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**THE HISTORIC CONTEXT OF CHRIST’S MEDIATION IN HEAVEN AS PRIEST IN
PROTESTANTISM AND ORTHODOXY**

**A comparative and critical study on Christ’s role of mediator as High Priest primarily in
the thought of John Owen (1616-1683) and Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993)**

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List of key-words

Sacerdotalism
Hierarchy
Priesthood
High Priest
Presbyter
Bishop
Deacon
Cesaropapism
Perseverance to the end
Penal substitution
Justification through faith alone
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Reformation
Mediation
Salvation
Atonement
Reconciliation
Sanctification
Eschatological
Emissary
Doctrine
Reformed theology
Orthodox theology
Catholic

CHAPTER 1

Preface

Reformed theology supports its doctrine of the mediation of Christ on solid and unambiguous texts of the New Testament. Presently Christ mediates for the forgiveness and perseverance of the Church, having this qualification in virtue of His own atonement sacrifice and righteousness as the risen and assented Lord.

When within this plan we introduce man's mediatorial interventions, we are overwhelmed by uncertainty, fear and improbability with regard to salvation and our perseverance to the end, because salvation no longer depends on the sovereign power of God who works on the basis of the sacrifice and mediation accomplished by His Son at Calvary.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of the problem

Orthodox theology operates on the basis of a minimal role attributed to the mediatorial role of Christ for the believers and a maximum role attributed to the mediation of Saints, the Mother of the Lord and the serving priests of the church, while Reformed theology operates on the basis of a maximum and unique role of Christ in mediation and an inexistent role of mediation for the saints, the Mother of the Lord and the serving priests.

Aim of the research

To clarify the differences existing between these two traditions and to show the practical implications of each one of them on the life of faith. The critical evaluation will aim to help improve the context for dialogue with the orthodox believers and to underline once more the importance of evangelical ministry.

As a case study for the biblical analysis of the doctrine of Christ's mediation we shall take into consideration the studies of two personalities in the field, one from the sphere of Reformed theology and one from that of orthodox theology for the following reasons:

JOHN OWEN (1616-1683) is one of the most important reformed theologian of England. Owen is also known as Calvin of England. He expounds the doctrine of Scripture about Christ's work in-depth, detailed and reverential.

DUMITRU STĂNILOAE (1903-1993) is one of the most important orthodox theologians and the main bearer of word for contemporary orthodoxy. Stăniloae stands out for his inclination to promote an experiential theology and one closer to practice.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CHRIST'S OFFICE OF MEDIATION IN HEAVEN

The role of the priest in the Old Testament was to mediate for people in the presence of God. He was the one lifting up prayers and praises to God on behalf of the nation of Israel, he sanctified the people and was preparing them to be accepted in the presence of God. This type of priesthood ceased when the promised seed came through the Abrahamic covenant, namely Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament our great High Priest is Jesus Christ. The model of His priesthood is offered through Melchizedek – an allusion to the eternal priesthood is made in Hebrew 7:1-3. Jesus presents His death as an atoning sacrifice for sin. His atoning ministry is substitutionary, accomplished, complete, unrepeatable and efficacious.

Christ is qualified as High Priest by the lack of sin in His life (Heb. 9:26). Through His sacrifice He opens up for us a new and living way to God. Now we can „come before God” unmediated and continually. Thus the necessity for a human priesthood which is to mediate between God and man disappears. Christ manifests in a unique way His role as priest in the New Testament. Consequently, after His ascension Jesus becomes the „one mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Due to the lack of these qualities in other people’s life no other men are able to fulfil this ministry. The servants of the Church (priests, pastors and others) are called to direct the believers to the Great High Priest of the New Testament and to ask them to put their faith in the saving power of His sacrifice.

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR THE APPEARANCE OF SACERDOTALISM

From Jesus to the Protestant Reformation, this chapter analyses the historical context in which changes from the doctrine of Christ’s unique role of mediator as Priest in heaven occurred. The history of Christian ministry is divided in four major periods, in which aspects of sacerdotalism specific to each period are distinguished.

The period of origins (30-150 A.D.) uses evidences from the Apostolic Fathers beginning around the year 90 A.D. Using rabbinical sources, the supporters of the sacerdotal tradition transfer Hebrew traditions in the context of Church ministry in the New Testament. The origins of the liturgical functions of bishop and deacon are those of the Old Testament Judaism. Based on the fact that the apostles received their ministry directly from Christ, sacerdotal tradition views them as personal representatives on earth of the ascended Christ.

Following the study of Clement, Ignatius, Hippolytus and Cyprian becomes evident that the function of the one which is *sent* begins to be focused in the presbyter who becomes a *mono-episcopos* taken from the group of the local presbyters. Through the roles played by Clement of Rome in the East and Ignatius in the West, in the history of the first century, two major episcopates emerge: the collegial one and the individual one, or the mono-episcopal. Based on this interpretation, the servant of the Church who takes over the ministry of the apostle appropriates later the capacity to represent man before God and God before man.

The second period for the development of sacerdotal ministry takes place between 160 AD and the Edict of Milan in the year of 313 A.D., when the effects produced by the new order imposed by Constantine begin to make their presence felt increasingly. The well-informed writings which appear during this period are the ones treating the rites and proceedings for the nomination of church ministers. The most valuable and earliest analysis is the treatise on the *Apostolic Tradition* of Saint Hippolytus of Rome, dating around 215 A.D.

In the prayer developed for the ordination of the bishop, Hippolytus is careful to show us that in the context of an ideal Church, the function of the bishop involves a relationship on two

levels. The bishop positions himself *in God's place* before the Church and *in the Church's place* before God. In this quality, the bishop „atones” before God, „bringing” the Church's Eucharistic sacrifice. Hippolytus sees in the ordination of the bishop an act of divine power.

Cyprian (d. 258), the bishop of Carthage, introduces sacerdotalism in the Church by adopting the term *sacerdos* for the bishop. Cyprian's doctrine about priesthood was, first of all, a doctrine about *the bringing of sacrifice by the priest* on behalf of the believer. For Cyprian the bishop is „the vice-regent of Christ” or, in other words, a mediator on Christ's behalf between God and men. Thus, the teaching about the bishop's mediation is clearly established around 200 A.D.

The third period for the development of sacerdotal ministry (313-330 A.D.) starts with the fourth century when the church's situation began to change radically. Under the rule of Constantine the Church entered a new stage of organization, modeled after the secular organization which led, in time, to profound changes in the life of the Church. It was constantly developed as a type of organization through which the local churches were controlled from the center and through which it was taken from them, in great measure, the right to decide alone on its organization and life of faith.

The bishop begins to treat superficially his relationship with the church he served. He no longer decides his governing policy at home, but away, in a meeting in which the final decisions depended on him and his other fellow bishops.

Thus, the sacerdotal system of that time, represented by bishops, was in great measure one depleted of love, corrupt, unscrupulous and intriguing, especially in the East.

The fourth period for the development of sacerdotal ministry (330-1517 A.D.) brings before us the Eastern Church which adopts the governing system named cesaropapism and the Western one which adopts the theocratic imperialism through which the political ruler is somehow kept at a distance from the business of the church. During the time of the Ottoman conquests in the East, the Greek sacerdotal hierarchy saw itself accredited with an effective power, both civil and religious, much greater in scope than the one it had before these conquests. The patriarch became as from this moment a regent of a vassal empire. As an official of the Ottoman Empire the patriarch and his cohort of bishops participated unreservedly to the corrupt system which dominated the affairs of the Porte.

In the West, the episcopate becomes an institution fully identified with the State. Its contact with the State is continuous, but less frequent with the needs of the flock. His Christian message was a generalized one and so permissive that it received the support of pagans and Christians alike, proving that his ministry wasn't one which defended and supported decisively the Christian teachings which made the difference between what it was pagan and what it was Christian. All these factors transformed the church hierarchy into a system based on grades of subordination and a type of totalitarian ministers. The laity's approach to God and the Word of the Scripture began to be wholly mediated.

Luther (1483-1546) wanted to purify Christianity of all the impurities introduced in the Church during these centuries. He explained salvation through the term „justification” and declared war to the teaching according to which salvation was mediated through the clergy and the sacraments. Luther also insists on the idea that all who believe in Jesus Christ are priests. Similar to Luther, John Calvin (1509-1564) aimed for a return to the teachings of the Holy

Scriptures. Calvin said: „all those who boast to be priests who bring atoning sacrifices treat Christ unjustly.”

Conclusions

The convictions of the supporters of sacerdotalism is that the successors of the apostles must not be considered servants of the Christian society, but emissaries of God. The theologians of the first centuries took over all the texts of the Old Testament which speak about the privileges, decisions, tasks and responsibilities of the Aaronic priesthood and applied them to the servants of the Christian Church. But in their endeavor they completely ignored the analysis of this concept in the Epistles to the Hebrews.

The Protestant perspective asserts that the process of development and maturation of the Church must not lead to the conclusion according to which Jesus transferred, during the first two centuries, His authority as Lord and Head of the Church to certain successors called bishops. Apostolic succession correctly refers itself to the succession of the apostolic Gospel, when the original content of the apostolic truth was transferred from one generation to another: „entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). A church becomes apostolic when it recognizes in practice the supreme authority of the apostolic Scripture.

In Protestantism the role of „priesthood” is a „functional” one, not sacred and not one which mediates the grace, sacrifice and the forgiveness of God. Luther considered that the doctrine of priesthood of all believers or the teaching which supports the direct access of each believer to the throne of God’s grace, on the basis of Christ’s mediation ministry, is a biblical teaching presented in many places of Scripture and especially a teaching applied in the early church.

CHAPTER 4 THE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN IN THE THOUGHT OF JOHN OWEN AND DUMITRU STĂNILOAE

John Owen (1616-1683) – His life and times. Owen was born in Stadhampton in 1616. He graduated from the University of Oxford. In 1662, Owen came out of the Church of England and became the leader of the nonconformist movement. He wrote a number of great theological works and went into glory in the year of 1683.

Owen is concerned to prove that in heaven Christ performs a threefold ministry of mediation as Priest, King and Prophet. For him the mediation of Christ must be viewed in its eternal and historical dimensions. The eternal covenant functions as a cause for Christ’s mediation. The incarnation of Christ and his historical ministry were necessary for the accomplishment of salvation.

The nature of Christ’s priesthood is for Owen contained in Hebrew 5:1: chosen from among men He is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. These aspects are attained by Christ through His incarnation.

Death on the cross is part of His priesthood office which Christ no longer continues in heaven. In heaven Christ lives a life of priestly ministry which He brings in love and dependence on the one He lived on earth – His sacrifice. According to Owen, the mediation of Christ is only for the chosen one and involves the administration of the house of God on earth and care for it in all its temptations and sufferings.

In conclusion, only in Him and through Him we can make known all our desires, prayers and our whole worship before God.

Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) – His life and times. Stăniloae was born in 16th November 1903 in Vlădeni of Braşov County. He developed an interest for the German philosophy and the Russian theology. He also manifested an openness for the western values and was always in search for an experiential theology.

Dumitru Stăniloae and the Orthodox theology about the mediation of Christ in heaven. For Stăniloae the effect of Christ's sacrifice is to restore, sanctify and deify the human nature in Christ. The sacrifice through which Christ restores and deify the human nature wins God's love for this nature.

Stăniloae rejects the idea that through Christ's sacrifice it is restored God's justice and honor. The sole aim of Christ's sacrifice is to give Himself through it to God as man and He offers it with the purpose of attracting man to God. Christ dies because He feels pity for men. But His sufferings alone are not able to free them from their sins. His death is a stimulus for people to give themselves to the Father. Christ must infused them with the same drive to die toward their selfishness, taking power from His death before the Father. Salvation is attained through the appropriation of the state of sacrifice and of the new life to which Christ arrived through His death.

Stăniloae does not accept that Christ's death is substitutive. God does not receive man on the basis of Christ's sufferings on his behalf, but because man makes the effort of no longer sinning. We free ourselves from our own vices through Christ's mediation and through our effort to free ourselves of any thought which stops us to enter in a loving and endless relationship with God and through Him with our fellow people.

As Priest Christ brings us as sacrifice, together with His sacrifice. On the other hand we give ourselves as sacrifices, so that He is able to take us to God. Based only on His sacrifice He is not able to take us before God. There is a need for our sacrifice which consists in living an orderly life, in prayer and other gifts for our fellow men.

The believers are not able to enter alone before God. The role of the priest of the church is to replace Christ as Mediator in the Church of those gathered on earth. It is true that the Church needs Christ as Mediator, but this fact must become visible in the serving priest and mediator on behalf of Christ for man. The serving priest is the visible image of Christ.

The mediation of saints and the use of icons in worship.

God is too far to be accessible to believers, therefore the saints are the mediators who pray for the faithful on earth. The most important among saints is Mary and, therefore, she deserves the greatest veneration.

Icons are intermediaries between the persons represented and the believers who pray. The purpose for the veneration of saints represented through icons is that through their veneration believers may benefit from their example as those who succeeded to unite themselves more profoundly and fully with God.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST'S MEDIATION IN HEAVEN

In the Reformed perspective of John Owen.

a) *The believer is justified through faith only in the sacrifice of Christ.* Justification through faith is the most glorious result of Christ's office of mediation. The believers are justified on the basis of their faith (*ek pisteōs*) and are called to live a life of faith (*eis pistin*) (Rom 1:17). To the believer the righteousness of Christ is imputed through faith as a means, not through faith as a merit. If man's reconciliation with God, his deliverance from the everlasting punishment and the inheritance of the eternal life are received according to the teachings of Luther and Calvin about justification through faith, then it means that we deal with a doctrine which, in most real practical sense, it determines the final destination of each man on earth, either in hell or in heaven. Implicitly, it means that any other way of coming to God is wrong.

b) *The priesthood of all believers.* All those turning to God through faith and repentance have direct access to God without the mediation of an earthly priesthood. There is no guarantor and human initiator in man's relationship with God. The way to the heavenly Father is mediated only by Jesus Christ. The priesthood of all believers focuses on *living the faith in communion* and on man's capacity to respond to God's call. All the priests of the church communicate God's love and forgiveness and prove their preoccupation and compassion for the others. The individual is encouraged to read and study the Bible without the consent of the clergy. Each believer has the responsibility to give himself to Christ and to proclaim Christ through deed and Word (1 Peter 2:9).

c) *The believer has the certainty of God's forgiveness because this rests on Christ's efficaciously and once for all accomplished work.* The „immediate” effects of Christ's priesthood, before God, are reconciliation and the knowledge that sins are forgiven. The „mediated” effect is the atonement of sins. The moral effects are justification and the removal of guilt, and the real effects are sanctification and living in holiness (Romans 12:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Christ's priesthood and His mediation in heaven as Priest helps us in our perseverance in faith to the end.

d) The impact of the personal life of faith.

Christ's mediation as High Priest encourages us to continue living a life of faith. Assurance of salvation is characterized through the inner peace with regard to our stand before God. The passion for evangelism and mission is motivated by man's need to receive God's forgiveness. Evangelism concentrates on man's need to come to put his trust in Christ's perfect and efficacious redeeming work.

In the orthodox perspective of Dumitru Stăniloae.

a) *The meaning of the priesthood of all believers.* The believers are priests in the sense that they are people in a state of sacrifice, voluntary self-giving and keeping themselves active in a „passive” state of surrendering to God and to their fellow believers, and living according exclusively to their own will. The focus falls on personal effort. Reliance on man's own power leads to the absence of assurance. The knowledge that sins were forgiven is missing. It is conveyed the idea that Christ's sacrifice is not efficacious for the forgiveness of sins.

b) Explanations for the necessity of having the priest of the church as a mediator between man and God. The bishops are successors of the apostles and therefore they continue their work of mediation between God and man. Faith and hope is directed to them, not to Christ.

c) Grace is given through the mediation of the bishop and the serving priest. The believer receives Christ and His grace through the mediation of the priest. Christ works in the life of the believer in the same way, through the mediating priest. The believers are always in need for the visible priest, different from them, because they always need Christ as Mediator.

Conclusions

In the Protestant perspective, Christ secured our direct access to God, and now our privilege is to bring our prayers and spiritual service to Him, without the need of a mediator taken from among men.

According to the Orthodox perspective we are dependent on our own efforts and the mediating work of others for us. Thus it is denied the efficacy of Christ's atoning work. The priesthood of all believers is viewed as a continuous dialogue between Christ and the Church, where believers are called to bring themselves continuously as sacrifices and to keep them in a passive state of self-giving themselves to God and to their fellow men.

CHAPTER 6 CRITICAL EVALUATION

Against mentalities

A lack of relationship between faith and living shows the measure of faith and living of any believer from our days.

Objectives: Things, attitudes and orthodox practices which deserve to be appreciated and retained are identified. Other things, practices and attitudes which blur or even deny the salvific character of Christ's work of redemption are rejected.

Methodology: In any relationship between orthodoxy and Protestantism the use of a hermeneutic of love is recommended. The doctrinal critique proposed in this chapter brings into analysis the orthodox belief about God and His Word and the lack of relationship between the knowledge of doctrine and practical life. The Protestant evaluation on orthodoxy is produced based on the truth of the Gospel.

Social-historical problems

Orthodoxy makes itself guilty of an adverse attitude to the protestant denominations from the East, refusing any dialogue and proving an analysis on these which lacks any objectivity and historical context.

The Protestants charge orthodoxy as guilty for the paganisation of church practices and the practical life of faith. The mutual lack of trust, the attacks launched in the history of Christianity and the uncontrolled suspicions will never lead to an objective and accurate interpretation of the two traditions. The problems of orthodoxy pertains to nationalism and intense ethnocentricity not only against non-orthodox Christians, but also against some wings of orthodoxy.

Phyletism, identifying state's secular interests with the one of the Christian church, and even racism remain prevalent weaknesses of the modern orthodoxy. In Romania it is still felt the extremely powerful pressure to place yourselves in affiliation with the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church continues to carry a campaign to attain the status of national church.

Doctrinal problems

The Orthodox way of negation makes ordinary man believe that he is unable to know or experience God. Hence the total abandonment to understand God or the truths which He revealed for us in Scripture. The relentless insistence of orthodoxy on the fact that it alone is the true church of Christ on earth affects the need for Christian unity. The Orthodox Church vehemently opposes the efforts of the evangelicals to proclaim the Gospel in Romania, even if this action can only lead to the improvement of human life.

6.2 Fall, sin and restoration

Orthodox perspective asserts that human nature has not been initially without sin. People were created outside of a full fellowship with God, but with the capacity to realize their union with Him through deification or transformation. Fall represents a kind of diversion of the traveler from the way which leads to his heavenly home. Falling into sin does bring nothing new in man's life, no new condition, no new state; it only brings into view the limitations and the dangers inherent to the man who is not allowed to participate into deification.

The state of man's sinfulness is viewed as man's enmity against God, not as God's enmity against man. God is unable to hate His child, not even when he is in a state of sin. God is only sickened by his sin, which Christ takes upon Himself and hates Himself because of this.

Protestant perspective asserts that sin estranges man from God, brings God's enmity against him and condemns him to everlasting perdition. Orthodoxy diminishes profoundly the gravity of sin and the seriousness with which it must be viewed. Since man is not helped to see the seriousness of sin, he does not see either the need to treat it with seriousness.

The Protestant perspective neither support the view that Christ needs to perfect Himself through sacrifice, nor the fact that through sacrifice He attracts people to God. In many instances the Scripture shows that the sacrifice has the role to atone, to justify man before God (1 John 2:2).

6.3 Man's salvation from sin

Orthodox perspective does not view salvation as a state, but as a journey. The emphasis falls on man's task of walking on this path with God's help without the need for a declaration of guiltiness. Orthodoxy avoids the use of the term „salvation” and prefers the term „vocation”. Salvation is not considered as restoration or deliverance from a state of guilt and sin, but an elevation to a complete new state of life. God does not reconcile Himself with man, but God reconciles man with Himself.

Protestant perspective asserts that man is not able to walk with God until he receives the right to fellowship with Him. He needs to be brought from a state of enmity to a state of forgiveness and blamelessness. Walking with God cannot happen as long as there an alienable state between Him and the sinner.

The sinner needs the declarative act through which he is endowed with the right to be in a new relationship with God. Relying on salvation on one's own powers is unacceptable and unbiblical. Personal effort is also necessary for the Protestants in their life of faith, not to win salvation, but to prove their salvation and progressive sanctification. The Protestants look back and find their motivation in what God already did for their salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ.

6.4 Christ's sacrifice

Orthodox perspective seeks to restore, sanctify and deify the human nature in Christ. Orthodox theologians do not accept that God is angry against man for his sin and, consequently, He does not claim any sacrifice for his forgiveness. The effect of Christ's sacrifice is a simple deliverance of man from his selfishness. Through the sacrifice brought to God, Christ perfects Him as man, He gives Himself to God as man and then He gives Himself to man, brings the sacrifice for man's benefit, not to win his right to stand before God, but only to attract him to God. The use of Christ's sacrifice is only to restore the human nature in Christ and to win people's love for Him and for God.

Protestant perspective insists that Christ's sacrifice is for atonement (putting away God's anger against the sinner), it is substitutionary and only for the benefit of man.

6.5 The continuous presentation of Christ's sacrifice in the church

Orthodox perspective does not hold that Jesus Christ is an atoning sacrifice, but an example for the fallen mankind. Christ purpose when He lived on earth was not to become a sacrifice for sin, but to live the human life as an example of the absolute devotion God was expecting from mankind.

Protestant perspective asserts that through the example theory offered by orthodoxy it is denied first of all the fact that God's justice requires punishment for sin. It is denied the existence of a payment made by Christ as punishment for the sin of man. The reformed perspective asserts that the example theory must be rejected, because it ends up arguing that man can save himself by following the example of Christ and by trusting and obeying God as Christ did.

6.6 The Church

Orthodox perspective. In the orthodox tradition the Church rests on a hierarchical structure, made up of bishops, priests and deacons. The believers' access to God is mediated by the serving priest and the Word is kept away from the ordinary believer, who is not encouraged to read it alone and to feed himself daily from it.

In the Orthodox Church, Christ is kept at a distance from the ordinary believer. He is not encouraged to confess his sins in private prayer before God. The church is rather a mystic entity which incorporates God's direct activity. The orthodoxy sees the Church more in a divine way, a creation for which Christ and the Spirit are responsible.

The Church is tradition: tradition is the life of the Church. The expression of Church unity is stated in the Liturgy and sacrament. Within the church the focus is not on doctrinal correctness, but on correctness during the liturgical service. In the Church the bishop is Christ's representative. He gives life to the Church through the celebration of Eucharist.

Protestant perspective views the Church as a community made up by people who responded through faith in Christ to what God revealed to them in His Word. For Protestants, the

problem in orthodoxy is represented by the position which the Church occupies between God and the ordinary believer, namely that of mediator of grace and forgiveness. Through tradition, reformed perspective understands handing down in the church the models of worship and teaching which are faithful to the Word of Scriptures. The Head of the Church is Christ.

CONCLUSIONS

Between Owen's reformed perspective and the orthodox perspective of Stăniloae there are some common points, but a lot more differences. These differences pertain to the way Scripture is interpreted. Holding on to the doctrine of the unique office of Christ's mediation between God and man affects radically man's deliverance from the consequences of sin. The Protestants call this the work of salvation. When man's salvation is seen as a work performed by Christ and given to man through faith as a gift, than its objective is certain.

Salvation is a kind of work which man can only receive, he cannot win it through his own efforts or through the efforts of other people. On the basis of Christ's mediation between God and man, the believers are able to come in worship before God. They no longer need a human fallen priest, either orthodox, evangelical, or catholic to mediate their forgiveness.

„The priesthood of all believers” emphasizes aspects of communion and fellowship. It has to do more with the Christian service not the status of a certain individual. As priests, the New Testament believers bring to God spiritual sacrifices through Jesus, their High Priest. The priesthood of all believers has as results *the personal consecration* – we are no longer ours – *total obedience* – showing obedience to Jesus is a proof of our salvation – *sacrifice of praise* – the expression of our gratitude for Christ's work – and *prayer* – the direct communication with God.

The priesthood of all believers is not a prerogative on the basis of which we can relax as Christians; it is a mission into the world where we exercise our priestly service not for our own good, but for other people's good, not in the place of Christ, but for His sake and because of His command; it is not just a spiritual privilege, but a moral obligation and a personal vocation.

Every individual is important for God's work. This truth has led to the growth of the churches, to young people's education, founding of hospitals, Christian schools, orphanages and many other humanitarian edifices. All these came into existence due to the teaching which says the as priest each believer has something to offer to God. Those who serve with the Gospel are God's gift for the church.

Proposals

Both the Protestants and the Orthodox are recommended to avoid polemical mentalities. It is important to talk to each other in the spirit of Christian love, seeking to accept that each tradition has something to offer the other.

The Protestants need to make known that they not only recognize, but also support any movement for a true and biblical spiritual renewal within orthodoxy. They are eager to see the orthodox churches returning to the full health of a life of faith. Through their missionary efforts the Protestants do not intend to convert those converted or to steel the sheep from the orthodox fold.

A calmer and more objective dialogue between the two parties could contribute in Romania to the development of a new perspective. It is paramount to have in view national and even global preoccupations in which all Christians are called to be involved. Countless socio-

ethical tragedies in the modern life of Romania demand united efforts, not fragmented, on the part of believers – hunger, poverty, immorality, human abuses and others.

That does not mean that we ought to minimize or ignore the differences, but that it is important to make these matters a priority in a larger spectrum of stressing preoccupations, remembering that the Orthodox and the Protestants can already rejoice around a consensus on various fundamental issues which pertains to certain doctrinal elements. The Protestant position considers that at the basis of a critical approach to orthodoxy must lay in equal measure our love for the truth. We need to show a profound concern for truth which in turn will safeguard us against falling into irrational sentimentality.

Scripture teaches us to bring to God a worship which is in Spirit and in truth (Ioan 4:23-24). The Spirit and the truth help the believer to come near to God both with his heart, overwhelmed by emotion, and with his mind as a controlling factor for his emotion. The two traditions – the protestant and the orthodox – must be evaluated based on the standard of biblical truth. Therefore, the doctrinal criterion is as important as is the moral criterion of love.

The Protestants need to learn to make the difference between what the orthodox officials declare and what the personal interpretation of some of them is. There are official declarations of some Romanian orthodox hierarchs which show a considerable measure of understanding and sympathy toward the Protestants, while the personalized interpretations of other orthodox are not at all friendly to them.

We recommend a more stern insistence in orthodoxy on the idea of knowing God which is not only limited to the „exercise of the mind”, but one which is translated into a transforming godliness. The rule of faith must contain in itself the essence of the Gospel, and none of the other things which are less essential.

We propose to be as insistent in any theological matter as the Gospel is. Where the issues are left in the grey area, they must be approached with relaxation and latitude. Where the history of church exegesis is clear, we will prefer to remain narrow and insistent.

The Protestants need also to take into account the important historical lessons which they could learn from the Orthodox tradition. The Eastern Orthodox Christianity existed in political, cultural and religious conditions extremely adverse. In the same time the Protestants need to avoid any future compromises of which they made themselves guilty in their own history.

From Orthodoxy the Protestants would be able to learn how to remain consciously adherent to the apostolic tradition and determinate to model their Christian identity after the life, creeds and the synods of the early church.

The Romanian society must start to experience a new form of church orthodoxy, one which will reflect the church unity in space and time. Through this characteristic we do not invite to uniformity, but to unity, diversity, not division, enmity and persecutions.

The Protestant critique that Orthodoxy looks too much backwards and that it suffers from a medieval mentality must not be viewed by Orthodoxy as lacking in support. This stiffness in the past is able to distort the biblical witness, a witness which must be alive in our lives. Moreover, the lack of a readjustment of the past to the life of the present church risks to affect the churches and the priests interaction with the contemporary cultural problems of the believers.

Taking into account the patristic past is necessary, but repeating it precisely is dangerous. An exaggerated love for the liturgy of the first centuries is considered by many a ritual which is lacking any transforming life.

Orthodoxy needs to apply itself more to the biblical teachings and to explain these in such a way that they can fulfil our daily needs. There is a need for church discipline against those who depart from the life of faith according to the principles preached by the Orthodox Church.

Consequently, Orthodoxy could discover in Protestantism an ally for the process of defending the faith against erosions created by the permissive and antichristian model promoted by the secular society in which we live.

The Protestants can learn from Orthodoxy the way in which she knows to integrate almost entirely theology and worship. Bringing theology and worship together in a single act gives Orthodoxy its unique and profound liturgical character. According to all analysis, combining theology and worship in a single liturgical act represents the essence of Orthodoxy.

From the perspective of Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestant Christianity disappoints through its growing break between the study of theology and the liturgical experience. While in the Protestant denominations from both East and West theology and worship become more and more secular through their form and manner of presentation, in Orthodoxy they represent one inseparable act with a flavor profoundly reverential.

The Protestants need to take seriously into account Orthodoxy's repeated appeal to evagrian aphorism: „If you are a theologian, you truly pray. If you truly pray, you are a theologian”. The Protestants are urged to learn from Orthodoxy that for the academic study, the ultimate context needs to be the Christian community gathered for worship. Without a liturgical context of worship, theology becomes „scholastic” in the worst case and not a guide for worshipping God in spirit and truth.

On the other hand, Orthodoxy is guilty of neglecting the theological study among the community of believers. A life characterized by a thinking anchored only in history can transform itself in historicity and Christian living fossilized in the past.