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MISSIO ISRAELIS
A MISSIONARY READING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT
With particular reference to the books of the Pentateuch

-PhD Thesis-

SUMMARY

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The discipline of Missiology seems to have ignored until recently one of its essential and constitutive sources: the theology of the Old Testament. This reality is partially excusable: the Christian mission began since the Apostles' times under the circumstances of the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20). However, not only that mission itself has more profound bases and more flexible boundaries, but the Christian theology, in general, suffers as long as the Old Testament revelation is ignored or, at best, used as an instrument for confirming some New Testament passages or themes. The healthy perspective is, however, a broader and a more nuanced one.

The importance of approaching the missionary theme from an Old Testament point of view, the lack of a Romanian bibliography on the theme, the inexplicable reservation of some academic voices in spite of the many serious and explicit counter-evidence, and our personal adherence to the theme were sufficient arguments for our choice to research the subject of the present thesis named: *Missio Israelis. A Missionary Reading of the Old Testament, with particular reference to the books of the Pentateuch*. It is meaningful the fact that the study was also a challenge on the respect of the unexpected outcome of the research. If the initial endeavour regarded first of all a legitimation of an Old Testament approach of the missionary theme by reference to the whole Hebraic Scripture, the journey of this paper persuaded us that such an approach exceeds the borders of a doctoral thesis. In other words, not only can we discuss the mission in the Old Testament, which is a very generous theme and, therefore, cannot be treated in the boundaries outlined here. For this reason we eventually narrowed the research to drawing a missionary theology of the Old Testament from the books of the Pentateuch.

The legitimacy of an Old Testament approach of the missionary theme is rendered first of all by the definition of mission we propose here. On the one hand, mission is above all – even etymologically speaking – a sending for the purpose of salvation. The history of the Old Testament is nothing other than the history of several sendings for that purpose. On the other hand, mission entails a much broader context: it is essentially the mission of God in the world. Consequently, the history of humanity itself is the history of that divine mission, and the human mission is an act of deliberate and self-conscious participation in the mission of God.

The primary element of novelty of the present paper is the treatment of the missionary theme from a perspective that gains progressively more ground in the international academic area, both on the biblical and missionary theology fields, namely *the missionary hermeneutic* of the Holy Scripture. We dedicated a whole chapter to this theme, although it is essentially a methodological introduction to the treatment of the three larger chapters of this thesis. *Mission as interrogation* (chapter 1) tries to draw the main features of the new missionary hermeneutic, to outline a history of the idea and to stress the foundations that will underlie the approach of the following chapters. Hence, we pointed out initially that the starting point for this kind of hermeneutic can be found in the words of Jesus Christ and the Apostles themselves. If chapter 24 from Luke proposes an Old Testament hermeneutic both messianic and missionary, the passage from Acts 13 is nothing else but a concrete application of this hermeneutical key by the Apostle of the gentiles himself. Furthermore, by assessing the relation between Bible and mission, we notice that each testament is at the same time a product, a record and a tool of the mission of God in the world. However, the New Testament is a favourite of Missiology, especially through the Great Commission, which occurs due to the preconception that our mission must be built on imperatives. Nevertheless, as we can see from many Old Testament passages (e.g. Ex 19:3-6, 20:2), the imperatives are always founded on indicatives, that is, the statements made by God Himself about His mission and that of His chosen ones.

So what is a missionary hermeneutic of the Scripture? First, it must not be mistaken for a biblical theology of mission because it is more than that. A biblical theology of mission deals with different missionary themes in the Bible, asking questions such as “What are the biblical bases for mission?” (A question most frequently related to the Christian mission). The reversed question, proposed two decades ago, generated the debates regarding the new type of hermeneutic: what would have taken place if we would discuss the implications of the missionary bases for the Bible instead of talking about the biblical bases for mission? This shift of emphasis proposes mission as the central theme of the whole Bible. But since mission primarily means the mission of God Himself, the missionary hermeneutic implies a reading of the Scripture starting from this divine mission. The mission of God is the metanarrative that links all the biblical narratives with each other, giving them unity, and even more: it gives meaning to all the particular narratives of the humanity, today and evermore. It is interesting to notice that this view arises in the context of a postmodernism, which attacks the concept of the

metanarrative itself. Through this hermeneutical proposal, the missionary theology assumes the role of answering the postmodern accusations from a new perspective. Theologically speaking, the missionary hermeneutic proposes a missionary reading of the whole Scripture, which means the use of the mission of God in the world as a hermeneutical key for the understanding of both Testaments. At a concrete level, this can be achieved in three basic steps: reading every passage of the Scripture in the framework of the metanarrative of the divine mission, indicating how the metanarrative itself reflects on the passage and determining the significance of the passage for the mission today. These are the three aspects we shall pursue in the treatment of every Old Testament passage approached on the present thesis.

The theme of the Old Testament mission started to be approached constantly and more and more elaborated since the debut of the discussions around the concept of *missio Dei*, in the middle of the 20th century. For Missiology, these discussions marked a shift of the emphasis from ecclesiology to triadology, with mission regarded as flowing from the intra-trinitarian movement of communion. The assertion that God is missionary on His nature opened the possibility to speak about mission even before the sending of the Son in the world. The debates included proposals and theological developments, such as the pair *missio Dei generalis-missio Dei specialis*, where the first phrase refers to the direct action of God in history, at the personal (individual conversions) or the collective level, or even through impersonal forces of nature and historical events, while the second involves the mission of God in the world through His messengers. In the last sense, God is a *Deus mittens*, a sending God, which implies the missionary nature of humankind: if God is the One who sends, then the human is a *homo missum*, a missionary being. Furthermore, if God is a missionary God, then every man and woman, being created in His “image and likeness”, has a missionary nature too. As the Holy Scripture teaches us that human beings are eventually created in “the image” of Christ and Christ is the Sent One *par excellence*, humans are to participate in this mission by virtue of their nature. The human seems to have then an ontological missionary constitution.

Created in the “image” of God, humanity is called to attain the “likeness” with God, which in Orthodoxy amounts to *theosis*, the goal and purpose that every man and woman’s life should pursue. If the Incarnation was decided from eternity, irrespective of the humans’ fall, and if it had the purpose to bring the human nature to the *theosis* through the union with the divine

nature, then the finality of the mission of God must become the finality of human beings' mission too. The *theosis* amounts to a real Christification, the reason being man was created in the "image" of Christ, which allows us to talk about a *Christothelic missiology*.

The human's status as a missionary being – *homo missum* – can be read in Gen. 1:26-27. The next verse (1:28), combined with Gen. 2:15, gives us details about this mission, which includes three essential mandates: *the creative, spiritual and cultural mandates*. If the latter regards the relationship between human beings and the world while the second points to their relationship with God, the creative mandate is the basis for both the spiritual and cultural activity of humans. Made in the image of the Creator, man is a creator on a small scale, the only creature that can create as well. Even if he cannot create *ex nihilo*, he has the mission to carry on the creative work of God by shaping His creation, for his own good and that of the creation itself. His creative mandate is made explicit starting with the episode of the giving of names to all the living creatures (Gen. 2:18-20), when man is invited to take on the position of king of the whole creation, which implies not only authority, but also responsibility. On the other hand, the human is called to be creative with his own destiny, which means first of all, the multiplication of the personal talents. This is his basic mission in the world that cannot be fulfilled outside the relationship with God. Therefore, the creative mandate must be combined with the spiritual one, which is usually seen by the Fathers in passages like Gen. 1:28 or Gen. 2:15, even if these verses refer primarily to the cultural mandate.

The cultural mandate of human beings involves their mission amidst the whole creation of God. As a dichotomic being, the human has the mission to link the two existential realms – the material and the spiritual – through his life and his choices. The creation account tells us that the material world created before humans was "very good", which is a superlative from the Creator Himself. This means that the material world, though created for man, does not have an exclusive utilitarian character. The human cannot use the universe in which he was placed only for his egocentric wishes.

The Old Testament asserts several times that the earth belongs to God, enough reason for a responsible reference on the part of human beings to the world they live in. On the other hand, the human is nothing else but a viceroy, a viceregent of God amidst His creation and, therefore, he will answer before God for the world given to him for stewardship. Furthermore, even from a

strictly anthropocentric view, the cultural mandate makes sense as we know that our every decision regarding the environment has repercussions on our physical offspring, our descendants who could suffer because of our choices. The ecological issue is a current topic. Even if Christianity – and implicitly the Hebrew heritage – was reproached for the origin of the ecological crisis, the Old Testament is very clear on this matter: not only that the whole creation matters in the eyes of the Creator (“the matter matters”) and humans are mandated to guard it, but it is destined to an eschatological finality, which enters into the purposes of God with the world. The relationship between the creation of the world and its finality equates with the relationship between the outset of the mission of God in and for the world and the finality of that mission. The *theosis* of human beings as a goal of mission is coincident with the final restoration of the whole creation.

The threefold missionary mandate of man, inscribed by God in his destiny from the beginning, ended sadly in a failed mission. Chapters 3-9 of Genesis set out not only the image of the humans’ missionary amnesia, but also the sinister picture of a world advancing hastily in sin and forgetting to a greater extent about its Creator and its initial mission. We have before our very eyes a progressive disorder, from the culinary to the sexual, from the social to the technological. In this context, we identify three basic crises: *of freedom, identity and unity*. What links structurally – and in a sense missionary – the three crises is the equation *sin-punishment-solution*. Every sin entails a particular or universal punishment, but it is important to note firstly that the punishment is a natural consequence of sin, and secondly that every punishment comes along with a solution, let alone the situations when the punishment itself is a solution. This reality shows us that God’s mission in the world does not cease after the human’s fall and missionary fails. On the contrary, after every fall God Himself comes in the way of the fallen ones.

The crisis of freedom is basically the crisis of the first fall. Gifted with freedom, man has not understood entirely the gift of the Creator. He has not understood eventually the following paradox: freedom is not the capacity to choose, but the insight to choose properly. The authentic freedom is that which chooses the good, all the more so as that good coincides with the will of the Creator of this freedom. The first crisis generated a relational disorder at all levels: human-God, human-human and human-creation. The consequences-punishments came instantly: the expulsion from Eden, working in hard conditions or death. However, the solution came

immediately. It can be read in the protoevangelium, but also in the mortality punishment itself, since God puts an end to sin by means of this mortality. The mission of God as an answer to the humans' fall streams also from the heartbreaking call, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9), hard upon the fall.

The crisis of identity can be identified in two central episodes. First, the fratricide of Cain, who is jealous of God's regard to Abel and commits the first murder in the history of humanity. Second, the episode of the union between the sons of God and the daughters of man renders the fall of the last redoubt against the extension of sin through the sin of Set's descendents. The two episodes are merely the examples given by the Scripture in the context of a climax of the antediluvian sin. The punishment that follows is quasi-universal, though preserving the hope through the election of Noe and the first covenant (cf. Gen. 6:18) made by God with the humankind.

Finally, the crisis of unity is the crisis of the Tower Babel. Between unity and dispersion, the Babel episode sums up in a way the entire history of Genesis' sin. On the one hand, the protagonists at Babel repeat the original sin: they want to be abreast of God, to affirm themselves as individualities separated from the source of existence – their Creator. On the other hand, their sin consists in the rejection of the primary mission to "fill the earth", to propagate in order to fulfill God's mission in the world, but ultimately the unity they seek ends up ironically in a dispersion totally opposed to the one they had been initially mandated. This is a sign that not any unity is good in itself, as no diversity is blamable. The episode ends apparently with the lack of the third term of the equation mentioned above: it seems not to have a solution; however, it will come through the election and in the person of Abraham.

Election is a central concept in the Old Testament. It is closely related to that of calling, since any election made by God is followed by the calling of the elect. Furthermore, election always implies a mission, a sending, hence a responsibility. The first Old Testament explicit example in this regard is the patriarch Abraham. Gen. 12:1-3 opens the history of salvation and turns the concept of covenant into an essential reality of the entire history of Israel. The covenant, as a concrete relationship between two parties, already existed in the Ancient Near East at the appearance of Abraham. For this reason, the abrahamic covenant displays linguistic or structural similitude with the covenants of that period. However, it bears some distinctions too.

The novelty of the abrahamic covenant is that, unlike the other ancient covenants, it is made between a unique God and a person. The God of Abraham is a party of the covenant if the gods of the other covenants were merely witnesses or referees. Missionarily speaking, the comparative analysis of the patriarchal and Ancient Near East covenants reminds us of a patristic and at the same time current theme: the use of the pagan customs, concepts and culture from the perspective of the One truly God, investing them with new meanings. Any covenant implies a responsibility. In our case, it is a missionary one.

The central notions of the passage from Gen. 12:1-3 are *the promise* and *the blessing*, which eventually coincide. The paronymy “epangelia” (promise) and “evangelia” (good news) confirms the affirmation of St. Paul in Gal. 3:8: the passage from Gen. 12 is a gospel in advance. The abrahamic promise regards mainly three aspects: a fruitful progeny, a land of his own and a blessing (of Abraham, his descendents and all the families of the earth). The promise equates the blessing as the first two terms fit in the concept of blessing. This is the solution proposed by God after the general fall from Gen. 3-11, an antidote for the theme of the curse we found in the first chapters of Genesis. The beneficiary of this blessing is the numerous progeny promised to Abraham. However, in St. Paul’s interpretation, this progeny has a spiritual connotation: the descendants of the patriarch are all those who believe in Christ, according to the abrahamic promise. The Melchizedek episode confirms two realities: on one hand, as a prefiguration of Christ he teaches us that the blessing itself must be read Christologically, and secondly, we find out that the mission of God in the world has no boundaries. It cannot be limited temporally, spatially or conceptually. In other words, God works through unsuspected ways in the world, including the personal level. The case of the pagan priest Melchizedek is a conclusive example. Moreover, we notice how the blessing promised to Abraham has its first fulfillment in the blessing of Melchizedek, as a *typos* of Christ.

Apart from the blessing promised to “all the families of the earth”, i.e. all the nations of the world, Abraham’s life brings us some more missionary themes to reflect upon, that are still in actuality. We identify four missionary exigencies of the patriarch Abraham’s life: obedience, itinerancy, witnessing and intercession. Abraham was a model of *obedience*, from the first to the last moment of his life. Obedience is an essential condition for the fulfillment of the promise, but as this promise embraces all the history and the whole creation, the abrahamic obedience gets universal connotations, thus becoming paradigmatic. Two episodes in particular illustrate the

trajectory of the patriarch's obedience. First, the obedience of renouncement: the decision of leaving the familiar for the unknown, especially in that age's context, is a real challenge for any modern missionary. Leaving all behind, Abraham abandons himself to the divine voice and will, but this will bring him promises alike, for himself and for the whole humankind. His obedience will come to its climax with the sacrifice of Isaac (more properly *aqedah*, the binding of Isaac, since the sacrifice was not accomplished). This is the moment that will give value to the abrahamic faith and obedience, the main reason why he will be seen as a model of faith and obedience in the New Testament writings and in the Christian theology until today.

If obedience is the premise of mission as the inner spring which moves a will, then *itinerancy* is the status of any missionary who chose this way. Every mission implies a move, but one that lasts until the grave. It is eloquent in this regard that, at the end of a long life of obedience and itinerancy, the patriarch will get a land of his own only for his grave. This itinerancy implies several dimensions, such as the encounter, the cross-cultural, the danger and the sacrifice. The life of Abraham is pointed with the divine encounters, the only ones which could ground and give value to his choices. However, these encounters transcend the personal realm: the theophanies have a universal goal, from Abraham's departure to the episode of the lost cities. In his itinerancy, Abraham encounters varied peoples, and they learn about the uniqueness and greatness of YHWH. On the other hand, we notice how these encounters are often dangerous, shaping a theology of risk, which doubles any active missionary endeavour.

Itinerant by choice, Abraham is consequently a model of witnessing for all ages. We can identify a first coordinate of this witnessing in the patriarchal cult, which boils down to two main aspects: the building of the shrines and the calling of the name of God. The shrines, usually built on the heights as symbols of the divine transcendence, are at the same time remembrances of the encounter with God (for Abraham) and witnesses of the divine presence (for the gentiles). The calling of the divine name comes to certify the legitimacy of this encounter and this presence. The second dimension of the abrahamic witnessing is ethical: the passage from Gen. 18:19 is convincing in this respect. On the one hand, we have an *expectant ethics* which is an implicit mission, when we refer to the episodes in which the gentiles who meet Abraham acknowledge the existence, the uniqueness and the omnipotence of YHWH, the God of the patriarch. On the other hand, the *initiating ethics* is an explicit one: it regards the active role of Abraham in the

ethical shaping of his descendants, for the sake of all nations. Thus, we notice how the life of the patriarch follows the equation election-ethics-mission.

However, any witnessing fulfills in *intercession*. If I want my God to be acknowledged by those who have never heard of Him and if I truly want them to come to know Him, then I will try to mediate their relationship the most concrete way, especially from the Orthodox perspective, which teaches that no one can attain salvation by himself/. Chapter 18 from Genesis is the abrahamic witness in this respect. The cases of Sodom and Gomorrah provide us at least two essential themes to reflect upon. First, Abraham's argument suggests that he targets the salvation of all those involved, not just of Lot and his family, in a *pars pro toto* intercession that will define also the role of Israel, of Christ, and later of the Church. Second, what strikes us is the boldness of the patriarch in his address to the Creator that can be explained only through the intimacy of a genuine personal relationship, providing a model of *missionary boldness* for the christians everywhere.

The main Abrahamic missionary lesson is that the role of the people who will be born as a consequence of the calling of the patriarch, namely Israel, will be a role of mediating the divine blessing for all the nations. This role will be essentially assumed by a mission through attraction. It is about the magnetic dimensions of Israel's life, which will function as an attraction for the nations through three primary elements: the presence of God, monotheism and the ethics of the Old Testament. If the mission of Israel is first of all to be translated through the verb "to be", then its missionary identity, as a chosen people, to be a mirror of the divine presence, is destined to attract the attention of the nations. Therefore, the presence of YHWH in the middle of His people is a universal calling to relationship, drawing the coordinates of the equation presence-knowledge, because the purpose of the presence of God in the middle of *one single people* is that *all the peoples* of the earth will get the knowledge of this God. But in order to fulfill this purpose, the presence of God must be doubled by "the presence" of Israel. The verb "to be" has to be doubled by the verb "to do". The divine election waits for *the answer of Israel*. *Mission as attraction* has in view all the realms of Israel's life, from the spiritual to the political, from the social to the economic one. The chosen people is called to witness about the divine presence through their own presence and eagerness for the divine calling. In this particular moment in history, on the Israel's obedience depended greatly the destiny of all nations, Israel's mission being essentially a *mission of presence*. The central position of Israel in the mission of God in the

world can be outlined as follows: God-Law-Israel (obedience)-divine presence-attraction (of the nations). Chosen by God in order to receive the Law, Israel was meant to be a model of obedience, like Abraham, so it could make visible the presence of God in the world, for the sake of all humanity.

Nevertheless, the witness of Israel before the nations was not possible in the circumstances of the post-patriarchal age of slavery in Egypt. In order to be a missionary people, Israel had to first be a people, a free and independent nation. This will happen as a result of the event of the exodus. In other words, Israel had to be able to first serve God, in order to serve the nations as an instrument of the divine mission. This service could not be freely executed without the political, social, religious and economic deliverance from the Egyptian slavery. The exodus was the central and founding event of the people of Israel. Its historicity is strengthened by an unequivocal assertion of a historical dating and of the number of Israelites that left Egypt. On the one hand, the stultification of the exodus and its reduction to an insignificant tribal migration deprives it of its paradigmatic value not only for the history of Israel, but for the Christianity itself. Furthermore, the accurate interpretation of the Holy Scriptures helps us to identify in the exodus the first confirmation of the promise of a fertile posterity made to Abraham. On the other hand, the historicity of the event witnesses about the active presence of God in history, a God who intervenes every time when his mission in the world is jeopardized by the human's actions and choices. Finally, the episode of the exodus teaches us, for the first time explicitly, that God is a *redemptive* God.

The theme of the exodus as redemption provides us with one of the best matters of missionary meditation in the entire Old Testament. If the terminology of redemption points to the idea of a unique familiar relationship between God and Israel, then the recurrence of the theme through the Old Testament confirms its missionary importance and central position. Furthermore, the typology of the exodus is decisive even in the New Testament, from the Gospels to Revelation, setting out the story of the redemption in Jesus Christ itself. The Old Testament redemption, from the physical slavery to the redeeming rest in the promised land, corresponds with the New Testament redemption from the slavery of sin to the eternal rest in the heavenly land, the New Jerusalem. The old exodus, as a first fulfillment of the covenant between God and humankind, ends with the new exodus, portrayed by Isaiah and identified by the Evangelists in the death of Christ on the cross, as a fulfillment of the New Covenant, anticipated

by the prophet Jeremiah. Both events point to the final exodus, which will bring the end of the exile by earning the eternal citizenship in eschatology.

However, exodus' lesson does not boil down to the theme of redemption. What is the content of this revelation if the mission of Israel was to reveal the true God to all the people,? Who is this God about whom Israel witnesses and how can He be described in other terms than that of redemption? The book of Exodus gives us several answers in this regard, which can be summed up in three essential attributes: uniqueness, incomparability and sovereignty. This is the lesson of the exodus which the Israelites learnt and which will be confirmed especially through the Law on Sinai. The Decalogue was never a purpose in itself, in the way that morality itself is not. It was the instrument through which Israel had to become a model or a light to the nations. Thus, it does not have merely an ethical function, but mainly a missionary one: Israel is called to fulfill its priestly function towards the nations through the moral law of the Decalogue.

The first two commandments, in particular, witness about the way Israel has to relate to the mission of God in the world. The first commandment talks about YHWH in terms of a triple exclusiveness: of existence, worship and redemption. YHWH alone, among all the gods of the nations, has the attribute of existence, as well as can redeem humanity as we see in the event of the exodus. These realities call for an exclusive worship of this unique God. The second commandment, flowing from the first one, refers explicitly to the false gods, which sit outside this triple exclusiveness. In the Old Testament, God seems to be in a continuous encounter with the gods of the idolatrous nations, all along the history of Israel. Either we talk about an idolatry of power (Egypt), or an idolatry of nature (Canaan), or one of the security and the control of the events (Babylon), the Old Testament asserts the futility and inefficiency of the gods behind those idolatries each time. The paradox of the gods is that at the same time they are *something* (objects made by man, elements of nature etc) and they are *nothing*, since they do not possess a real transcendental existence. On the other hand, the Old Testament stresses several times that the primary distinction that has to be made is that between the Creator and the creature. When the human abandons the Creator and worships the creature, not only does he/she lose the relationship with the Creator, but becomes less human, since he/she bears the image of the Creator. All of these Old Testament reflections on the theme of idolatry meet the contemporary themes of meditation on the idols of our times. Both the etiology and the solution of the problem are the

same with those of the Old Testament, even if the idols are not apparently the same. Thus, its actuality and its missionary value are more obvious.

The uniqueness of YHWH implies the uniqueness of Israel by its election. What is that distinguishes the chosen people from the other nations of the earth? Rather, how was Israel supposed to be different among the nations? If in YHWH's case we talked about a triple exclusiveness, we think that concerning Israel we can assert that its distinctiveness consists in a *missionary exclusiveness*. The concept of election, so important for the theology of the Old Testament, implies the principle of separation: Israel is set apart and chosen from all the nations in order to serve the mission of God in the world. If the Old Testament's concept of election must be viewed firstly in terms of service, then the election of Israel presupposes serving the world through difference: Israel is chosen and called to witness about the uniqueness of YHWH through its own uniqueness. The classic passage which informs us about this uniqueness of Israel and its concrete role within the mission of God in the world is Ex 19:3-6, with its three essential phrases: chosen people, priestly kingdom and holy nation. The term *segullah* („chosen people”, but also „treasured possession”, „particular treasure”) refers to a special possession of the king, chosen by him from all his treasures. It is meaningful that we read in this passage that the whole earth belongs to God. In this perspective, the King of the entire universe chooses his own personal treasure, Israel, and endows it with an enormous responsibility. First of all, Israel is called to be a “priestly kingdom”. We know that in the Old Testament the priest had a double role: to reveal God to the people and to reconcile man and God through their sacrifices. Hence, Israel is called to assume the same role at a universal level, by mediating the blessing of God for the whole humanity. But this is not possible apart from the personal example, and this is essentially Israel's mission as attraction. At the ethical level, by individuals or by the community, Israel must reflect the life of God through its own life, as a calling to all the nations towards the knowledge and worship of this unique God. At the social level, the Old Testament's ethics is doubled by concrete laws regarding the attitude towards strangers, who need to enjoy the same benefits as the chosen people, at least on two grounds: a theological one, because God Himself loves strangers, and an empathetic one, as a remembrance of Israel's own wandering, from which they were redeemed unconditionally, by love. We must not forget that the command of loving our neighbour comes from the Old Testament and also that the “neighbour” in the Old Testament transcends the ethnic boundaries, even if Israel was not always aware of it. The

destiny of Israel stands, therefore, between God and their fellows, who are all the humans created in the image and likeness of the Creator. It is a missionary destiny par excellence, as a participation in the divine mission to bring blessing to all the nations of the world.

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