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FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

“ISIDOR TODORAN” DOCTORAL SCHOOL

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MISSIONARY
THEOLOGY THROUGH INTERNATIONAL
MISSIONARY CONFERENCES AND INTER-
ORTHODOX MISSIONARY CONSULTATIONS**

PhD Thesis

SUMMARY

Scientific coordinator

Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Valer BEL

PhD Candidate

Pr. Cornel-Gheorghe COPREAN

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KEY WORDS

Mission, evangelization, Church, unity, ecumenism, world missionary conferences, inter-Orthodox missionary consultations, *missio Dei*, missionary theology

SUMMARY

The PhD thesis “*The Development of the Missionary Theology through International Missionary Conferences and Inter-Orthodox Missionary Consultations*” elaborated under the careful guidance of Rev. Prof. Univ. PhD. Valer Bel, does not mean to be an exhaustive approach of the subject, in the sense of the systematization of a missionary theology (which is actually impossible), rather an analysis of the manner in which the Christian mission was defined and developed in an ecumenical context, in general, but especially within the Orthodox theology. Thus, the intention of the thesis is to present the theme synthetically, from the perspective of the missionary theology, by following the essential and defining parts of the Christian mission.

To this respect, **the theme of the research** requires the approach and systematization of the discussed missionary themes, on the one hand, in an ecumenical context, within the International Missionary Conferences (Edinburgh / 1901, Jerusalem / 1928, Tambaram-Madras – 1938, Whitby – 1947, Willingen – 1980, Achimota-Accra – 1957-1958, Mexico-City – 1963, Bangkok – 1972-1973, Melbourne – 1980, San-Antonio – 1989, Salvador de Bahia – 1996 and Athens – 2005), and on the other hand, within the context of the Orthodox theology, in the Inter-Orthodox Missionary Consultations (Cernica – 1974, Ecimiadzin – 1975, Prague – 1977, Paris – 1978, Amba Bishoy Monastery – 1979, Zica Monastery – 1980).

Regarding the theme of the research in the specialized literature we may state that, although the missionary literature is rich, however we do not have a complex work to present the evolution of the missionary thinking in a double approach, both ecumenical and Orthodox, on the background of the theology elaborated within the missionary conferences and consultations, starting with the past century, more precisely with the World Missionary Conference from Edinburgh 1910 until today. There are, however, a few specialized works and a series of articles that speak tangentially about the subject, some of them being reflections on certain aspects of the mission, others preferring an approach from the historical perspective of mission in the context of the ecumenical movement, especially in

the Western environment. In the space of the Romanian missionary research, there isn't a detailed analysis of the themes approached within the missionary conferences and consultations, although there are a few studies that present the themes discussed during these meetings, or offer historical data about them, but some of these studies do not mention the missionary implications.

The argument of the research derives on the one hand from the necessity of a theological reflection on the evolution of the missionary thinking, in the context of the adoption of a new text, which summarizes the great ecumenical convergencies in the missionary theology "*Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*"¹. On the other hand, since mission is the reflection of the religious life within a Church², it constitutes one more reason to interrogate ourselves on the characteristics of mission and of the Orthodox missiology in the context of the realities both of the past and present centuries. Hence, in the context of the enacting of this new document regarding mission and evangelization, but also in the context of the anniversary conference from 2010 from Edinburgh, which celebrated 100 years from the first World Missionary Conference, today it is necessary "a reflection and a systematic presentation" of the manner in which mission was defined and understood during this period of time, all the more so that rev. prof. Ion Bria underlined that "until now we did not have a clear and concise Theology that expresses the concrete missionary practice of the Orthodox Church"³.

In order to achieve the **purpose** of this thesis to analyze *the evolution of the missionary thinking* we proposed a theological-speculative analysis of the themes discussed within the missionary conferences and consultations, through which the following **objectives** may be reached:

- The presentation of the historical, theological, social-political or economical context in which the world missionary conferences and the inter-Orthodox missionary consultations took place
- The integration of the elaborated theology within each of the missionary meetings

¹ Jooseop KEUM, *Together towards Life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes with a Practical Guide*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2013, pp. 1-81. The document was approved by the Comitee of WCC during the meeting from Crete, on September the 5th 2012.

² Vasile Gh. ISPIR, *Curs de Îndrumări Misionare*, Bucharest, 1929, p. 17.

³ Ion BRIA, „Contra sectarismului”, in *ORT*, XLII (1990), 3, p. 184.

- The identification of the missionary impulse resulted from the debates or better said, the extent to which they contributed to the activation of the contemporary Christian mission
- Mentioning the convergencies and divergencies between the ecumenical perception of the Christian mission and the Orthodox one, seen as an extension of the missionary impulse.

In our endeavour to achieve the proposed objectives we will use the *historical method*, since we will turn to a chronological approach of the world missionary conferences in the first two chapters and of the inter-Orthodox missionary consultations in the third chapter. *The theological-speculative method* will be used to underline the contribution of these conferences and consultations to the development and elaboration of the missionary theology. Another method used, necessary to underline the divergencies and convergencies between the two perceptions, both ecumenical and Orthodox, regarding the Christian mission, is the *comparative method*.

The **limits of the research** are given by: 1) impossibility to evaluate the conferences completely, referring only to the theological analysis of the final reports with brief references to the plenary discussions; 2) the synthetic presentation of the elaborated theology by pointing out the fundamental theological aspects from the perspective of the mission of the Church due mostly to the richness of the bibliographical reference sources; 3) brief analysis of the Orthodox missions until the 20th century, for they are not the subject of the present thesis; 4) detailed presentation only of the most representative works of the most renowned missiologists, because the extensive number of works and articles is almost impossible to be seen in such a short period as the one dedicated to this research.

From the point of view of the structure, the thesis is organized in *three chapters*, preceded by Introduction and followed by *Conclusions* and *Bibliography*.

In *Introduction* we revise briefly the manner in which mission was understood until the beginning of the 20th century both in the Eastern and Western environment. From the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century the Protestant world was the one to involve greatly in mission. The *Missionary Conferences* were initiated by the Protestant environment due to the practical need to discuss whether the differences between the historical Churches brought disservices to the preaching of the Gospel of Christ amongst the unChristians. For this reason they are important from the point of view of the understanding of the relationship between Church and mission. Starting from the

slogan of John R. Mott, “*the evangelization of the world in this generation*”, perceived as a permanent and universal obligation, the Protestants wanted a coordination of their missionary activity. The conference from Edinburgh in 1910 was, in fact, the first meeting for this purpose, also considered the defining moment of the *modern missionary movement* and, in the same time, the *birth certificate of the modern ecumenical movement*⁴.

In the **first** part, “*The missionary movement from Edinburgh (1910) to New Delhi (1961)*” we present the conferences that took place under the aegis of the International Missionary Council from its foundation in 1921 in Lake Mohonk (New York) until its integration into the World Church Council (WCC), in 1961 in New Delhi. The characteristic of these conferences that took place in Edinburgh (1910), Jerusalem (1928), Tambaram (1938), Whitby (1947), Willingen (1952) and Achimota-Accra (1957-1958), consists of the fact that they took place exclusively at the heart of the Protestant world, without an Orthodox or Roman-Catholic participation. During this period, the reflection on mission was especially focused on Church through the underlining of the role of the Church in the missionary activity.

If the first conference from Edinburgh in 1910, as a conference of the missionary societies and not of the Church, did not bring its contribution to the theology of mission, starting with the conference from Tambaram in 1938, the emphasis was put on the close relationship between mission and Church. Mission was understood as an exclusive work of the Church, where the Church is the instrument of mission⁵.

The conference from Willingen in 1952 represents an important moment in the attempt to restate the missionary theology based on the concept *Missio Dei*, which underlines the Trinitarian foundation of the Christian mission. The Christian mission is put in the context of the Trinitarian doctrine as well, not only in that of the ecclesiology as it was until this moment. The classical doctrine *missio Dei*, as a sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit was then extended in the sense of the sending of the Church into the world by the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit⁶.

⁴ Kenneth Scott LATOURETTE, “Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council”, in Ruth ROUSE, Stephen C. NEILL (ed.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948, Vol. I*, Geneva: WCC, 1993, p. 362.

⁵ David BOSCH, *Witness to the World. The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2006, pp. 167-171.

⁶ David J. BOSCH, *Dynamique de la mission chrétienne. Histoire et avenir des modèles missionnaires*, Lomé / Paris / Genève, 1995, p. 526; Valer BEL, *Misiunea Bisericii în lumea contemporană*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, p. 12.

Another defining moment of this period is the integration of the International Council of Missions into the structure of the World Church Council, in New Delhi in 1961, under the name Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. This coincided with the admission of the Orthodox Churches to this organism, externalized in the changing of the “basis” of this council from a Christological one, which was not wrong but it was incomplete, into an exclusively Trinitarian one.

In the **second** part, “*Developing the missionary theology or from a theology of “missions” towards a missionary theology (Mexico-City 1963 – Athens 2005)*”, we present the conferences organized by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC: Mexico-City (1963), Bangkok (1972-1973), Melbourne (1980), San-Antonio (1989), Salvador de Bahia (1996) and Athens (2005), to which both the Orthodox Churches, as full members of the WCC, and Roman-Catholic delegates, as observers, participated.

The importance of these meetings, which took place between 1961 and 2005, consists of the developing of the missionary theology, in the new sense that they gave to Christian mission. Mission was no longer perceived as an exclusive work of the Church understood as a missionary society, but as an expression of the existence of the Church, as a work of God that is continued in history.

The involvement of the orthodox Churches, but also the inclusion of the International Council of Missions into the structures of the World Church Council in New Delhi in 1961, made possible a clarification of the traditional missionary notions, redefined today in texts with an ecumenical character⁷, which summarizes the great ecumenical convergencies in the missionary theology.

From the moment of the complete integration of the Orthodox Churches into the structures of the WCC there are three declarations regarding mission and evangelism: “*Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*” (1982), “*Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today*” (2000) and “*Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*” (2012). These declarations consolidate the fact that efforts have been and continue to be made to elaborate a missionary theology and in this endeavour the Orthodox contribution is of great importance. The confessing dimension of the Christian mission, instead of an offensive mission; the indissoluble relationship between mission and

⁷ Vezi „*You are the Light of the World*”. *Statements on Mission by the World Council of Churches 1980-2005*, WCC Publication, Geneva, 2005, pp.1-162.

unity; the Trinitarian importance of the theological concept of “missio Dei”; the Christologic character and the pneumatologic aspect of mission; the liturgical aspect of the Christian confession – the liturgy after the Liturgy; the ecclesial dimension of mission and its liturgical aspect are only a few of the Orthodox contributions to the new ecumenical understanding of mission.

The Orthodox Churches not only participated to the drafting of the missionary documents that summarize the ecumenical convergencies in the missionary theology and to the international missionary conferences organized by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC, but they were also preoccupied, and continue to be, with the elaboration of a missionary theology, organizing to this respect a series of consultations on missionary themes starting with the 1970s’.

In the **third** part, “*Inter-Orthodox missionary consultations and their contribution to the elaboration of the missionary theology*” we speak about the inter-Orthodox missionary consultations organized by “The Department of Studies and Relations with the Orthodox Churches” of WCC: “Confessing Christ today”, Cernica, 1974; “Confessing Christ today through the liturgical life of the Church”, Etchmiadzine, 1975; “The role and the place of the Holy Scripture within the liturgical and spiritual life of the Orthodox Church”, Prague 1977; Contribution to the theme “Thy Kingdom come”, Paris, 1978; “The place of the monastic life within the confession of the Church today”, Amba Bishop Monastery, 1979; “Preaching and teaching the Christian faith today”, Zica Monastery, 1980.

Their importance within the Orthodox environment consists of the fact that they activate a systematic study of the Christian mission, and in the ecumenical environment they offer the possibility to know the Orthodox perspectives regarding mission. Hence, they offer the frame to point the Orthodox missionary principles. That is why, the final section of this part, “*Reflection of the approached theme within the Orthodox missionary theology*”, wishes to be an assessment of the main themes approached within the missionary meetings, as they appear in the works of renowned missiologists: archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, rev. prof. Ion Bria and rev. prof. univ. PhD. Valer Bel.

The manner in which these theologians approached in their works and applied in their lives the contribution or the achievements of the inter-Orthodox missionary consultations, may become a source of inspiration for the future missiologists, who must

develop a fresh missionary theology that is able to respond to the challenges of the contemporary society that is changing continuously.

Through the inter-Orthodox missionary consultations, and also through the contribution of several important missiologists in the field of Christian mission, the Orthodox Church often considered in the Western environment as a church that lacks the missionary zeal, rearticulates the missionary sense of Orthodoxy, emphasizing the fact that the missionary dimension is a constant of the Christian life.

In *Conclusions* we underline, based on the study, the extent to which the international missionary conferences and the inter-Orthodox missionary consultations have contributed to the development of the missionary theology. Thus, emphasizing the manner in which the mission of the Church was perceived during the past century and the beginning of this one offers us an opening towards new perspectives and approaches.

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