanity and give it the possibility of deification, which was actually the primordial purpose of man's creation by God: The saving of the world, the ontological and existential meaning of man is given by Christ, who becomes the center of spiritual life of man:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2, 20).

The good news is that God took shape as human to save us and live in us: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the **one** and only Son, who came from the Father, full of (John 1: 14)". All people want to live forever. But to have eternal life they need Christ: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17: 3). The Church is the body of Christ and that is why we find in Christ redemption: the liturgical life of the Church and the Holy Scriptures mirror the centrality of Christ – which is essential for the preaching of His Gospel and understanding why the gates of hell cannot conquer His Church.

1.3. The pneumatological and sacramental dimension is essential for the mission of the Church because Christ is inseparable from the Person of the Holy Spirit and His work of life that spiritually refines man. The Holy Spirit continues, confirms and strengthens the work of Christ (John 15: 26), makes all things new and, therefore, His work is one of soteriological efficiency from an anthropological perspective in a broader cosmic sense. The Holy Spirit and its invocation in the first prayer of the Orthodox Church, “O Heavenly King...” gives man grace for its sacramental integration in the structure of the Church; it also turns the bread and wine from the Eucharist into the Body and Blood of Christ, Who is present in the Church, the new creation as in the beginning in primordial waters, thus intermediating its permanent immaculate union with Christ, its Groom. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal power, but the living Spirit of God who is also the Spirit of communion, the one who works by the Sacraments of the Church to make the faithful people of God holy and redeem them through synergy, working together with God. The Holy Sacraments make up the Church through the new ones that are incorporated via the grace of the Spirit.

The Holy Sacraments are received by man in the local Church, his parish. The parish is, thus, the environment, the field, the horizon where the redeeming union with God is truly fulfilled when the graceful Holy Sacraments, as performed by the ordained canonical priest, are received; this is done in communion and submission with the hierarchy of the place that ensures the ecclesial unity of the people of God in the universal Church. As usual, most of our Christians occasionally take part in sacramental celebrations, the Baptism, Matrimony or funeral-related hierurgies. Some do not know the real deep mystagogic significance of sacramental acts in relation with the biblical text; they are united with Christ and, as St. Paul wrote, these earthy men are less shaken inside existentially and spiritually by the enlightened and redeeming divine work. Certainly, the sacramental dimension of the Christian condition in time implies the knowledge of divine truth of life and redemption; this involves a permanent use of the text of the Scripture, the great text of Christianity that comprises the historical revelation of God which culminates in Christ, an act of love and divine offering for the man who experiences God’s work and presence in his concrete life but particularly in

the condition of prayer, meditation and Liturgy. It is this dimension that confers heavenly atmosphere in Orthodoxy in the melodicy of hymns that reproduce the biblical Godly words of a poetic creativity inspired by the hagiographs taken by the Holy Spirit to the communion of saints. In this sense, rediscovering and becoming aware of the liturgical and sacramental work of the Church towards her sons, the Orthodox lay people, is an urgent impetuous mystagogic and missionary exigency that can only have as starting point the real and concrete fact that the sacrament, as Father Stăniloae claims

is made in the encounter in faith of the two people in the ambient of the Church full of the Holy Spirit and in the bodily touch between the two people, along with the confession through words of this faith; of the one that performs the sacrament and the other that receives it (Staniloae 1978, vol. III: 8).

Mystagogic in the sense of intense and deep experience of faith in personal and missionary interiority; of public communitarian witness of faith, visibility with an impact on the less initiated ones in the great mystery of Christianity, as St. Paul put it. However, in the sacraments, as B. Sesboüé put it, Christ has a major role as original Sacrament by the founding words and sacramental gestures (Sesboüé 2009: 31) then taken over by the Church and its sacramental hierarchy. Through the Holy Spirit, for man, it institutes the personal thought and experiated relation with God.

The sacraments of the Church institute and make permanent the relation with God, the redeeming communion and are “in carnal relation with God” (Staniloae 1978, vol. III: 38, 174) in the sense of something concrete, palpable, intensely felt as a presence, a relation, as love between two persons – in the Holy Sacraments, but especially in the Eucharist where Christ is, the Christian’s “bread of life” (John 6, 48, 51) according to St. John. Considering these aspects and the fact that the Christian Orthodox, in general, is one of liturgical and sacramental character and less biblical, in the sense that in his spiritual life, the reading of the Bible is of no primary importance, but the presence to Church and devotion to God and His saints – obviously to practitioners of faith in the sociological sense; they become a smaller segment of the ones that only declare themselves Orthodox and participate to the life of the parish – a thorough understanding of the sacramental dimension of personal existence

engaged in the horizon of Orthodox community where the Holy Sacraments are fulfilled by the priest rendering man Church and Body of Christ. All Holy Sacraments show a normal life in Christ known from the Scripture, through which we are spoken the hypostatic Word of God and whose words are repeated in the ritual of the Sacrament, thus becoming prayer. Therefore, it can be said that the Church **exists** and **makes** things happen in the sense that it fulfills the Sacraments and, in their turn, they fulfill the Church (Staniloae 1978, vol. III: 40, 52), i.e. they permanently make up the sacramental Body of Christ, the holy and heavenly people of God in the pilgrimage to the eternal citadel to God's Kingdom. What is said in the Liturgy of the Sacrament, the words have a performative value in the sense that what is said is made through the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, at the level of parish as integral Church in the local community by the reception of the Holy Sacraments, man is on the path which makes him real in relation, communion with God. Thus, the messianic prophecy, *God is with us* is fulfilled for man is son of God whom he names, adores and invokes as Father after the divine discovery towards the deification, the divine-humanisation, Christification and trinitarisation (Popovitch 1997: 247; Bourgeois, Sesboüé, Tihon 1995: 16) according to Justin Popovich's text that contains so many substantial expressions full of theological sense. Sacramentality is the way of communion between God and man, the state of man's pervasion and shining by Christ's glory, the uncreated eternal light of the Holy Spirit, the entire Holy Trinity.

1.4. Church and Mission. The Orthodox concept of mission depends on the understanding of the nature of the Church starting from Christ who brings the Good News, the path that necessarily takes to His Church which gives the respective Good News. By sending the Holy Spirit, Christ wanted for His work to be continued in the Church, a universal sacrament of redemption by its inherent missionary nature. For the Church, *to be* is to proclaim the Gospel of redemption unceasingly and to spread the grace of the Holy Spirit towards sanctification and deification so that we cannot speak of the Church and mission separately. Instead, we can speak of *the mission of the Church*, of its members, the clergy and the faithful, confessing and living, fulfilling the

commandments of the One that called them “out of darkness into his wonderful light” (I Peter 2: 9). The Church is the prophetic, sacerdotal and royal people of God who prefigures Christ’s plenitude and His eschatological reign by the reconciliation of everything thanks to Him. The Church needs to bring all people to her because they are all created and redeemed by God in Christ. Therefore, the Church cannot be conceived as a purely human group in history falling back on its own interests which are mundane and ephemeral. The Church would then lose its character, its divine aspect by the Trinity itself present in its theandric structure. In its missionary essence, the Church is in itself the sense of mission. Mission is an essential act of the new theandric reality, the Church, the body of Christ that has brought plenitude to the world, the cosmos ever since the Pentecost.

The Church is not a voluntary association of individuals (congregationalist ecclesiology), a “*corpus Christianorum*”, the result of a historical accident, but the reality of God’s economy to unite everything in Christ “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.” (Ephesians 1, 10, 23). It is the mystery of our life in Christ, the *hic et nunc* visible manifestation of the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit in our life.

The Orthodox Mission is to be interpreted as extension of the same holy Church in time and space with the people growing through centuries in their own cultural, historical area, but also with people going to new places and keeping in their mind and in their heart the Christian Tradition from home, maintaining the faithful people of God in the communion of saving grace of the one and only Church of the Apostles, of the Fathers of the one and undivided Church from the beginning until today in the dynamics of the same biblical and dogmatic faith. Evangelization includes everyone, because all people recognize the caducity of the world and miss God. However, they can become sons of God by union with Christ, keeping at the same time their personal uniqueness. Orthodoxy affirms that everything that exists in man must enter the Kingdom of God. Everything that represents man must be immortalized, deified and united forever with God. It results from here that by union with God, man does not lose his personality, in modernist sense, because my soul and my love remain mine even after the union with God.

Therefore, mission is not the proclamation of theoretical truths or ethical principles, but the assemblage of people to become members of the Christian community in a concrete visible form. To build the Body of Christ is the apostolic vocation of the Church itself by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Church under a missionary aspect fulfils the mandate and Christ's will by the work of the Holy Spirit; despite the troubles of time, it remains faithful to God and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Matthew 16: 18). The Church is the Kingdom of God that has paradoxically come and will come (Bria 1980: 9). The Church proclaims and anticipatively updates in time and history the kingdom of God in the Holy Spirit which constitutes its essential vocation starting from the Pentecost. Apostolicity is one of the Church's fundamentals, this attribute testifying to the unceasing continuity of the ecclesial organism in unity and holiness by sacramental hierarchy that continues the apostolic work through the Holy Spirit. The sacramental act of incorporation in the Church of Christ is made with the conscience that the baptized one "builds on the foundation of the apostles and prophets", and the Church is incomplete without one of the many that Christ "won" spilling His Blood. The purpose of preaching the Gospel, mission is of establishing Eucharistic communities in every human settlement; by means of the Liturgy and the celebration of the redeeming presence of God in grace, they are summoned to witness Christ, to fulfil His commandments, to show love spiritually and materially by philanthropic acts. In Orthodox Missiology the term *Missional* is not in use but the hermeneutics shows the holistic dimension of the Church mission related to Trinity, His real and actual communion to the people of God in the redeemed history (Gelder, Zscheile 2011: 44-45; Scherer, Bevans 1992: 209).

Orthodox Mission is to be understood as an apostolic task and in the Creed from Nicaea and Constantinople; we thus confess the faith in the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church. In this sense the mission is an act of the missionary Church, not an act of human adventure. Through mission, the Church is extended and new Christian communities come into being in new places in communion with the centre sending missionaries under the blessing of the local bishop of a Church. The structure of the new Church and of the sending Church are the same in sacramental communion, worship and charity, spiritual and liturgical

unity under the guidance of the local Synod or of the bishop with his canonical ordained priests.

The Church gives plenitude to the human being that cannot achieve holiness without God. Therefore, becoming aware of the quality of Church member is a maximum requirement in the present context of Orthodox Church mission. By means of the sacramental integration in the Body of Christ, the Christian has the responsibility of witnessing to the grace received, live according to the biblical commandments, the Tradition of the Church in a theological, confessing and ecclesial existence. Therefore, according to the ecclesial principle of *sensus fidelium*, “the missionary and pastoral rehabilitation and reactivation of laymen are crucial problems for every local Church” (Bria 1989: 99), for every community, Orthodox parish in which it is absolutely necessary for Christian unity and holiness to be reflected. As people of God gathered in a certain geographical place, as parish, the local missionary Church (Rivers 2005: 38), the Church by the clergy and the faithful is assembled to update the variety of ministry and charisma perennially (Afanasiev 2008: 93) shown in Christian history according to their importance in various contexts. Thus, the entire people of God had a major role in the mission of Church in history which can be illustrated by means of significant contributions regarding the identification and veneration of national and local saints in the introduction of the living language, both spoken and written in the Church cult and sermon, in the organization of the local Church, respecting the national and cultural values. In the Romanian Orthodox Church the aspect of the missionary work is mapped by the following statistics of the priesthood learned in our Faculties of Theology.

2. The Dynamics of Christian Mission

2.1. Liturgy and Mission. An essential principle of Orthodox missiology is *the proclamation of the Gospel by doxology and Liturgy*, a principle according to which prayer and the liturgical representation of the Gospel or Revelation have a primal role in Orthodoxy. Consequently,

the communion that confesses Christ is, at the same time, the communion that prays to Him, adores Christ as God. In history, God's adoration in the Church was the expression and guarantee of keeping the divine revelation (Bria 1986: 17).

The redeeming events in the life of Christ are expressed and represented in the Liturgy, i.e. His messianic activity and the preaching of the Good News, of the Gospel, death and Resurrection. At the same time, the Liturgy, updating the redeeming events and offering us the Eucharistic Christ anticipates the future Kingdom for the Christians. By the Eucharist, Christians are "christified", they experiate the plenitude of redemption because "the Lord is good" (Psalm 34: 4). Thus, between the Gospel and the Eucharist, in Orthodoxy, there is a strong organic connection: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them" (Matthew 28: 19-20). True life depends on the sacramental act of consuming the Eucharistic Christ, eating and drinking the Body and the Blood of Christ (John 6: 53).

Orthodox Mission is divided into Liturgy and the Sacraments, the Liturgy and the Eucharist imprinting the true rhythm of mission; first of all, *gathering* (ek-kaleo) and then *sending*, "*In peace we shall exit*". The Eucharist creates communion, gathers the Christians, unites them in Christ and between them and from this peak of adoration each one becomes an apostle of Christ for the witnessing on the sublimity of the life with Christ, in Christ. Therefore, in the Byzantium, the centre of mission was Liturgy. By its structure and the liturgical aspect, the Orthodox Church is a missionary Church (Lemopoulos 1993:179). Despite all these, given its function and ecclesial dimension, the Liturgy in the Orthodox Church cannot be reduced to ritualism, introverted life, but it accomplishes a genuine openness towards the world, the social life with communitarian problems. If Christian mission lacked the doxological, liturgical dimension, it would be mere religious ideology, a peculiar activity of human vanity and selfishness. Saint John Chrysostom acknowledges these missionary aspects:

Would you do honor to Christ's body? Neglect Him not when naked; do not while here you honor Him with silken garments, neglect Him perishing without of cold and nakedness. For He that said, this is my body, and by His word confirmed the fact, this same said, You saw me an hungered, and fed me not; and, Inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me (St.

John Chrysostom Hom. In Matt 50).

In Orthodoxy, *the Gospel is preached in the Liturgy, in the Sacraments of the Church, in other divine services, the 7 praises of the daily liturgical cycles of saints.*

In the Orthodox cycle, the Holy Scripture is the spring and foundation of the entire liturgical and spiritual life of the Church. The Orthodox liturgical ritual is characterized by the impressive biblical phraseology, extended texts taken from the Old and New Testament at each ordinance typically established by the Church. The biblical message is liturgically brought to date in the prayer of the Church, especially in its Liturgy, when the Church performs the Eucharist; it is by Eucharist that the Church fulfils itself in communion with Jesus Christ. The Bible is alive in Liturgy, the liturgical acts vivify and give sense to the words of the Scripture interpreted and brought to date according to the requirements of Christians nowadays and since forever, all called to holiness, a state of inner grace that passes beyond words, radiates for the Christian communion overall. This state is given by the participation to “the divine nature” (II Peter 1: 4), the communion with the Holy One.

But on the other hand, the prayer itself springs from man’s purest feeling, the simple thought risen to God for praise, gratitude or demand; it bears the seal of spiritual biblical experience in a continuity of invocation and fulfillment of human hope in time and eschatological perspective. Drawing on P. Florensky, D. Stăniloae presents a structure of prayer according to the following scheme:

a. Addressing God, *God the Almighty... or Jesus Christ, our Lord ...or God, heavenly King, Comforter, true Spirit...* that express the essence of public or private prayer, i.e. the invocation of the presence of God the transcendent, the mystery of the divine Name invoked by the faithful man who feels God in his proximity, more in his heart, lives overwhelmed and transfigured by the divine presence.

b. The anamnestic aspect of prayer, i.e. the recall of the wonderful acts of God from the history of divine economy, the Revelation, the self-communication of His eternal will and love for man and his redemption. His involvement in human history for man in order to be in communion with God and the trust that make man open towards God and His work confirm the identity and continuity of divine redeeming acts for people

since the beginning of times: “Jesus Christ, Our Lord, you entered the garment of the tax collector Zacchaeus and redeemed him and his household...” or “you came to Cana in Galilee and blessed the wedding there...”.

c. The demand thanks to which the desire of the faithful or of the celebrating community comes into force is presented trustfully to God based on the fulfillment of the prayers by Him in the history of the economy of redemption, of the Church: “watch over those that pray to you and guard them from all evil” or “receive the prayer of your humble subjects and with your unseen help bless this wedding...”.

d. God’s praise in the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this enumeration was consecrated in the Christian tradition based on the chronology of the economy of each divine person towards humanity.

e. The doxological confirmation by the word *Amen* needs to be understood from the perspective of divine truth, of the faithfulness that God has for His people (Staniloae 2004: 87).

In the liturgical acts, the Revelation is brought to date, “God with us”, the economy of redemption in its dynamic to the kingdom of God who is efficiently present in the perspective of life and redemption in the community of His own, in the church, *axis mundi* and liturgical center of creation by the grace of the Spirit as has always been with His people.

2.2. Spirituality and Mission. The Orthodox Church has a liturgical, communitarian spirituality, but also a *personal dimension*, fruit of askesis and love sprung from God as love source (I John 4: 8). This is a missionary factor of an exceptional quality and utmost value, extremely important for the mission of the Church, for Christian witnessing. The Christian aim is the holiness achieved by communion with the holiness in itself, God’s being. If the Orthodox Church is the holder of an exceptional legacy of liturgical spirituality, we may rightfully assess that the evening stars on the sky of the Church are those of ascetic and mystical spirituality, the saints as inexhaustible spring of spiritual growth. The saints, martyrs, the known and unknown devout people, the hesychasts of the Orthodox Church are the ones that achieved likeness with the image of God via the holiness of their life, prayer and contemplation, love of their neighbor which effaces separation, thus creating an environment that

irradiates light, joy, communion and the view of God. The holiness of life, holiness as divine gift obtained from the spiritual fight with the attempts, the passions, the devil by the classic steps of Christian spirituality, purification, illumination and above all, *unio mystica*, the suffering of deification through grace, the essential anthropological concept of the orthodox theology is the absolute human goal. The Orthodox Church gives an authentic goal to the Christian world which is viable and experienced in the love that offers itself and transfigures; this is a difficult, yet possible goal, achievable by the grace of the Holy Spirit by the Charismatic diversity in the Christian East. This includes what we call a secularized world which refuses God because of its various ideologies. The holiness with its balance is the value nowadays imposed in the entire Christianity which unfortunately faces spiritual influences foreign to the genuine Christian spirit. This also holds true for the unchristian spaces of the Far East, the new gnosis, the occultism of the “parallel tradition” with the attempt of some forces to create “a new world”, “a new religion”, illusions of the unrooted man in the spiritual Christian tradition. As acknowledged by the Christian West that admires the ascetic-mystical, sacramental and liturgical spirituality of Orthodoxy nowadays and the Church Fathers,

perhaps the Christian East in helping man to discover himself as a religious athlete, with a corresponding spirituality that can save him from an easy and false absorption in the divine impersonal essence of Oriental mysticism which tends towards a carnal union with Christ (Colte 1973: 338-339).

Between mission and holiness, there is a deep intimate relation because the first effectively fulfills itself when the theological and missionary priest preaching Christ radiates the power and warmth of the Spirit by his personal life in Christ. Therefore, “the man who has the Holy Spirit inside him is able to understand the deep sense of Scriptures and guides others on the path of holiness and plenitude of life.” (Bernard 1986: 25). Orthodox spirituality also has a theological foundation; it is a trinitarian, Christological, pneumatological-sacramental one in the ecclesial community by the participation of the clerical man to the life of the neighbours, the improvement of spiritual life of the community whose member is in the freely and personally assumed anachoresis for more union and intelligible vision of God (Staniloae 1981, vol. III: 24-49).

Spiritual exercises, askesis are a rebirth to us in the Spirit of Christ up to the state of deification - theosis which is achieved through personal endeavor and is, at the same time, a gift of God due to the state of adoration, prayer, contemplation, meditation. Holiness is the sense of Christian life; holiness, as act of purification, illumination, mysterious union with God in grace by putting on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6: 11-18) which is God's will and work for people, the sublime gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian is the person "in the image of God" that received, by Baptism, via the Sacrament of Unction, the "mark of the Holy Spirit as gift" of God which is united with Christ Himself in the Eucharist, fearfully and humbly consuming His Body and Blood as bread and wine. Therefore, the Christian is a *theophorus*, a bearer of God by the divine grace inside him and a confessor of divine love for the redeemed world; this was achieved by means of Christ's sacrifice whose heavenly fruit are benefits for man in the Church. Thus, the Christian permanently needs to prove by words and facts this quality and in Christ, this valor of his in the intimacy of personal prayer, in the presence and communitarian service in the institutions of the state, of society, in general by practicing Christian values, responsibility and love. Nowadays, it is necessary to overcome a dualism which unfortunately shows in some Christians; it is the case of a pathological halving in a spiritual and moral manner by the affirmation and practice of faith individually, privately, egotistically and the lack of Christian engagement for the world, which is even more serious for the institution of the Church whose member man becomes by Baptism. The stress on the mystagogic aspect of Christian life needs to fall in parallel with the visible, concrete, public witnessing of quality, of the honor of Christian. In fact, the sense of Christian life is the acquirement of the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes man's face shine when improved by eternal divine light that shone in Christ on Tabor and that accepts people loved by God; "I am loved that so I exist" (Zizioulas 2013: 145). The spiritual experience of the missionary involves the equivalent between speech and the living of Christ in prayer.

2.3. Culture and Mission. *Contextualisation of the Scripture, of Christian universal in national culture and local specificity is a principle*

and one of the personal, special qualities of Orthodoxy by which it expresses itself osmotically, naturally, ontologically; certainly, this happens after a long historical experience with its positive and negative realms, the relation between national culture and Christian faith. In the perspective of present missiology, “inculturation” signifies the insertion of values in the spiritual inheritance, the cultural legacy, one’s own life conceptions. In the Christian vision nowadays, inculturation is the movement of local values and cultures by which they become “basic instruments and powerful means to present, restate and live Christianity” (Dictionary 1991: 506). From a missiological perspective, inculturation is the evangelization process by which the Christian message and life are assimilated by a culture so that they express themselves by means of the specific elements of that culture and make up a principle of inspiration, in norm and power of unification that transfigures the respective culture. Therefore, the integration of Christianity in ethnical culture (indigenisation) is the transfiguration of the richness of human culture and history of a people in existence, in its manifestation in the light of the Scripture of Christ, of eternal truth. In fact, the history of Orthodox peoples overlapped, identified with Orthodoxy itself which created and shaped the profile of a national culture. The historical vocation of Orthodoxy may be expressed as follows: “mission to serve the Church, the Church to serve the nation” (Bria 1980: 10). The Orthodox Church served the people in its whole, not only the ruling class, but also the ecclesial community sometimes even against authorities.

Moreover, as Ion Bria claimed, “the local Church is the one that creates culture in the process of reception and transmission of the Gospel via cult, ethos and spirituality. Culture is not an independent anonymous construct; every local church, every nation has its own cultural configuration” (Bria 2013: 176). A simple acknowledgement of the spiritual and cultural patrimony of an Orthodox country is suggestive in this sense. As shown by C. Nicolescu, “the Church proposed itself to the world by culture... and first rank culture” because Christ, its Lord, is an intellectual that taught the “academics” of the Temple as Logos of God (Nicolescu 2015: 286, 290).

The current configuration of the Orthodox Church is of great cultural and geographic diversity due to the national Orthodox Churches

and to an increasing “diaspora” which increasingly shows itself worldwide. On the one hand, local Orthodox Churches not only imposed themselves specific culture and personal pastoral, canonical traditions in the life of peoples they encountered in history; thus, we can now speak of a Byzantine, Slavic, Latin and Arab Orthodoxy, on the one hand and the rise of Orthodoxy in new geographical areas, in Asia, Africa and America, on the other hand which raises the problem of a transfer of authority from mother Churches to the indigenous centre.

As rev. Ion Bria claimed, Orthodoxy is

a factor of history of a people or nation. In the case of many countries from the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, the history of a nation cannot be understood without the history of a local Church. Orthodoxy always defended ‘the polyphonic system’ in which every local Church defends its ethnic and cultural identity, its specific mission. Being autonomous and autocephalous – having limited territory and its own synod – any local Church is a prototype within a universal community (Bria 1999: 276).

2.4. The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism. Finally, we cannot omit the *ecumenic* dimension of Orthodoxy which, in the ecumenic movement,

is defined as the current, historical, seen form of Universal Church undivided as in the first centuries. It preserves the dogmatic basis, the liturgical structure and canonical order that supports the unity of Universal Church (Bria 1987: 12).

Due to these essential elements, Orthodoxy “is not a confessional form of faith and spirituality reserved to a restrained group, a nation, region or culture; on the contrary, it has an ecumenic dimension” (Bria 1989: 13). The notion of ecumenism ethimologically comes from the Greek word *oikoumene*, being the medium-passive form of the verb *oikeo-ein* – *to live*. *Oikoumene* is the inhabited world, the entire earth, the people’s home. This ontologically implies the idea of unity of humanity, a unity of being, a truth that is unique for all as they are unitary in life, and received the same unique life. In a theological sense, *oikoumene* refers to the unity of creation, the humanity in God the Creator and Redeemer of all people. In classical antiquity, by *oikoumene* we understand the civilized Greek-Roman world which was united as far as its politics, administration and cultural diversity were concerned. This also holds true

for the religion of the peoples within the empire. In the Christian sense, the term ecumenical may be understood from the perspective of what is universal, catholic, a reality that characterizes all people, a truth which is for all, as the truth of Christ's Gospel. Therefore, for the first time this sense of ecumenism is found in St. Ignatius of Antioch, visionary of Christian ecumenicity who gives Christological, ecclesial and sacramental connotations to the term. Thus, "the faithful should be where the bishop is, as the universal Church is where Christ is" (Ignatie 1979: 184).

By participating in the activity of the Ecumenic Council of Churches (C.E.B.) and inter-theological dialogues, Orthodoxy makes known its legacy of spirituality and genuine Christian theologisation. The ecumenic dimension is, for Orthodoxy, the confession of the whole Christian truth, hence the possession of truth; but on the other hand, we can also speak today about a geographical universality of Orthodoxy among the inner Catholicity and universality of its message (Clement 1965: 32).

Conclusions

The ecumenical dialogue has opened new possibilities of common Christian testimony and shows itself both *on the theological plan* (and this is harder due to the promotion of unlimited diversity without unit exigency; the Orthodoxy actually warned the Ecumenical Council of Churches that the purpose of this Christian organism is to restore the unit of the Church. However, there can be a distancing from Christian understanding biblically, revelationally and dogmatically founded and spiritually-liturgically lived within the canonical-sacramental borders of the Church, of essential Christian teaching: the Trinitarian God, redemption, Bible, Church and others), but especially in the plan of *practical*, social life: mutual help, the week of continuous prayer, common catechesis, etc. Currently, Orthodoxy is undergoing a crisis of the ecumenical movement due to various factors: the inter-communion with the heterodox ones, language, ordination of women, rights of sexual minorities and religious syncretism.

These situations are not compatible with the spirit of Orthodoxy that pertains to integrism groups which refuse the Christian model proposed by ecumenists that cumulate a structure ever since the first centuries; this

is present in their theological theses specific to all confessions belonging to special spiritual and cultural spaces such as the Mediterranean Basin.

Orthodoxy is characterized nowadays as it has always been, in its missionary work, by the *faith* in our Fathers, Apostles and martyrs, *hope* in our presence in this world and in every place where Providence allowed us to exist through *love* in theology and our service.

In the Orthodox sense, there is only a Church, “the ark of redemption” whose institutional and spiritual-sacramental borders coincide. The Universal Church is identical with the Orthodox one. Criticised by ecumenists as exclusivist, this conception is shared by most Orthodox theologians, although there are also voices that accept the thesis on the charismatic limits of the Church and believe there is a certain state of ecclesiality beyond Orthodoxy. Who breaks from the Church, by either wrong teaching – heresy –, or disobedience – schism – loses the communion of the Spirit. Man becomes son of God by His Church which became one in the Sacrament of Baptism. The Eucharist seals the gracious sacramental union with Christ. The foundation of this ecclesiological vision consists in the ontological unity of God who gives Himself to the Church, the one undivided in history. As Christians, we head not only to unity, but our entire existence also derives from the inseparable space between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity given to us, the people, as historical event on the day of Pentecost. Orthodoxy embraces this ecclesiological conception which is the undivided Church of the first Christian millennium that follows in history the Church of the Pentecost by its faithfulness to Christ and His teaching dogmatically formulated and experientiated in the most convincing manner and sublimely by the saints of the Church. The succession of the grace and the uninterrupted continuity of sacramental priesthood are also essential in Orthodoxy which is the expression of the communion of saints and angels led by the Holy Virgin in the mystical body of Church with the Christians in this world.

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