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THE ORTHODOX MISSIONARY ETHOS

Ph.D. Thesis

SUMMARY

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Summary

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The orthodox pattern of thinking has never concentrated exclusively on the mission of the Church as a distinct element of her life, separate from the other manifestations of faith. Missionary work of the Church has always been regarded within the orthodox theological thinking as dynamism of Christian life as a whole, without recourse to an exclusive systematic development on this topic. Essentially the Orthodox Christian mission from an orthodox point of view has always identified itself with the entire spectrum of the life and work of the Church in the world, based on Apostolic Tradition concerning the keeping of the true teaching and practice of Christian living in the world. An approach to the Christian mission implies a reference to the whole life of the Church in all its aspects, which aims at gradually transforming this world into the Kingdom of God.

The present paper, entitled *The Orthodox Missionary Ethos*, is trying to explain as much as possible the meaning of the Christian mission as preserved and transmitted over the time in the Eastern Orthodox Church. This approach is absolutely necessary today in a globalizing and secular era, both for Western Christians who need to see in the mission of the Orthodox Church her condition as continuous revelation and confession of the eternal truth, and for Orthodox Christians who accustomed to the stillness of the religious life, essentially missionary, no longer perceive the deeper meaning and are tempted to adopt Western forms and meanings regarding missionary work in the world. Rediscovering their own Tradition in its exclusive missionary valences becomes a priority for any Orthodox witness in today's gregarious and religiously confused society.

The missionary orthodox ethos cannot be understood without taking into account the theological concepts, ecclesiastical institutions and social achievements, such as the Trinity, the Church, local community, autocephaly, Liturgy, philanthropy. This missionary spirit of Orthodoxy is determined both by the Holy Tradition of Church and the historical conditions in which the Christian life is conducted. The mission of Church is not an isolated compartment in

the life of Church, but the ethos and the breath which penetrates all aspects of the life of Church: its immediate relationship with God, its reasoning, its structure, its view on the human person and all creation, as well as its attitude and action towards the world in which the Church witnesses to Christ.

The Orthodox Christian mission actually means sending the Holy Tradition of the Church as a way of living in communion with the Holy Trinity to each generation in order to transform the world into the Kingdom of God. In time, the Eastern Orthodox Church has maintained a specific missionary ethos through the richness of its theological vision, proximity liturgical worship, deep spirituality of the Philokalia, pastoral freedom to historical constraints and especially the flexible canonical stewardship. The orthodox missionary ethos is shown in three basic dimensions of Church life, which supports the concrete unity of Orthodoxy: truth of faith contained in the biblical and doctrinal testimony, the administrative organization contained in the canonical and disciplinary rules and liturgical life contained in the divine worship and ascetic morality.

The paper is structured in four great chapters, which focus on the aspects of Church life and their impact on the contemporary society: revealed doctrine, canonical organization and liturgical, ascetic and social experience in the world. In the first chapter, entitled *The Biblical Foundation and Theological Coordinates of the Orthodox Christian Mission*, I considered it necessary to state the biblical foundation of the Christian mission as a work of God in the world. The status of "sent" by God, which had patriarchs, prophets and chosen people in the Old Testament, it is shown by the Son of God Incarnated in the New Testament and it is the fundamental paradigm of the Church mission. The Christian mission, actually arisen in the early Church, is coordinated by the main doctrinal themes of orthodox faith: Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Church and Kingdom of God.

The truth of faith is preserved by the consciousness continuity of teaching and life of the Holy Apostles and Church Fathers of the first centuries. Patristic thinking is an expression of reference in Orthodox theology, inseparable from the Holy Scriptures, because the Church confesses "the God of our fathers" (Acts 5, 30) and has "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints "(Jude 3). The Holy Trinity communion as pattern and content of Christian mission, the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the human world as the basis and starting point of the mission and the Eucharistic and eschatological perspective of the life of

Church as the purpose of the mission, are the key points of an essentially doctrinal structure to affirm the Orthodox missionary ethos.

The second chapter, entitled *The Missionary Dynamic Form of the Orthodox Church Canonical Organization*, presents the missionary forms of the canonical organization of Orthodox Church which was adopted in different historical conditions of the human world. From the local Eucharistic community to the national autocephalous council, the Church was adapted to the world conditions, finding the best forms of its organization to conduct mission according to Trinitarian life. The local community of the parish is a concrete manifestation of the Universal Church in a natural human community and its evangelical spirituality tends to give to the world a model of human society in the image of God.

The Mission of Church is clearly reflected in its internal and external organization forms, which enhances and optimizes its development. The internal structure of the Church, by divine right, with sacramental hierarchy and faithful people, caused in the natural flow a development of an external structure, by human right, with autonomously organized communities, under a bishop, tailored to the history of the world. Autocephaly, the canonical form of organizing the local church by asserting national independence of peoples, becomes an important factor of the Orthodox missionary ethos. In this way, the local Church of the people has kept and submitted Christian faith and evangelical spirituality of the universal Church within a specific cultural space having awareness of missionary responsibilities to the people concerned.

The third chapter, entitled *Edifying of „the Body of Christ” through the liturgical ministry and witness of Christian life*, presents the central role of Liturgy in Christian life and its social dimension in the mission of the Church. Communion of the Body and Blood of the Lord represents it the fundamental goal of the Christian life in this world and the motivation of all ascetic efforts which generate inner transformation of the human being. This is the condition of the Christian presence in society and the power through which he may change the world around him in the Kingdom of God. For this he appropriates some existential values which structure the life and promote the Christian mission: the family, the personal and social ethics, philanthropy, patriotism, which lead them closer to God.

Liturgical life of the Church is the very core of Christian mission, because the living in Christ through the Holy Spirit, who builds the Christian as son of the Father, has always determined missionary work in the world. The Holy Trinity life testimony in the Church is meant

to implement the evangelical vision of the existence in all social structures, as response to the secular ideology and religious indifference. It is cultivated through Eucharistic living of Liturgy and other divine services, through assuming an ascetic and spiritual mentality and it is shown in the world through a personal morality and social ethics of the members of the Church, resulting in philanthropy and martyrdom for the salvation of God's creation.

The fourth chapter, entitled *The Orthodox Church Mission in contemporary society*, shows the way in which the Orthodox Christian tradition is present in today's society and the Church's mission priorities in the secular world. The false values of secular ideology are established and canceled by the real values of Christian life proposed by the Orthodox missionary ethos. The presence and work of the church in today's society must be alive and responsible, giving them, as an alternative, its treasure of teaching and practice. Secularization, technology, consumerism, hedonism and individualistic spirituality are opposed inside the mission of the Church by the life of communion with God and with others, revealed doctrine, liturgical life, personal asceticism and spirituality of communion in meekness.

The Orthodox Church can offer the world a different life through its mission, bringing a vital equilibrium to human existence on earth. By His incarnation, the Son of God has introduced the human nature within the deepest intimacy of the Trinity and gave it the ability of eternally participating in the Trinitarian life. In the Christian life joy should not be a moment or an event, but rather a permanent state of the heart, for which the feeling of our communion with our Lord Jesus Christ is natural. Thus, joy is an essential element of our life in Christ and the sign of Christ's presence in our life. The love of Christ, the joy of Christ and the peace of Christ that we receive through personal prayer and common Liturgy are the gifts to be shared with the world at all times, today and tomorrow.

The Orthodox missionary ethos essentially brings forward the *ethos of Christ*, capable of saving the world from the power of evil through the redeeming love that transforms the cosmos. If the entire creation has been redeemed through the sacrifice of God to people, its eternal destiny will be achieved through the sacrifice of the people to God.

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