

**„BABEȘ-BOLYAI” CLUJ-NAPOCA UNIVERSITY**

**Orthodox Theology Faculty**

**Ph.d School „Isidor Todoran”**

**The Kenotic and Pnevumatic Character of Christian Mission**

**Ph. d. Thesis**

Abstract

Ph.d. coordinator :

**Priest Prof. Valer Bel**

Ph.d. Candidate **Lucian Nicodim Codreanu**

## **Abstract**

### **The Kenotic and Pnevumatic Character of Christian Mission**

**PhD. advisor: Pr. prof. univ. dr. Valer Bel**

**Drd. Lucian Nicodim Codreanu**

The aim of this paper is to provide a theological argumentation and profile of the kenotic and spiritual character of Christian mission as a way, a model, or a missionary paradigm, and, at the same time, to make a case for the necessity of such a mission. The paper covers three main research areas: a biblical one, a dogmatic-missiological one, and a historical one, each of these areas corresponding to a chapter. Certain references are made towards adjacent fields or domains, such as an excursus on philosophical issues in the theological chapter. The structure of our paper was conceived so as to cover the kenotic and spiritual character within the given field of reference and to immediately extract the kenotic-spiritual meaning of missionary practice and of missiology in general.

As we note in the paper, the kenotic and spiritual model is present in a typological form even since the Old Testament. As a theological being created in God's image, man can intercommunicate with God and he can also enter into communion with the Holy Spirit as a spirit-bearing being. The models of kenotic and pneumatic mission are the prophets. The Holy Spirit inspires them and talks to the people through them. In their writings, we can find themes and motifs that are profoundly kenotic and pneumatical, which have been continued and put to good use from a missionary perspective by the Holy Apostles or by Christ Himself, such as the theme of the pouring of the Spirit from the book of Joel (Chapter 3) or the theme of Jonah's mission (Chapter 2). We can also find deeply poetic fragments in which the processes of self-renunciation and of receiving the grace of God are clearly illustrated, such as the time Jonah spent in the belly of the whale (Chapter 2) or the example in Jeremiah 4; 20, 9. Moreover, messianic prophecies depict the image of a humble and kenotic Messiah through multiple motifs and metaphors, as described in Isaiah 42, 1-4; 53.

The narration and theology of the New Testament present clearly and without a doubt the

inaugurated. The spiritual character of mission is fully revealed during the Pentecost, the foundation of the Church and a model that is paradigmatic in many ways for the spiritual character of mission. The Spirit is constantly involved in the apostles' mission, whereas the apostles, as vessels of the Spirit, perform the mission under the continuous guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the mission of the Apostolic Church, synodality or the charismata are aspects of the spiritual character of mission that articulate the Body of Christ. Each analyzed moment becomes exemplary and can be used to infer immediate reasons and meanings for the kenotic and pnevmatological character of Christian mission.

The theological reasons analyzed in the second chapter reveal new aspects and reasons in the motivation of the kenotic and spiritual character of mission. God Himself is humble in His essence and each hypostasis fully gives itself to the others in the dynamic of the perfect Trinitarian love. God shows kenotic love at the creation of the world. He inaugurates kenosis and keeps it in relationship with the through a certain type of distance and difference that are inherent to theonomous autonomy. Kenosis is also revealed explicitly in the providence of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in the world. Christ overturns the natural balance of power and places a new foundation of the world through kenosis. He not only identifies Himself with the least of us, (Matthew 23, 12), but places Himself lower than any other man through kenotic love (Timothy 2, 4-6). The Holy Spirit communicates the humility and the virtues of Christ; without this communion in grace, kenotic and pnevmatological mission would remain at the level of a human endeavor, carrying all the burdens of the fallen human nature with it.

Kenotic and spiritual mission is permanently articulated on kenotic spirituality. In fact, the duo of humility and grace lies at the core of the Church's spirituality. Through humility and grace, the knowledge of God is articulated in the Church, obviously with the support of the Sacraments of the Church. The effort to obtain humility and grace becomes a premise of kenosis and grace in mission. However, through knowledge in humility and grace, one passes on to the aspect of missionary representation, a representation of the ethos of the Church and of God in particular, with extraordinary consequences for Christian mission. Through a level-based understanding of spiritual life, mission is connected to the tradition of the Church. It is also transmitted by those who are experienced in the dynamic of grace, who find themselves on the second level of knowledge, as the Tradition of the Church confesses through voices such as the one of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite.

The aspect of preaching the Word from a position of humility and experience of grace brings new light to the perspective of mission's kenotic and spiritual character.

Through the renewal of kenotic thinking, through the emergence of spiritual phenomena, through the post-modern gnosiological shift towards the spiritual, the contemporary philosophical context reclaims and encourages a spiritual mission, a mission that offers man support and a genuine spiritual experience, resulting from the rich tradition of this experience, which is the tradition of the Philokalia. Through the same tradition, missiology can bring the unique perspective of the experience of the Spirit and of the school of grace (from the ascetic university) to the ecumenical dialogue with various other pnevmatological perspectives that lack the complexity and the authenticity of the Tradition, where the understanding of how the Spirit works can be unilateral and ultra-simplifying.

The third chapter analyzes the mission associated to the Spanish conquest from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which is a case of Christian counter-mission because it lacks a kenotic and pnevmatological component. Historical analysis is a complex and laborious phenomenon that may involve traps, especially when the interpretation of the facts affects present entities. At the same time, there are always mitigating circumstances and contexts. Therefore, it is our duty to discern between the different aspects of the reality of an act and to identify spiritual pathologies in order to prevent them in the future. As we have noted, mission cannot be associated to conquest, spiritual or cultural colonialization, and cannot be imposed or seen as a bargaining chip for material advantages. It also cannot be used as a law to incriminate or punish, nor can it be performed in disagreement with the initial message of love; it cannot be discretionary in interpreting certain parts to the detriment of the whole and has a duty to embody the spirit of the Gospel and to serve in the image of Christ. In essence, the mission that does not embody the kenotic and spiritual character does a disservice to mission, to the Church, and to Christ and is eventually discredited and disapproved.

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