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Witnessing in Canada**

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CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX-CHRISTIAN MISSION AND WITNESSING IN CANADA

The motivation of this thesis stems first and foremost from the desire to know and deepen the understanding of the historical, cultural, social and religious context of Canada as a missionary space. Orthodoxy immigrated to this country along with the Eastern Orthodox Christians who crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of a prosperous life. The Orthodox Church is relatively new in the cosmopolitan and pluralistic Christian landscape of Canada. From this point of view, the thesis could be a guide for the priests and laity of the Orthodox Church to understand the Canadian society, culture, its history of Christianity, as well as the nature and challenges of the Orthodox Christian missionary work in Canada

The second goal of this thesis is to share the specificity and beauty of Orthodox spirituality with the Canadian people that are concerned with spirituality and the history and work of the Orthodox Church in Canada. The Orthodox Church is not yet another New Age "cult" or one of the new religious movements that have appeared among the Canadian religions of the last hundred years but it has a well-defined and bi-millenary apostolic history. The identification of the spiritual problems in contemporary Canadian society from a missionary perspective are also covered in this thesis. There are currently few studies dedicated to this branch of Christianity in Canada and almost nonexistent in the Orthodox mission in Canada. The themes discussed in this paper are ample and have many ramifications. The aim of this thesis is not to exhaust all aspects of the Orthodox missionary work in Canada. It seeks rather to identify the existence of an Orthodox-Christian mission and witnessing in the contemporary society, in Canada, as well as the characteristics, efficiency and difficulties that are being faced in this country at present. To distinguish the specificity of the Canadian missionary space, we present the similarities and differences between Canada and the United States in terms of their cultural, historical and religious aspects, and those relating to Europe. Canada shares with the United States not only the

longest border in the world, but also the English language, colonial history, religion, and a very close culture that made true religious osmosis possible.

The principles of the Orthodox missionary theology and its distinctive doctrinal aspects in relation to other Christian denominations, even in a succinct presentation, help us to determine the specificity and novelty of Orthodoxy in the Canadian missionary space. On the other hand, contemporary Canada, as a missionary space, offers its geographical, historical, social and political particularities that are required to be understood by the Orthodox Christian missionary.

Considered in its entirety, it can be said that the Eastern Orthodox Church in Canada is missionary and offers Orthodox witness (martyria) through the work of its many parishes and monastic settlements in various church jurisdictions. These Churches usually use the liturgical language of their home country, but also English, depending on the context of the service and the origin of the members. An inappropriate understanding of the complexity of the immigration phenomenon, the specificity of the background of each immigrant people, and the cultural diversity within the Eastern Church of Canada, makes it to be perceived at times as a fragmented Church while its dogmatic and liturgical unity is completely ignored.

The historical development of the Orthodox Church in Canada demonstrates that its emergence is linked to the phenomenon of the migration of Orthodox Christians from the Old World to the North American continent and the fulfillment of their spiritual needs. The hierarchy of the Church in every Orthodox overseas country responded to the needs and demands of their spiritual sons, sending priests and hierarchs for missionary work. This has given birth to Orthodox Christian churches within Canada, defining their ethnocentric character. The names of the Orthodox churches in Canada illustrate this: Greek-Orthodox, Russian-Orthodox, Romanian-Orthodox, Serbian-Orthodox, etc.

The phenomenon of "Canadization" of these churches, through the adoption of the Canadian language and customs, has gradually become a reality with the passage of time. Although ethnocentrism is often presented as a distinct mark of the Orthodox Church in Canada, it must be said that it has a parallel both in Catholicism (i.e. like the Irish Catholic Church, South Koreans Catholic Church, Ukrainians Catholic, etc.) and in Canadian Protestantism (e.g. the Anglican Church of Canada, the Korean Trinity Presbyterian, the Taiwanese Presbyterian, the Chinese United, etc.). In terms of their jurisdictional organization, the Orthodox Churches in Canada are fragmented, however, in terms of their

doctrinal and liturgical unity, they are said to provide a common witnessing presence in the Canadian religious landscape.

The realization of the jurisdictional unity towards a united witnessing of Christ remains a goal in normalizing and harmonizing the various Orthodox church jurisdictions in Canada. The Great Orthodox Synod gathered in Crete, in 2016 was concerned about the issue of the diaspora and its reorganization: „*It is affirmed that is the common will of all of the most holy Orthodox Churches that the problem of the Orthodox Diaspora be resolved as quickly as possible, and that it be organized in accordance with Orthodox ecclesiology, and the canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church.*”¹

Consumerism specific to capitalism with its impetus of instant gratification along with the phenomenon of secularization, the contact with various ideologies, and forms of New Age religions amplifies the sense of anxiety and alienation of the Orthodox Christian immigrant. For Eastern Christian immigrants in Canada, in seeking an axiological system in the new society the contradictory states of soul are inherent. Since they are now a part of a new society, the alienation caused by their state as foreigners quite often push the Orthodox faithful towards a search and genuine rediscovery of their roots and existential values. In the "intra muros" mission work, the missionary priest, meets the opportunity to be a spiritual father, inspired by love and compassion, to guide these souls to Jesus Christ, the Savior who offers His rest to the weary and burdensome. The orientation of the Orthodox mission in Canada is not limited to the therapy offered to the Orthodox immigrants. In its "extra muros" dimension, the Orthodox mission targets all Canadian people, including the aboriginal natives and the average Canadian, often despondent and spiritually thirsty, eager to receive Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world and His Gospel, in their lives. The mission of evangelism and the witnessing of the faith is a call to all those baptized in Christ. That is why laity must have an active role in the life of the Orthodox Church and in the expansion of the ecclesial body of Christ.

The objective of this paper is to capture the Canadian missionary environment and to boost the Orthodox-Christian missionary work and witnessing in Canada. There are few present studies dedicated to Orthodox Christianity in Canada, and to my knowledge, they are none concerning Orthodox missionary work in Canada. The themes discussed in this paper

¹ „The Orthodox Diaspora - Official Documents - The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/diaspora>, accessed on: 21-09-2016.

are ample and have many ramifications. This thesis covers only a few of the many aspects of Orthodox missionary work. The methods that were used to carry out this thesis involved consulting specialized literature, cross-cultural and comparative research, and the personal missionary experience in a quest to answer essential pastoral questions. What is the Orthodox Christian mission? What is its specificity? What is Canada's geographical, historical, legal, religious and social context? Can we talk about a contemporary Orthodox mission and witnessing in Canada? What are the challenges of the Orthodox mission and witnessing in Canada?

The missionary identification of the spiritual problems of contemporary Canadian society, whose solving, the impetus of the Orthodox missionary work depends on, are also an integral part of this work.

In the first chapter, we define the theological premises of the Orthodox Christian mission in the understanding of some famous contemporary theologians. The bias against the Orthodox Church that it is not a missionary church because it is lacking a missionary theology is addressed in the first chapter as well. The two essential components of the Orthodox mission are evangelism and witnessing. The mission is to proclaim the good news of the coming of the Kingdom of God.² The imperative of the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of the Risen Christ is the Savior's command addressed to the Apostles: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*" (Matthew 28: 18-20). The evangelization is indispensable to the mission of the Church, for the proclamation of the word is the foundation of faith (Rom. 10, 14-15). The second essential component of the mission is the witness (martyria), which refers to the confession to Christ by word and deed along one's whole Christian life: cult, sacraments, prayer, spirituality and charity. Since missiology is a "Western" discipline, and the word "mission" itself is a word that has originated among Western Christians, many of the concepts of Orthodox missiology must be defined either in comparison with or in contrast to the Western missiology.³

² Ion Bria, ed., *Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspectives on Mission (WCC mission series)*, World Council of Churches, 1986, p. 11.

³ Stephen Tromp Wynn Hayes, „*Orthodox Mission Methods: A Comparative Study*” University Of South Africa, http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/16924/thesis_hayes_stw.pdf;jsessionid=6BB0CB3B9714649E4DB1FD04A5A0CF82?sequence=1, accessed on: 06-09-2016, p. 10.

On the North American continent, Orthodox-Christians are collectively identified by the epithet "Eastern", a term meant to identify them with their place of origin.⁴ Timothy Ware expresses the West's dilemma of positioning itself towards Orthodoxy: "*Orthodoxy is not just a kind of Roman Catholicism without pope, but rather something quite distinct from any other Western system of religion.*"⁵

In Orthodoxy, the debate on the Gospel and culture refers to the content of the Gospel, *Lex Credendi*, and receives valences only through the discernment of those propelled by the Holy Spirit: the saints. Second, integrity in Christ is enshrined in Tradition, as a critical principle of assuming human culture and a way of publicly protecting the divine mystery revealed in Scripture, against pseudo-gospels. In the view of Father Ion Bria, tradition means fidelity and continuity - *Lex Orrandi* - in order to preserve the integrity of the Gospel. Last, but not least, in the Orthodox missionary approach, the human culture cannot be considered a substitute for authentic Gospel and Christ's confession. In its pilgrimage thru time and space of the Gospel, the human culture is the cosmos that receives the baptism of Christ with open arms.⁶

The second chapter addresses some important Orthodox theological themes such as: the distinction between created and uncreated energies of God, doctrine of the fall, salvation and deification, with the aim to clarify the nature and the specific mission of the Orthodox Church. Catholicism considers that nature has not been corrupted by sin, so it limits salvation to the judicial satisfaction of Christ, while Protestants claim that salvation is "sola fide." It is true that in his effort, salvation is not achieved alone by man, with his own powers, but in him lays also the power of Christ. This power must become our spiritual and will power, and, therefore our collaboration is required to save us from sin.⁷ Father Dumitru Stăniloae affirms that deification is the perfecting of man through God, since in other ways one cannot reach perfection. Deification begins from Baptism and continues along the spiritual

⁴ James J. Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox mission theology today*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2001, p. 1.

⁵ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, New ed., Penguin, London, 1993, p. 2.

⁶ Ion Bria, „A New Typology for Gospel and Culture Syntax: From an Eastern European Orthodox Perspective”, *International review of mission* vol.84, no. 334 (1995): pp.273–74

⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Sensul Ascezei Ortodoxe*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2005, p. 18.

ascension, in which its powers are active, that is, along the purification of passions, the acquisition of virtues and illumination.⁸

The full growth of one's natural powers is accomplished in the collaboration with divine grace. Divine grace helps to develop the potencies planted in man as "likeness" to God. The Holy Fathers say that by deification, the work of human nature ceases, being replaced by divine works, and natural attributes being overwhelmed by divine glory.

The third chapter describes the historical stages of Canada's development and the peculiarities of this country as an evangelistic space. The word Canada derives from the native Iroquois's Huronian language, and it means settlement or „*village*”. Spread over a total area of 9,984,670 km²⁹ and a population of 36,155,487¹⁰, Canada becomes the largest „*village*” in the world and the second largest country in the world. The religion of the Canadian natives was based on animism and shamanism. Christianity arrived in Canada with the first explorers John Cabot and Jean Cartier; however, its propagation among the natives was the work of bold missionaries such as Jean Brébeuf, who was martyred, Samuel de Champlain and others. In the same chapter are presented the stages of the development of Christianity in Canada, as well as the evolution of the Catholic Church in Quebec, culminating in the spiritual crisis triggered by the "quiet" revolution, called so after the rapid and imperceptible secularization of society in the 1960s.

Orthodox Christianity spread among the natives of the North American continent, from the eighteenth century onward, due to Russian missionaries in Alaska, influencing the space geographically neighboring Canada. The political and socio-economic factors that catalyzed the appearance of the first Orthodox missions, including the characteristics of the Aleut natives, the personalities of the first Orthodox missionaries on the North American continent such as: St. Herman of Alaska, St. Innocent, Father Jacob Netsvetsov, their missionary methods and witnessing, as well as the historical development of the major ethnic Orthodox Churches in Canada: Ukrainian, Russian, Greek, Romanian, and Antiochian are all presented in Chapter IV. A particular attention is given in Chapter IV to Romanian Orthodox Church in

⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ascetica si mistica creștină sau Teologia vieții spirituale*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 1993, pp. 337 - 41.

⁹ „Land and freshwater area, by province and territory”, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/phys01-eng.htm>, data accesării: 27-04-2017.

¹⁰ „Statistics Canada: Canada's national statistical agency”, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/start>, accessed on: 17-08-2016.

Canada. The study outlines evidence that the Romanian immigrants, as early as 1902, start contributing to the Orthodox evangelization and witnessing in Canada. The hope of continuing the dialogue between the sons of the same mother in order to heal the divisions caused by Communism and the realization of a unitary witnessing so that „with one accord we may confess” Christ, is emphasized in the same chapter as well.

The challenges of contemporary Canadian society, the phenomenon of secularization, cosmopolitanism, the temptations of postmodernism, the ethical dilemmas facing Christianity and the missionary work in Canada are presented in Chapter V. The same chapter briefly describes the legal framework governing the relationship between the Church and the Canadian State, a bundle of Laws that we hope will serve Orthodox missionaries in Canada. Respect for the laws of the country is part of the Anglo-Saxon ethos, being a defining feature for the character and integrity of the ordinary Canadian. Multiculturalism and the cosmopolitan character of Canadian society are attained here. What is a Canadian? " A *Canadian is a fellow wearing English tweeds, a Hong Kong shirt and Spanish shoes, who sips Brazilian coffee sweetened with Philippine sugar from a Bavarian cup while nibbling Swiss cheese, sitting at a Danish desk over a Persian rug, after coming home in a German car from an Italian movie [...] and then writes his member of Parliament with a Japanese ballpoint pen on French paper, demanding that he do something about foreigners taking away our Canadian jobs.*" Although this definition of a Canadian anonymous¹¹ can cause hilarity, it holds some truth, that for ordinary Canadians, globalization is a reality in which they breath. Chapter VI attempts to answer the question: What does Orthodoxy bring from a missionary and spiritual point of view in the Canadian confessional landscape? In Orthodoxy, prayer and liturgical act are significantly intertwined, so that a total separation of them, as it happened in the churches of the Western Reform, can never happen. The full teaching of the Primary Church, as defined by the seven ecumenical councils, is immediate and vital in the Liturgy, but also in the hymns of worship that form the basic ideas of Orthodoxy and the prayers of the liturgy. Thus, there is no divorce between liturgy and theology, ministry and dogma. The conviction of the Orthodox Church that it is one, holy, catholic and apostolic is not based on a notion of justice, but on its consciousness that it represents the Mysterious Body of Christ. In the Orthodox Church, the kingdom of

¹¹ „We stand on guard for thee, I'm sorry!", <http://www.torontosun.com/2015/06/30/we-stand-on-guard-for-thee-im-sorry>, accessed on: 02-06-2017.

heaven, the earthly church, and the triumph of those who are asleep are inextricably linked to each other. By participating in the Divine Liturgy, the earthly church fighting for salvation is reminded that it belongs to the Church above the world. In the Liturgy, Christians in the world share the presence of angels, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, saints and all those who have been redeemed, and in the Mystery of the Eucharist share the presence of Jesus Christ.¹² The inter-confessional dialogue, the need to update the missionary language, missionary solutions, and the future of Orthodox missions are addressed in chapter VI as well.

The contribution of the author is to illustrate the existence of a missionary work and Orthodox witnessing in the Canadian landscape and to familiarize the readers with the specificity and history of this church, which is an integral part of Canada's multi-confessional and multi-ethnic mosaic. The results of the thesis refute the insinuation that the Orthodox Church is not a missionary one. However, many of the contemporary challenges faced by Eastern Christians in Canada are similar to those encountered by Catholics and Protestants. Orthodox hierarchs, priests and laities have witness and continue to witness for Christ in Canada, a country blessed by God with vast territories, diverse and wonderful people who live in peace and harmony.

This research paper brings to forefront the Canadian Orthodox missionary framework, highlighting the presence and activity of the Orthodox Church in Canada with its peculiarities. It can be a starting point for future studies to deepen the specifics, and issues of the Orthodox mission in Canada. The continuation of the dialogue among the ethnic Orthodox Churches in Canada in order to harmonize them on the mission field and to provide Canadian society with a unified and effective Orthodox witnessing, remains a stringent objective. This study shows that the mission of the Orthodox Church in the secularized contemporary society of Canada is necessary in a realistic manner, taking into account the concrete realities. The pluralism of the Canadian society means that the religious, ethnic and racial identity elements are intertwined in all areas of life. The Orthodox missionary must be well acquainted with Canadian history and culture, being prepared to open bridges in an evangelical, courageous, and culturally unbiased way. In this sense, the thesis brings edifying clarifications. Ultimately, this study opens an understanding of the challenges the Orthodox

¹² Ernst Benz, *The Eastern Orthodox Church*, Aldine Publishing Company Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 1963, pp. 207 - 208.

missionary must be prepared to face while preaching the Gospel of Christ in the contemporary Canadian society.

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