

The “Evangelising” Orthodoxy Revisited. An Eastern Orthodox Perspective

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to show, by providing appropriate arguments, that evangelism is the core of the Orthodox Liturgy. The Eastern Eucharist has about 80 percent of its content biblical and evangelical text, while living in a context where being an “evangelist” equals being a member of a sectarian type of Christianity. However, Christ brings and proclaims the Gospel (Matthew 4:23, 9:35), His disciples are “evangelised” and sent (missus) to evangelise (Mark 16: 15, Acts 14: 7), Paul is evangelised in Damascus and continues to “evangelise himself” in the Arabian desert, and in turn evangelises all those whom he encounters on the journeys known as “missionary” (Acts 16: 10; 20: 24, Romans 1: 15-16, I Corinthians 9: 16 and many others). In the typical assertion, Paul never defended his own “mission”, social status or work, but the Gospel. Orthodoxy in Romania has already learned much from the “evangelists”. She must rediscover her vocation of evangelising her own faithful with humility. The paper makes a short history and exegesis of the term and its evolution, then underlines the difference between evangelism and mission of the Church, and draws attention on the vocation of the traditional Church to revisit it and make it more evident and more vivid, as well as to learn from the enthusiasm in doing so from other younger denominations at the local level. We all must be aware that Christians must speak with one voice in an Europe which is more and more secularised, driven away from her founding religious values and identity. As the Romanian Theologian Dumitru Staniloae put it: “If I am to be born again, I would do my very best to re-evangelise Europe”.

Keywords: *Evangelism, Orthodox Faith, Evangelicals, Gospel, Mission, Parish, Catechesis*

1. Preliminaries

“Again, we offer You this spiritual worship for those who have reposed in the faith: ancestors, fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and for every righteous spirit made perfect in faith.”

Among the reactions that European society has had to the massive immigration of Arab populations towards Western Europe, there is one in particular, captured in a short film that went “viral” in online media, of an elderly Christian “standing his ground” to a crowd of immigrant Muslim men in a park in England and repeating to them that the true God is Jesus Christ, that this is the only truth, that He was prophesied, incarnated, resurrected and that he is the living God; the rest is a lie. (*Muslims Attacked Man of God - Speakers Corner Hyde Park London 2015*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijmACi_YXC0, date retrieved: 02.09.2017.) Taunted, insulted and pushed by the people around, risking physical harm, he continues to read Bible excerpts and to announce the Truth. Leaving aside his denominational affiliation, it is worth noting that he does not proclaim the Gospel to people who have never heard of it. The event makes us consider evangelism as a concern of the Church that should be aimed at those who have heard of the Gospel, the members of the Church, especially those from within, the self-declared post-modernists, atheists, members or sympathisers of esoteric movements and philosophies esoteric of the Far East, even though they are baptised in the Orthodox Church, who inhabit now the European continent, nowadays multifarious in religious terms (Achimescu 2007). Europe and the Northern hemisphere, in general, although having the status of cradle of Christianity, are undergoing in an irreversible process of becoming atheistic, denying their Christian origin and moving away from Christian values, without knowing exactly where they are heading. More recent events show that religion cannot be replaced by atheism, as its promoters had hoped, but by any other form of religiosity. Historically, atheism *per se* has not proven to be viable in any society, regardless of its level of civilisation or progress.

We shall need to differentiate the term evangelism from catechism and mission (Himcinschi 2003: 24), in order to clearly distinguish their differences and complementarity, and to reassess the place and importance of evangelism as a shared Christian attitude. Mission involves at least two persons, one who sends out the missionary and the missionary who is sent. Evangelism means both to live the Gospel and to announce the Gospel; it is a mission in itself, it is a “coat” that a person wears and becomes part of their existence, identifying them and showing them as

they are, without necessarily, giving it to someone else. Everyone can “evangelise themselves”, that is, to conform to the evangelical criteria of life, in an uninterrupted progress, throughout their life. In the institutional-parish environment, it is argued that the Church carries out its “mission”, conducts catechisation programs, but does not “evangelise”. As a term in itself, “evangelism” is a delicate term, avoided in the language of the Church, because of its excessive use by neo-Protestant groups. This gave “free churches” a kind of ownership of the evangelising mission, starting with the Reformation (16th century), when Erasmus of Rotterdam defined “evangelism” as a form of Lutheran fanaticism in Dutch society. (He had a dispute with Luther himself, see Desiderius Erasmus de Rotterdam, *Diatribes seu collatio de libero arbitrio*). Therefore, evangelisation was viewed by the Roman Catholic Church as a “Protestant subversive activity” in order to draw Catholic believers to Protestantism. The Roman Catholic Church, followed by the Orthodox, adopted the term “mission” as a substitute for “evangelism,” yet it does not convey the same range of meanings. In fact, the *raison d’être* of the ecclesial community is evangelising or announcing the news of salvation to all people, in all times and places (*oikoumene*). Evangelism would therefore be typical of some Christian factions, generically called “evangelist” or respectively “Gospel Christians”.

The purpose of this study is to show, by providing appropriate arguments, that everything begins with and aims at evangelism: Christ brings and proclaims the Gospel (Matthew 4:23, 9:35) (Bel 2016: 190), His disciples are “evangelised” and sent (*missus*) to evangelise (Mark 16: 15, Acts 14: 7), Paul is evangelised in Damascus and continues to “evangelise himself” in the Arabian desert, and in turn evangelises all those whom he encounters on the journeys known as “missionary” (Acts 16: 10; 20: 24, Romans 1: 15-16, I Corinthians 9: 16 and many others). Biblical quotations were retrieved from <https://www.biblegateway.com>, NIV Bible. In the typical assertion, Paul never defended his own “mission”, social status or work, but the Gospel: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!” (Galatians 1: 8). John the Evangelist considers that proclaiming the Gospel is not only a worldly action, but an eternal vocation, even for the heavenly powers, in heavenly

reality: “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.” (Revelation 14: 6). Ultimately, evangelisation from the Eastern Orthodox perspective means the application of the Great Commandment, which is the conclusion of the Gospel According to Matthew

[Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.] (Hatfield 2011: 236).

Evangelism as the purpose, meaning and vocation of the Christian is accomplished by various means, yet chief among these is the power of God that inspires and motivates, rather than the human abilities to teach the evangelical precepts. It is no surprise that some teachers of religion consider evangelical precepts to be good given their social effectiveness. In theology and religion studies departments in Western universities, the atheism of theology students is not an impediment to their being admitted to study theology and be offered a doctoral degree in theology. The statements are made following personal discussions held in 2016 with faculty and graduates of the Department of Religious Studies, Durham University, United Kingdom.

Catechism is a tool or type of evangelism, as it seeks the acquisition of theoretical knowledge about the Gospel, the Kingdom of Heaven, and the relationship of God with the world. The verb “to catechise” (*catehein*) is used in the New Testament to mean learning or teaching the doctrine of God to the unbaptized (Acts 18: 25; Romans 2: 18; Galatians 6: 6). In contrast, *kerissein* or *evangelizein* (to proclaim) mean to announce the Kingdom of God (Hatfield 2011: 236). In early Christianity, a further biblical term was used, *didascalein*, which meant the activity of teaching the faith to the baptised by means of readings of homily on biblical texts, which catechumens did not have access to. We can thus understand catechesis as a process of teaching those who are unfamiliar with Gospel, evangelism as the proclamation of the Gospel to all people, regardless of their religious identity and exegesis as a practical training of Christian character according to the requirements of the Gospel. *Catehein*, *evangelizein* and *didascalein* would be the equivalent to the processes of

learning, applying, and teaching. It is important to note that the non-initiated could not attend the “teaching”, since the Christian teaching of others involved an initiation, a mystical note, limited access to the mysterious realities, and familiar only to the instructor.

Catechism, as the method of introducing novices to new realities, was used by Christ Himself, with the Gospel or the Good News, making the Kingdom of Heaven accessible. The Apostles and Evangelists describe in many places the teaching work of Jesus. He was commonly called the Teacher, and He would make this point Himself: “Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah.” (Matthew 23: 8-10).

Mission is the sum of activities of the Church that involve all areas of community life, by which the Church defines itself as the Body of Christ, on the one hand, and as a socio-human institution, on the other. The mission of the Church is accomplished by means of catechesis, religious education in the public sphere, liturgical services, social assistance, the building of places of worship (Bel, Preda 2011: 638-703), volunteering, counselling, community and individual support, monastic prayer and meditation and others.

Evangelism as ecclesial responsibility

The Gospel is the fundamental document for the Church’s educational program targeting adults, a category that has been mostly ignored by the clergy’s actions, precisely because adults are quasi-absent from the life of the Church and see the latter as a provider of occasional religious services. Teaching the adult members of the parish would have long-lasting consequences, yet the difficulty lies in planning such teaching in the parish setting where one becomes aware that Christ is the Risen God, offered to the humankind by the Holy Spirit, i.e. the life in the Holy Spirit sent to personal men (Acts 2: 3 and 42) by the Christ risen from the dead. Still, without adult education, one cannot build a parish program, plan the future of a community, carry out far-reaching actions and evangelical vision is then missing.

From this perspective, evangelism is not merely an option in the life of the Church and of each parish, as Christ urges it in the well-known texts of Matthew 28: 19-20, Mark 16: 15, John 20: 21-23 and Luke 24:

47. The body of Christ, the Church, has different functions, with evangelism being one of them. The evangelistic “agents” are the members of the Body who put their gifts received from the Holy Spirit in the service of proclaiming salvation in the world. The source and the true “Evangelist” is the Holy Spirit, in the sense that the unseen side, the sensitivity to and the will to receive and to proclaim the gospel comes through the Holy Spirit, for it confesses the risen Christ: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me.” (John 15: 26). The “acquisition of the Holy Spirit”, which Saint Seraphim of Sarov spoke of, goes beyond inner warmth, the ineffable fragrance, the brightened face, the ineffable joy and the work of the evangelist (Oliver 2011: 73); is the reflection of the Gospel in the way Orthodoxy understands and lives: “Acquire the Holy Spirit, and thousands around you will be saved.” (Hatfield 2011: 238) Genuine evangelism must aim beyond conversion by numbers, and rather to denounce systemic evil, to eliminate the symptoms of an unjust society, eradicate poverty or oppression, grow in the knowledge and living in God in the many forms typical of diverse cultural spaces.

Evangelism should seek to change cultures and people (Bel 2016: 249), in the sense of their re-orientation, rather than to subordinate or to replace specific cultures, because Orthodoxy incorporates that which does not contradict the Gospel, it educates in the spirit of the Gospel, and infuses a specific moral sense, fostering all which is positive. It is carried out by word and deed, by example and witness, in order that men may attain the “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Furthermore, evangelism is not optional: Christ commanded the disciples to preach the Gospel through their teachings and liturgical life (Mark 16: 15-16), which they did at the urging of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 8), starting from Jerusalem to the whole world. This mandate prompted the unyielding power of Orthodox Christianity to convert, to change, and to adapt to specific ethnic and cultural situations, with a globalising message, in the best sense of the term. The divisions that appeared in the history of the missions (Petraru 2013: 350; Pierotte 2004: 35) were not caused by the content of the Gospel, far from it, but rather by the policies of the members of the Church and by theological differences also

determined by the human element. The Romanian author uses alternately the notions of “mission” and “evangelism”, favouring the term used officially by the Church. Towards the end of the paper, however, after showing that sometimes the mission was perceived as a form of “colonisation”, he concludes that the greatest obstacle to “mission” is “resistance to evangelism”. The “mission” of the Church in the Northern hemisphere, for example, has led in the last century to an alarming decrease of membership and of the importance of Christianity, while the neo-Protestant evangelisation has led to the increase of the number of Christians and the importance of Christianity in the Southern hemisphere, so that the weight of Christianity has shifted. For example, whereas in 1910 there were 82.2% Christians north of the Equator, and 17.8% in the South, by 2010 in the North there of 39.2% of Christians, while 60.8% lived in the South. The relatively high density of Christians in the Northern hemisphere relative to the population size leaves the false impression of a visible and viable Christianity in this part of the world compared to the southern hemisphere. It is also important to underline that evangelism is not primarily based on methods, techniques, statistics, quantities, which are tools typical of a “business plan” approach reflecting the mentality of the economic man; rather, it is based on enthusiasm, adaptability and creativity. Statistics and methods do improve the image to the Church as an institution, yet do not help to build a certain type of Christian life, do not trigger pastoral care, and do not increase missionary zeal.

Evangelism as a sanctifying act

The purpose of life in Christ is holiness, by reference to *the* Source of holiness, not the ideal of being better than others; it is the purpose and measure of the real presence of man in the Church of Christ. Personal holiness has concrete consequences in the community where it is unfolding. The first requirement of holiness is the firm conviction that Baptism represents the person’s entrance into the love of the Holy Trinity, by the incorporation of the baptised in Jesus Christ and the sealing with the Holy Spirit, which take him out of his life of mediocrity and moral minimalism. This conviction then is much more than the increase in the membership of a Church and infinitely more than the feeling of

religiosity: it is the fundamental change of the human nature in which the seed of the eternity has been planted.

The duty of evangelism today is not and does not seek to be a response to the process of de-Christianisation / secularisation that modern man experiences and promotes in suicidal manner. Evangelism must raise questions, both in the private space and especially in the public sphere, about the meaning of eternal existence and being, and not be merely a policy of the Church-as-institution; it involves the political, cultural and social forces that accept that Christ is “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

One can distinguish at least two dimensions of evangelism: a Trinitarian and an ecclesial one. The former reflects the outpouring of God’s to the world, as the Son and the Holy Spirit are sent by the Father, or the reflection of the revelation of God-Trinity, in the visible Body of Christ, i.e. the Church. In ecclesial terms, it means proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world, that is, the belief that by Him, within the Church, healing of evil is accomplished, the Truth is revealed, and the biological life is projected into theological existence, according to divine precepts. Sanctification of life by means of Sacraments and prayers of sanctification is incomplete when the evangelical values are not proclaimed. These make the difference between a service of sanctification and a magic witchcraft ritual. In one of the Holy Unction prayers, God is asked the following for the one who is given the Holy Sacrament: “Direct their feet aright, in the way of Your Gospel.” Also in other sacraments.

Evangelicalism or the trivialisation of evangelism

We will intentionally use the term “evangelicalist”. There is no equivalent in Romanian language dictionaries. In English, a distinction is made between “evangelism” and “evangelicalism”.

As a common noun (*evangelistys*) (Lampe 1991: 559), it occurs three times in the New Testament (Acts 21: 8; Ephesians 4:11, II Timothy 4: 5), with the meaning of function or vocation, not of rank. Although he counts himself among the Apostles, Paul states that he preaches the Gospel and urges his disciple Timothy to do the work of an “evangelist,” though the latter was not an Apostle himself.

Hence, from a biblical point of view, an evangelist may be, in fact, any Christian who announces the Good News to the world, initially the news of Christ that “the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17), then the good news about Christ Himself, He who saved the human race through His sacrifice and Resurrection, the foundation of the personal salvation. The word took on a negative connotation with the onset of the Reformation, which was supposed to be an authentic return to the Gospel, especially considering the “justification by faith,” (Richardson, Bowden 1996: 191) in contrast to justification by Indulgences or deeds, under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church. Soon after, the meaning of evangelism became narrower, denoting only those who practiced a certain personal conversion, rigorous moral life, focusing on Bible study, and zeal in spreading the Christian faith. The term Evangelicalism emerged in the American discourse to define precisely this kind of religious manifestation, which in a way has compromised the authenticity of Christianity in general. In the broad sense, evangelicalism includes all charismatic movements (Anabaptism, Puritanism, Methodism, Pietism, Baptism, the great American Awakening and its subsequent waves, known as “Free Churches”). Evangelicalism denotes the fundamentalist form of Christian organisation, with millennial or apocalyptic tendencies. In the United States, they are divided into the Old Evangelicals, who emphasise personal conversion, the internalisation of moral and biblical disciplinary and the New Evangelicals, who add the need to defend faith rationally. Subsequently, evangelicals of justice and peace, youth evangelicals or charismatic evangelicals emerged, focusing on baptism from the Holy Spirit and glossolalia (speaking in tongues).

To better understand the phenomenon, it is worth recalling the American experience: in the multicultural society of the 20th century, veritable strategies of “evangelisation” were developed, the purpose of which was the “new birth” of the person intended to become a member of the congregation; the new congregant was invited to read from the Bible, participate in community activities, integrate into the common structures, participate in all weekend actions, all under the direct supervision of the pastor. Although such activities have nothing negative in themselves, some specialists have drawn attention to three worrying features of this phenomenon: the conversion is automatic, based on a drafting system

where one obeys all the rigors; the community develops a manipulative attitude, and those who are not “good” enough are admonished, warned, judged; within the community there is a sense of fear and anxiety about impending disasters caused by the moral state of the rest of society. As a result of how some have done their duty and others have responded to “evangelism”, the word “evangelist” has also acquired a negative connotation. In a pejorative sense, the “evangelist” is a soul hunter who, by means of his zeal and aggressive methods, makes traditional Christians reject him rather than receive Christ in this manner. Having a clear pietistic component, evangelisation has not yielded long-term results. It has been criticised for the lack of sensitivity in communication, the conversion by constraint, not by conviction, and the imposed social action, the formal attachment of converts to an elitist community.

There is also a positive part to the model proposed by the American evangelicals: the emphasis on the “market”, i.e. the outreach to the people outside, in contrast to the passive or non-invasive attitude of traditional Christianity; the use of the laity, which they prepare for evangelisation; the development of specific abilities in the work of evangelisation; the engagement of all members, on different levels, in common activities, so that there are no mere bystanders in these congregations (Mrennan 1987: 2).

The challenges of evangelism

The mobility of the Earth’s population has led religions and cultures to develop, on the one hand, dialogue with each other, creating sometimes the premises for celebrating diversity, and other times for tensions and conflicts. A first barrier to evangelism would be religious pluralism: this is not just about other religions, but insurmountable denominational differences within Christianity. Orthodoxy itself is so polarised that, in addition to the cultural and national differences, allowed by virtue of autocephaly within each Church, there are ecumenically open Orthodox Christians, but also traditional, self-sufficient Orthodox Christians, for whom any outreach of the community borders on heresy, treason and apostasy from the right faith. Whereas the former relativise the evangelical message, the latter manipulate it using it occasionally, only when it reinforces their own opinions. We prefer not to refer to dogmatic,

canonical or disciplinary issues, but to common themes of public interest such as the “holy light” in Jerusalem, the advisability of building the National Cathedral, the importance of women in the life of the parish, and others.

The “people of God” is a biblical and theological phrase that could justify evangelism in the Orthodox Church, but it is also used by other denominations: each thinks that the expression designates not the Gospel people, but the specific of their own denomination. The action of evangelising the Orthodox “people of God” does not imply a person’s conversion or formal passage into the Orthodox Church, although this appears necessary under certain circumstances; rather, its purpose is the knowledge of the living Truth, the need to share it with others in an atmosphere of respect, especially with those who do not want to be evangelised. Coercion, used in the Church in the West of Europe, even when led by good intentions, ended up being the main charge levelled against the Church, with an explicit reference to the legacy of the Crusades and the Inquisition, which the Roman Catholic Church cannot deny and which, for ignorant or deliberate reasons, is directed against the Orthodox Church (Hatfield 2011: 237-238). “Orthodox” evangelisation was carried out by persons led by evangelical zeal, not by para-ecclesiastical organisations sponsored by the Church or by other parties. Orthodoxy honours the saints, i.e., those who confessed the Gospel to martyrdom, especially those who were killed by the Roman persecutions. The “pillars” of post-patristic “Orthodox” evangelisation are considered to be the Saints Kiril (826-869) and Methodius (815-885) among the Slavs, the Byzantine missionaries at Tsar Vladimir’s court (10th century), St. Stephen of Perm (1340-1396) and Russian missionaries from the 18th century among the pagan populations of Siberia, Korea and Japan, St. Herman of Alaska (1756-1837) – a model of evangelisation through asceticism, as well as the modern missionaries after the 1980s, from former communist camps, in Western countries.

One of the first challenges of evangelism is religious syncretism; it is argued that religion reflects certain aspects of the divine, every religion holds a greater or lesser part of the Truth, yet each must be reinforced and counterbalanced by elements of the other religions. As it appears as more of a policy rather than a concern for Truth, this approach abolishes the

unique and revealing character of Christianity, reducing it to a common religion like all the others. God's saving work cannot be reduced to an easy dialogue, it needs commitment, to be lived and communicated through love and empathy: "As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain" (II Corinthians 6: 1). The Apostle Paul favoured the phrase "together with", instead of "along with", often used by contemporary Christians, even obsessively encountered in the ecclesiastical media, yet quasi-existent in the Holy Gospel, because it does not express the communion of persons. By collaborating with God's grace, evangelism must promote the quality of the members of the Church, not primarily the conversion of non-Christians. The true fulfilment of evangelical values in the Christian's life is achieved when the person abides by the commandments and recommendations of Christ, not when he seeks to be better compared to others. Only then can there be deeper awareness of the Christian identity and can emerge a sound motivation for a life of faith.

Another aspect, often invoked in all areas of social life, which obstructs the efficiency of evangelism, is religious freedom itself, which is now the subject of the constitutions of European countries. Freedom is the key element in affirming democracy, yet it is especially the invaluable gift that God has given man at creation. By virtue of freedom, every person has the right to manifest, preserve or change their religion, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also asserts. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Freedom has been used not only to promote evangelical values, but also to obstruct them, as so-called "values" are proposed, foreign to both the local ethos and the precepts of the Gospel. We have in mind the efforts of the secularist organisations in Romania which, in the name of freedom, demand a ban on religious icons, religious symbols and religion in schools, preventing an overwhelming majority from exercising freedom of religion in public sphere. Also in the name of freedom, they call for the imposition of sexual minority rights, civil partnerships and

others. The secular cultural values, rooted in the life of modern man, can also be a great challenge in accepting and conforming to the Gospel, which comes into conflict with them, since it reflects the teachings of Christ that says, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me.” (John 7: 16), that is, it has a different origin from all the other teachings. In many cases, evangelical values had to be proclaimed with great care and tact, considering the consequences that a more upfront approach would have on the entire Christian community. First, there was the struggle with the “values” of pagan idolatrous religions, followed by the “values” of the Enlightenment and self-sufficient reason, then the materialist-dialectical “values” that were imposed in the socialist and communist society with the most dramatic effects for those who unmasked or refused them. In the “struggle for values” that the Gospel has faced, it seems that the “democratic values” prove to be more effective in drawing the modern man away the Gospel and directing him nowhere.

Wealth would appear to be the biggest obstacle to genuine acceptance of the Gospel, a counterbalancing value that gives stability and security to man. It has always been accompanied by passions such as thirst for power or corruption. To oppose this, the service of one’s peers with humility and honesty is proposed as a Christian ideal deeply anchored in the Gospel, though it is far from the Christians’ attitude, from simple citizen to the highest political or ecclesiastical dignitaries. In a reference work on the topic, (Hunter 2005: 1085-1087) does not include the terms “poverty” and “wealth,” but the phrases “rich people” and “poor people”, as the attributes of being rich and poor apply depending on the cultural context and geographic space. Paradoxically, this work shows that the most vulnerable category, in terms of evangelism, is that of rich people. Among the reasons behind this claim are the suspicions that the rich may have that others are after their wealth or profit, the belief that the priest must become a “family” employee, who is paid and must accept compromises, the self-sufficient and arrogant attitude that may cause many well-off persons to retreat to a closed elitist environment, one where many great personal dramas do occur, ranging from family problems, depression or alcohol or drug addiction, to social alienation (Hunter 2005: 1085-1087). In contrast to the demanding, intimidating, sometimes

oppressive attitude and the conviction that nothing can be denied to a person with money and influence, the Gospel speaks of humble service (Mark 10: 35-45), of the lack of appetite for ownership and of generous giving.

As we have anticipated, materialism lies at the heart of the consumer society. Postmodern man appreciates immediate gratification, happiness here and now, unlimited freedom, all of which culminate in greed. Cheap labour, child labour, exploitation in general, oppression and class differentiation are just a few elements in the cohort of the “gold rush” proposed by materialism. In the race for enrichment and luxury, the victims are human dignity, freedom, the family and its traditional values, but more seriously than all, the whole habitat on Earth, the living environment given by the Creator to mankind.

Whereas communism dealt with dialectical materialism, today we are talking about rapacious and destructive materialism. The Gospel proposes generosity (Matthew 25: 24-36 and Luke 10: 29-37), the most ignored virtue in modern society, where the difference between the richest and the poorest is astronomical, in the most real sense of the word. The parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16: 9) applies today more dramatically than in the time of Jesus, as the Gospel is used to justify the prosperity of some by exploiting others, presenting poverty as a blessing. For instance, “Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.” (Matthew 13: 12).

Morality or, more specifically, the changing paradigm of Christian morality is another challenge for effective evangelism. New techniques and practices have emerged about existence in the universe, unknown before and not dealt with by the Church Fathers, incontestable figures in the life of the Church: abortion, euthanasia, in vitro fertilisation, transhumanism and others. Technological and social utilitarianism leads to a culture of death in the name of freedom and of political correctness, in order to preserve the high standard of quality of life. The new attitude towards the family, its structure and its role, interfere negatively with evangelical demands: the family no longer represents the particular social structure, the medium where the Christian character is shaped, but a public manifestation of the desire for relationship and expressing

sexuality. The ways in which these are achieved, ranging from same-sex relationships to radical decisions to fight against conception and life, have become the topics of media, specialist studies, public debates, street actions, or theological disputes, without reference to the mystery of the person (Thatcher 1995; Hopko 2009; Sicari 2004). Secular society proposes a redefinition of the concept of family, which would trigger a conflict with the multi-secular Christian practice and belief, founded on the Gospel, namely the free and unique relationship between a man and a woman, based on mutual love, procreation being its natural outcome. Traditional Christianity has rejected homosexual unions as forms of public manifestation of sexuality, without however showing outbursts of homophobia, as wrongly speculated in media circles. The trend in Protestant or Neo-Protestant Christian denominations in developed countries to accept such tendencies, due to political correctness, raises doubt about the faithful relationship with the Church of Christ, since the norm of faith is the Gospel and the culture of the Holy Spirit as the life of the Church. The needs of the family must not become the subject of the political agenda or social policies promoted according to the interests of the political groups, rather they should be in line with the evangelical precepts, ideally proposed in the Acts of the Apostles, where the main concerns were unity, honesty, shared ownership of goods and common prayer (Acts 2: 42-47 and 4: 32-37). The Christian family is the model and tool for the elimination of individualism and egocentric tendencies that affect post-modern humanity.

Evangelism and the “institution” of faith

The institutionalisation of the Church, the fragmentation of Christianity in general, the changing cultural profile of the community of faith, individualism, technologies and agnostic science, anthropocentrism and individualism, secularisation and consumerism are among the concerns of modern and post-modern society, which de-structure the evangelical message and almost eliminate it. The change in the human condition and the spiritualising of matter are the desiderata of the evangelical message. They can only be accomplished through the participation of each faithful in the spirit of social and sacramental communion. The concern for social needs, liturgical devotion without

educational contribution, the social organisation of the church community, the ideal of pastoral-missionary “achievements”, the primacy of the economic over the spiritual, the gaps between the developed and the poor areas, between the very rich and the very poor leave on a secondary level any concerns for the applied evangelical truth, not only among the faithful, but also among the clergy. In addition to a theology of liberation, in the Latin Catholic space or a theology of tribulation and hardship, in the Orthodox space, it is necessary to equip the faithful with a theology of social responsibility. Love for one’s fellow human persons means dedication to all spiritual things, as Christ recommends in the nutshell version of the “Gospel”: “As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” (Matthew 10: 7).

Evangelism is fulfilled whenever causes “great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:10), because it is the only news that cannot lead to inter-generational dispute, does not cause tensions related to gender, class, culture or ethnicity; this news, though religious, does not coerce anyone through religion. The message of Christ implies both education for Christian identity, in the light of the cross and resurrection, and education for spirituality or openness to others by understanding and accepting their identity.

From the perspective of evangelism, globalisation is not a hazard, (Hatfield 2011: 236-237) as the latter too provides a realistic vision of life as sons of God, called to the same dignity, wherever one may be. In the beginning, the disciples’ evangelism efforts were directed at the Jews, but soon Antioch became a major centre for global Christian evangelism, from where the word was spread among the nations through the preaching of Peter and Paul. In fact, it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11: 26). The “risk” that the work of evangelism faces is to fashion, transform, remake and transfigure generations for their future life, on the earth and forever. Realities are ever-changing: therefore, fighting secularism and militant atheism are not the actual priorities, rather conformity with the Gospel. Christian faith does not have enough means to impose itself in modern society, yet it has the experience of sacrificial witness, for the Gospel remains the same as was for the victims of Roman persecution, Arab persecutions, persecutions of Enlightenment Agnosticism, communist-atheist persecutions, with their

impact felt until today. The category of middle-aged adults is particularly called upon to develop their love of evangelical teaching through which to overcome the frontiers of economic or political globalisation, to educate their own children in the spirit of the precepts of Christ. It is an education that is complementary to any school curriculum; it is done in and for faith, even when not expressed religiously, to worship God as the teacher and the One who leads the world along the Path. “The Way” is the first name given to Christianity. There are today movements seeking to revive early Christianity, including the initiative of the Cambridge Institute of Christian Orthodox Studies (IOCS) to launch a catechetical program entitled *How to run the Way* or *The Way* in 2010. Web: <http://www.iocs.cam.ac.uk/courses/an-introductory-course-to-the-orthodox-faith>, date retrieved: 2.09.2017.

The person - the subject of evangelism

Evangelism cannot be carried out by easy pragmatic tools or models, as it is a constant, lifelong exercise. It has been found that the excessive emphasis on psycho-pedagogical methods and teaching strategies in religion class can diminish the content of the lessons, with a contrary outcome to what was expected: on the one hand, the teacher is assessed in terms of the compliance with methodology, while, on the other hand, the recipients of instruction are left with superficial information regarding the content of the theme. Therefore, it will bear fruit if it is not reduced to mere activism. In the case of Romania, the main purpose of religious education in public schools was, in fact, evangelism. However, the results have been far below expectations, if one considers the surveys on the impact of religious education after 1990 on Christians whose children are by now in school too.

In the public sphere, questions are raised that the relevant fora treat with unwarranted indifference: How committed are these parents to the Christian education of their children? How solid is the family institution? To what extent are values received in school genuinely present in their lives? How profound is their religious life? How much of what has been done, positive or otherwise, can be ascribed to the teacher of religious education and to the parish priest? How good is the communication between the priest, the teacher of religion and the social worker? To what

degree are they aware of the Orthodox Christian identity? How many practicing Christians have basic evangelical knowledge? In other words, there is a persisting dilemma of whether, in a largely Orthodox society, real progress has been made through compulsory religious education.

There are multiple answers, which reflect dissatisfaction on both sides. This is the reason why we insist on the necessity of evangelical instruction and its characteristics, specific to the denominational environment, as compared to religious education in schools: evangelism is primarily the attitude, of both the person and the parish, not a curricular obligation; evangelism is an invitation, as Christ himself has used the metaphor of calling or inviting to bring about many realities, including those related to the kingdom of heaven; evangelism is a vocation, manifested by Christians to those around them.

The loss of enthusiasm for proclaiming evangelical values in Orthodox communities, compared to the neo-Protestant evangelical denominations, the passive-reflexive attitude of the Orthodox Church place it, in the public's view, in the unenviable position of a "state institution", subjecting it to public criticism for "worldly preoccupations" and for its "building projects", in contrast to the neo-Protestant denominations, whose newly-built places of worship or prayer houses tend to pass unnoticed because their evangelisation work is efficient, visible and transparent.

The fruit of evangelism: The discipleship of Christ

The apostles were urged by Christ after the Resurrection to make "disciples" themselves (Matthew 28: 17-20), because the disciple listens to the gospel and fulfils it more faithfully than someone who only obeys a teacher who has cognitive expectations. Paul also argues that not every teacher is a parent: apprenticeship in the Jewish tradition also involved a certain relationship of paternity. Jesus Christ condemns the Pharisees who distorted the institution of apprenticeship, began to seek only proselytes, whom they manipulated according to their own principles.

All the disciples of Christ were adults, and these adults changed the world through the Gospel. Jesus welcomed the children, but trained the adults. Fr. Constantin Necula argues that catechism for adults is a "pastoral necessity" and provides solid arguments in this respect. (Necula

2010: 213). The priest today seems to be removing the adult from the pastoral and formative activities in the parish, focusing more on children and the elderly. However, the parish is like a living organism: it moves when it is touched, sought, loved, responds to crises, but it is not proactive. The priest must understand that he evangelises persons in the parish, but the parish itself will not initiate a process of evangelism. On the other hand, he must not fall into the temptation of seeing himself as indispensable, as one who knows and does everything, but instead be the man who encourages those who have the ability to serve, be it in the areas of education, youth, jobs, finance, administration, pastoral care, etc. The more an area of parish life works better, the more it stimulates the others.

The priest must strive to discover and train disciples, first of all adults, and inspire in them three primary concerns about their social-religious role: to help them understand and live the Gospel; to help them have a prophetic voice in the community and in society; to help them share their own faith with the next generation.

School-based religious education focuses on children, but parents are left uninvolved, or just formally involved. Parent-teacher conferences are not predominantly about the cooperation between parents and teachers on the quality of teaching, on its diversification or improvement for the benefit of the children. Most parents (in rural areas) do not attend such meetings; in the city, debates are formal, confined to sparse reporting of pupils' grades and especially to administrative issues: class facilities, donations, excursions, end-of-year party, purchase of new school equipment, etc. The religious inactivity of parents is transferred to the children more effectively than the faith is transferred from children to parents, religious education becoming thus a kind of curricular curiosity; the message of the religion class becomes irrelevant or contradictory to the family's lifestyle. It is unlikely that what appears boring and unimportant for parents is important to children. Teachers of religion and priests appear naïve and triumphal when citing an isolated case in which the parent is impressed by the religious attitude of the child and reacts positively. The cruel reality shows that, after 26 years of compulsory religious education, young people of the same age do not know the basic principles of Christian life, do not practice prayer constantly, do not read the Holy Scripture, do not have Christian behaviour in their relationship

with the Church and their peers; on the contrary, they have a critical attitude towards the institution, anti-clerical and syncretistic, prefer borrowed religious elements, from the European Catholic or Protestant area, where many now reside. As a great contemporary evangeliser states,

The continual sharing of Gospel does not only refer to its range, to its expansion into the world, but also to profoundness, the profound rebuilding of each soul. The growth of the Church is achieved both by the acquisition of new members and by the deeper experience of the baptised of the mystery of faith and love. While the former determines quantitative growth, the latter can be characterized as a qualitative increase. (Anastasios 2013: 92-93)

If one also considers that the traditional family is particularly exposed to the paradigm shift resulting from the various forms of civil partnership, the increasing prevalence of divorce, even after a second marriage, the mono-parental family structure, a phenomenon that was difficult to imagine 50 years ago, it becomes apparent that only a parish-church-school co-operation can pass on transcendent and sustainable value systems in a kind of “educational ecology”. We stated above that the relationship between two people is understood in terms of the manifestation of sexuality, not considering their individual gender characteristics. It is now claimed openly that there are at least 60 ways of expressing sexuality: homosexuals, lesbians, androgynies, bi-genders, effeminate man, masculine woman, gender-variable, gender-seekers, inter-sexual, non-sexual, a-sexual, non-binary, pan-genders, trans-men, trans-women, trans-human, trans-females, trans-males, trans-feminists, trans-sexual, inter-female, inter-male, inter-human, inter-genders, inter-sexual, dual-genders, hermaphrodites, duo-spirit-genders, tri-genders, fourth-gender, xz-women, transvestite, cross-genders, zero-gender, etc.

Conclusions or the “evangelism” of the Orthodox parish

Romania has been considered a Christian country, since its beginnings as a nation, thanks to the presence in the region of the Apostle Andrew; apostolic Christianity represented the religious identity of Romanians living throughout the country’s present-day territory. In the process, apostolic Christianity has made a fundamental contribution to all aspects of social life, especially in the areas of culture, education, ethnic unity, national cohesion and consciousness of Romanians everywhere. We may argue that initially evangelisation in the area of the Carpathians,

the Danube and the Black Sea was a coherent process, a fundamental social, non-institutionalised reality, which the locals were committed to and which believers and their priests experienced naturally, without particular shapes and groups; now it appears as an institutionalised activity, with different shapes and groupings, yet lacking evangelical effectiveness.

In the first millennium of Romanian Christianity, few were aware of the organisation of religious institutions (the first diocesan sees) and their role in the life of indigenous people. Over time, the vocation of church institutions, from parish priest's institution as administrator of the parish to the head of a church, seems to have shifted to the management of the people's religiosity rather than its evangelism. It is natural, therefore, to ask the question: Is there a place of evangelism in the Orthodox parish also? How long will it be able to face the market offers, even in this area of public life? Theoretically, in the academic sphere, there are references to a post-modern Romanian society where Orthodoxy stands for its outdated dimension, contrary to the model of the developed European countries, which is improper. If one considered the statistics on education, access to culture, international mobility, living standards and access to hygiene, post-modernism could apply only to a very small percentage of the Romanian population, mostly residing in the big cities. The question may take a worrying form: Are Romanians still Christians, in the genuine apostolic spirit? During a Romanian-Danish project on parish challenges today, a Danish pastor stated:

I am surprised by Romanians' religiosity, but judging by their attitudes and social values, they seem to be not 'Christian' enough. They have become known in Western Europe for endemic crime, which we see confirmed here, in their own country too!

The return to evangelical consciousness, the main component of the mission of the Church, would involve the overhaul of parish programmes and of diocesan priorities to respond to the vocation of the Church as a community of faith. First, it is necessary to set up programmes that address the real needs of the people, adapted to the cultural, social and geographical features, scheduled throughout the week, within and outside the parish, not only on Sundays and on feast days. Given the ever-changing human priorities, it is desirable that adults be encouraged more

to engage in evangelism activities: education, volunteering, social involvement, personal development and training through church programmes, etc. The 25-35 age group has the greatest evangelical potential, yet is most visibly absent in public church life. They may not be inclined to listen to long sermons, but they show initiative, react and have the potential to change much, both in their lives and in society. Because often Orthodox services are a topic of discussion, their content, vocabulary and duration could also be organised and performed in such a way as to bring added spiritual value to both the celebrant and the benefactors, with emphasis on Sundays and feast days. This does not refer to the content of religious services, which is of inestimable traditional value, but the need to decrypt them and to worship “with the fear of God, faith and love”, so that there is spiritual benefit and satisfaction on either side, for the servants and the faithful. Moreover, a link could be created between weekly parish services and the curriculum of religious classes. For example, adapting the weekly school curriculum to the texts of the Divine Liturgy of the week, or taking into consideration the services or bible meetings on the same topic. Yet this would require regular meetings and close cooperation between the parish priest and the teachers of religion.

Since modern man is predisposed to search for something new in any experience, it is argued that the quality of the sermon encourages modern Christian to attend religious services. The sermon must provide a lived spirituality, a current and realistic enhancement of the biblical text in which each believer can find their role, while catechesis should provide the training environment and the superior quality of Christian living. Irrespective of whether people communicate audibly, visually or kinaesthetically, the priest ought to be familiar with such notions and not neglect any of them. Those who learn from aural input easily accept new ideas and listen much (this is not about hearing as a physiological aptitude), visuals imagine what they receive and are sensitive to interpretations and impressed by stories. The kinaesthetic communicate by feelings and emotions. He must always keep in mind the middle way, since the authoritative domination over the audience leads to the loss of two-thirds of the faithful, while the insipid, inconsistent and unconvincing discourse can have the same results. That is why effective communication

elements are essential to each speaker, following Christ’s model as he conveyed ideas, shared stories, created images, and inspired emotions and feelings.

Last but not least, evangelism involves the rediscovery, or rather the rebuilding of the united community that shares warmth and hospitality, among its members and especially among those who seek a communion of people and prayer (what was called “love as an ecclesiological reality”) (Dinu 2008: 192), for any “strangers” who cross the threshold of the church for random reasons and who might leave as transformed persons. The principle that every conscious member of a living parish should follow is that no one should go out of the church the same as when they entered: entry into the sacred space must lead to an increase in spiritual consciousness, an increase in knowledge, in faith, in conviction, in holiness.

In Orthodoxy, there are all prerequisites for effective evangelism, and both the top representatives of the church hierarchy and the priests who preserve the parish communities recognise this. What is needed, but has not received enough attention so far, would be a long-term programme (funding would not be a challenge if there is awareness of the necessity of this activity), which will change the perception of the notion of “parish”, of the place and role of the priest in its midst, and of the place and role of lay faithful in parish life. The training of a trainer / evangelist lasts for a minimum of 2.5 years, as they participate in a structured program requiring engagement and the desire for solid training.

Evangelism of the believer is a permanent focus of the Church and can be done either by means of appropriate catechesis, through regular catechetical ‘discipline’, or by liturgical or post-liturgical sermons, in church or in a hall [...] in the so-called circles for the study of Holy Scripture or of the writings of Church Fathers. (Metallinos 2004: 116)

By linking the above statements organically, we can argue that evangelism should be carried out at four levels: religious education, liturgical life, social service, and ecological administration.

Religious education teaches or presupposes the teaching / learning of the Gospel. We shall not delve into problems related to school textbooks or the share of history, ritual, dogmatic or church art lessons in the school curriculum. Every teacher of religion must know however that

it is not the “high achievers” in the religion class that indicate the success of the teacher’s mission, but rather the love of the gospel of Christ, lived and witnessed throughout the students’ lives. It depends on the teacher largely whether today’s student will read the Gospel in 15 or 25 years’ time, or whether the former student will remember the “stories” that he listened to in the classroom. All methods can be used, but modern methods, involving new communication and reading techniques and tools, are preferred. It is a salutary fact that many “houses of celebration” have been built in Orthodox parishes, but they are not used during the week, while in those communities there are children who do not have the means to do their homework in their poor homes. The prospect of using such centres for the purpose of educating children in the parish would be a great help and a unique opportunity for the priest to “home evangelism.”

Liturgical life is the celebration of the Gospel. It is quite unnecessary to emphasise the overwhelming share of biblical texts in Orthodox services, and especially of evangelical texts in the Divine Liturgy, a true compendium of St. John’s Gospel. The Orthodox Church did not rely, in general, on refined intelligentsia; rather it emerged as a church of the masses (Anania 2011). In the Liturgy there is no difference between the rich man or the beggar, the employee and the employer, as all have the same dignity and calling.

Through the social service the Gospel is applied. Social assistance is not the aim of evangelism, but it derives from it by necessity. He who teaches others also serves him with passion. The Church is the Body of Christ, not for the poor, the needy, or the people with special needs, but for them too, inasmuch as it proclaims salvation to whole world. The philanthropic work of St. Basil the Great was motivated by the spiritual involvement of both those who donated and of their beneficiaries; he considered that suffering, illness and infirmities were the consequences of sin, hence the need to provide religious assistance first and not only medical attention. Doctors had a secondary role for the Cappadocian hierarch, because they could treat only some bodily diseases, but did not cause the sick to understand the meaning of life and suffering, did not change their life or prepare them for death. Although the pattern and inspiration was Christ, St. Basil showed that the sick, alien, poor, and

marginalised people had to be treated as Christ Himself if “they were striving for a life according to His gospel” (Muller 2012: 180).

By ecological administering or stewardship the Gospel is embodied responsibly. It can be a sensitive point today, but the good stewardship of church goods is, according to the statutes, part of the priest’s responsibility, and he is accountable for how they are used, multiplied and distributed. When ordained, the candidate assumes responsibility for “good stewardship of the Church of God”, as Paul instructed Timothy the disciple:

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church? (1 Timothy 3: 2-5).

The Church does not exist for itself, but to continue Christ’s work of evangelism. Since Pentecost, evangelism has been the fruit of the Holy Spirit and the cause of the appearance of the Church. That is why apostolic evangelism, unlike the evangelicalist propaganda of today’s denominations, is not proselytism, but rather a call to the kingdom of God, which is far more than an institution.

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