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The pastoral service of hearing and speech-impaired believers

Within the mission of the Church

DOCTORAL THESIS

SUMMARY

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Summary

The importance of the work, through the subject it addresses and the novelty it brings, is that it generally highlights the establishment and organization of an Orthodox parish for people with disabilities of hearing and speech, the development of the sign language and in particular, the importance of introducing this language in the ministry of the Holy Services of the Romanian Orthodox Church. It is of vital importance for these people with disabilities to establish parishes, to serve in their specific language, to prepare young theologians in order to preserve these Orthodox communities.

The exemplification by the study made at the parish of the hearing and speech impairments "The saint hierarchs and Confessors Iorest and Sava, the Metropolitans of Transylvania and Iosif the Bishop of Maramures" wishes to be regarded as a contribution to the development of this special service, which in our country is still in the beginning, in a process of development of unitary religious signs.

The reasons why we have developed this topic are multiple. First of all, the service within the communities of people who are impaired of hearing and speech is a service that is not described in Romanian literature, the paper tries to set the main directions of organizing these Orthodox communities, to show the important mission of the priests within these parishes.

The approach of the priests' mission at the level of the communities of believers with hearing and speech impairments, the appearance and development of these parishes, the adoption of sign language in the ministry, is in full development in Romania, context in which the work gives a reflection on this topic.

This work is one of the means by which this pastor care is complete. The presentation of the development stages of the parish of the hearing and speech impaired „ The Saint hierarchs and Confessors Iorest and Sava, the Metropolitans of Transylvania and Iosif the Bishop of Maramures" in Cluj-Napoca, the organized activities and solutions addressed to the challenges faced over the years, I believe it is useful for the development of this special ministry. All the theoretical and practical research carried out since the establishment of the parish to date is important information that will help the new Orthodox communities of the deaf and, by extension, the shepherds of these communities. The understanding of the communion which is formed within these parishes, of the reasoning specific to the persons with disabilities, and of the

special way of responding to Christ's call after a long period in which these persons were merely spectators of the Holy Service, are important pieces of information for the social-missionary theology.

The research work **The pastoral service of hearing and speech-impaired believers within the mission of the Church** is structured in three chapters, with related subchapters.

The first chapter of the work, entitled the **Philanthropy and the social service of the Church**, through the three subchapters: *I.1. The philanthropy of the Holy Trinity, of our Savior Jesus Christ, of the apostles and Christians*, *I.2. Man, social being* and *I.3. Philanthropy – Christian duty*, is the beginning of my debate.

The existence and action of the Holy Trinity is an eternal and complete communion of love, with the divine revelation showing this communion.

“God is love” (1 John 4,8) and the creation of the world confesses that the love of the Holy Trinity that is flowing over is given to men created by the image of the Trinity Persons.

His love for men made Him come into the world, show men the new teaching of the High Kingdom, help the sufferers, and redeem the human nation through His life. He “revealed himself humble, but not giving up the divine attributes,”¹ and gave an example of serving the fellow man, humility and welcoming of all (John 13,2-20), bringing to the disciples the aid of the poor with the money raised for their needs (John 13,29; 12,5; Mark 14,5).

By creation, man is brought to existence as a being “in the image of God” (Genesis 1,23), called upon to resemble Him.

At the time of creation, deeply embedded in his being, man received one of the aspects of God's image, the ability to love, “the fullest expression of God's face and the maintenance of that face”². Love is the feature that underpins mutual assistance, so the first men received the communion in love, according to the model of love and communion between the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

The Church must see the moral, social, cultural and material state of the nation in which it operates and, on the basis of its biblical and patristic experience, of the data or observations made in this direction by the civil society or State institutions, assess how close or far that society is to God and to moral values – religious or human, and to act with pastoral tact and

¹ Sf. Ioan DAMASCHIN, *Dogmatic, III*,1, Scripta Publishing House, Bucharest,1993, p. 144.

² .Pr. Ioan G. COMAN, *The beauties of love of people and patristic spirituality*, Timisoara, 1988, p. 385.

responsibility for their revival or development, in the soteriological perspective. This action represents the missionary function of the social Theology, its being and its purpose. The Orthodox Church has acted throughout history (*Acts of the Apostles*, Chapters 2 and 6) in this direction since it was established and has continued more or less so far.

"Social Theology sums up all the spheres of life in their complexity. As they try to restore the unity between them or to link bridges between them and to reduce the distances between the profane and the sacred, between social and ecclesial, with eschatological and soteriological missionaries, it is also theological and social".³

Consequently, philanthropy is inherent to human nature, it is a primary reality, both in the form of interdependence and in the form of inter-participation. Christianity also takes into account the natural foundations of human philanthropy, but goes beyond them, adding to them new foundations which make universal, effective and full solidarity possible. These bases are: The common origin of all men, the divine paternity which extends upon all, the fraternity of men by the same Creator and Redeemer, the common purpose, the calling of all to salvation.

Above all, Christianity, preaching love of God and of fellow humans, as the commandment and foundation of Christian life, proposes the strongest bond of human solidarity. By Christian love, from which no man or even enemy is excluded, philanthropy extends to all and penetrates deep into the human being. It expresses itself in a loving service to all.

It can be said that, from a Christian point of view, our dependence on God, our state of Creature gives us a kind of solidarity first with God, based on God's face in us and its resemblance to Him.

This solidarity is strengthened and perfected in the act of redemption, when it takes the name of filiation to God and fraternity to men. The perfect model of solidarity is in the Holy Trinity among the Persons of the Holy Trinity, in the bosom of Godhood.

The Orthodox Church teaches that we cannot save ourselves, but only together with others, in the Church, with the help of others and helping others. There is, therefore, solidarity among the members of the Christian Church. The Church being conceived as the secret body of

³ Mihai VALICA, Pavel CHIRILA, *Social Theology*, Christian Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, p. 38.

Christ, to which the believers belong as members, organically connected to each other, the fate of one affects all.⁴

There is a division of functions and a hierarchy, but it does not weaken, but strengthens the solidarity of the whole. The Church is therefore considered as a living organism, as a single body, composed of the members (1 Corinth 12, 12) which are solidary with each other as the members in the body (1 Corinthians 18-19).

The most direct urge to philanthropy is expressed by St. Apostle Paul when he says: “perform your duties to each other, and thus fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians, 6 , 2).

Caring for the poor or the issue of social assistance, as we would say today, has played an important role in Christian life of all times. It is, by the feeling of mercy, the strongest expression of Christian love, which brings people closer to each other and ties them together.

This topic will be developed within the second chapter of my work, **Philanthropy – Christian duty**, with subchapters: *II.1. Value and timeliness of social work*, *II.2. Saint Basil the Great - promoter of the social activity of the first centuries*.

Christian philanthropy is “a concrete expression of love of God and of neighbor: Faith and service must be seen and practiced as a whole, not separately. In this respect, philanthropy is part of the mission and service of the Church”.⁵

Philanthropy is service by excellence. It brings us closer to the Savior Christ and to the Holy Trinity, but at the same time it brings us closer to our fellow humans. The saint parents described this very plastic and suggestive reality: Depicting God under the face of a circle, and men as lines which tend and converge toward the center of that circle. As people approach God, they also approach each other; distances between them are reduced and disappear.

More than all the religions and philosophical concepts of the old world, Christianity has raised man to a higher stage of life. He showed the world virtues and moral lessons, which have not been matched, nor even conceived outside of it. And all of this, in the name of love, which is the beginning and the end of Christian life.

⁴ *Dogmatic and symbolic theology, textbook for theological faculties*, Vol. II, 3rd edition, Renaissance Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2010.

⁵ Pr. Valer BEL, *Mission, parish, pastoration- details for a missionary strategy*, Renaissance Publishing, Cluj, 2002, p. 120-121.

The 4th age was rightly called the “Golden age” of Christianity. Out of the persecutions of the Roman Caesars, Christianity will have a time of theological flourishing, illustrated at this time by a number of personalities who have contributed to solving the many problems that were facing the Church and which asked for an immediate resolution. Among these personalities there is Saint Basil the Great.

The complex personality of Saint Basil the Great has been highlighted in the great unrest of the time, which he reflected in his works with all their problems, giving them resolution in the spirit of authentic Christianity. The deep unrest caused by religious, moral, economic and social problems caused the realistic attitudes of Saint Basil the Great.

The dominant feature of Saint Basil’s character is a harmonious plenitude of gifts among the most diverse. He brought together the genius of Rome and the one of Greece to a special degree, for which he was called "Latin among Greeks".⁶

With a profound philosophical culture and a deep knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, Saint Basil is a man of doctrine: His neat, precise thinking runs an entire generation; but he is also an action man, with a firmness of character, who knows what he wants. He is faithful, but also a philosopher when he must fight an error; a speaker who remains in contact with men, knowing how to speak to and lead them, being considered one of the great orators of our Church. Saint Basil, trained in the issue of theological unrest during the golden period of the patristic period, offers one of the most authentic answers in solving the issues so discussed. He does not remain at the theoretical contemplation of an abstract God, but at the basis of his ethic-social conception lies the faith in a concrete God, embodied in Jesus Christ, who works through the Holy Spirit in all the plenitude of the divine upon creation and especially upon man.

Philanthropy (Christian charity) is the most eloquent and concrete expression of love of God and of neighbor.

The solidarity between Christians increases by intensifying their spiritual life, their spiritual perfection and building, by participating in the liturgical life of the Church, and especially by taking the Holy Communion. A parish, that is a Church, in which the believers feel the differences between them rather than what they share and unites them, will never succeed in doing a special mission. “The Church must exercise its critical function, specific to the Gospel,

⁶ DANIEL, patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the three spiritual ties inherited from Saint Basil the Great, the semiannual Easter-missionary conferences held yesterday at the Patriarchy Palace, 2009 - the anniversary-homage year of Saint Vasile the Great, the Archbishop of the Caadocese Cathedral and the other holy Capadoccians.

in order to unmask, combat and defeat the injustice that underpins poverty, and also to help the rich to balance their existence and free themselves from the selfish and passionate start of the love of money. The Church must promote solidarity and fraternity between its adults and among all men”.⁷

It is obvious that, in order to fulfill its social mission, the Church must spiritually motivate its believers. Through the liturgical and ecclesiological orientation of the parishes, through the realization of the communion in the glory and service of God, it will amplify and develop the feeling of solidarity and brotherhood among the believers, and among all members of the Church, and the Church will be able to fulfill with ease and success its mission of supporting those lacking the support of society.

In the third chapter of the paper, the pastoral service of believers with hearing and speech impairment, with subchapters: III.1. ‘deficient’ and ‘efficient’, III.2. Hearing and speech impairment culture, III.3. religious sign language, III.4. The Orthodox parish of the Hearing and Speech impaired ‘the Saint Hierarchs and Confessors Iorest and Sava, the Metropolitans of Transylvania and Iosif, the Bishop of Maramures’, it is presented the necessity and especially the desire of the deficient persons to reach the word of God.

The appearance, systematization and use of a religious sign language was one of the great challenges successfully resolved by the Church and the specialized clergy to shepherd these communities with special requirements. In his care of all its Christians, the Church was concerned to offer servants suitable to the condition of the parish, to understand the word of the Gospel.

The service for the believers with hearing and speech deficiencies, in specific, sign language, has its beginnings in the Archdiocese of Arges and Muscel through the father of the university lecturer Dr. Constantin Onu, in 1999.⁸

If in the first two chapters the relationship between the activity of the Savior Jesus Christ and the social mission of the Church is emphasized, showing that social theology continues in the Church, and it is the model of the Church's missionary activity in its mission of leading its members toward their final and ultimate purpose, godliness, This last chapter is the place where there is a display of the way in which parishes for hearing and speech impaired from Romania

⁷ Pr Valer BEL, *Church Mission to the Contemporary World*, Cluj University press Publishing, Cluj, 2002, p. 119.

⁸ Pr. Constantin ONU, *Mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church to hearing and vision impairments*, 2007, p. 154.

were born, the necessity of the appearance of a way of communicating the word of the Gospel to these persons, the drawing up and systematization of a pattern of religious signs.⁹All these are exemplified in the analysis of the Orthodox parish of the hearing and speech deficient "the Saint hierarchs and Confessors Iorest and Sava, the Metropolitan of Transylvania and Iosif, the Bishop of Maramures".

The approach of the work includes the period of two years of voluntary service that preceded the setting up of the community, the identification, notification of the Orthodox believers of the founding of a parish for hearing and speech deficient in Cluj-Napoca, their catechesis and the systematization of a religious sign language. At the end of the work, the social-missionary activity is presented in the parish since its creation.

The approach of the priests' mission at the level of the communities of believers with hearing and speech impairment, the appearance and development of these parishes, the adoption of the sign language in the ministry, is in full development in Romania, a context in which the work "The pastoral service of believers with hearing and speech impairments within the mission of the Church" provides a reflection on a subject not addressed. As I described in my introduction, the paper tries to base the main directions of organizing these Orthodox communities, to show the important mission of the priests within these parishes.

"The missionary character of the parish has its roots in its own nature. Although, from an administrative and institutional point of view, it is part of the Church, from the sacramental and spiritual point of view, it possesses the plenitude of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; the parish is truly the presence and epiphany of the entire church, of the fullness of faith and of the wholeness of grace. Like the Church as a whole, the Parish is called upon to preach and teach the Gospel of Christ's salvation in the world, and to be the witness of Christ under the specific conditions of God's ordained. In this respect, the whole life of the Parish is a mission, for it exists not only for the religious building of the believers, but, above all, for the salvation of the entire world under the power of the prince of its age."¹⁰

The deficiency places the man in an unusual state, in which relations with the close are hampered by his isolation. "Physical diseases such as: Fever (*Leviticus 26,26; Deuteronomy*

⁹ PR. Constantin ONU, *Mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church to hearing and vision impairments*, 2007, p. 154.

¹⁰ *Go Forth in Peace, Orthodox perspective on Mission*, apud, Cristian Sonea, *Apostolate and responsibility, a theological view on the secularist mission*, Cluj University press, 2015, p. 189.

28,22; *John* 4,52; *Matthew* 8,14; *Mark* 1,30, *Luke* 4,38), tumors (*Deuteronomy* 27,18; *2 Kings* 20,17; *Isaiah* 38,21), plague (*Egress* 9,3; *2 Kings* 24,13), deafness (*Leviticus* 19,14; *Mark* 7,32; 9,25) were most often considered as divine punishments for man's sins."¹¹ The man must be strong in the face of pain and the phenomenon of solitude in order to overcome these attempts. "from the Christian perspective all sufferings can be accepted with the thought of God and with faith in Christ who accepted to suffer for the sins of all. *Isaiah* 53)."¹²

Communication with God, as well as communication with fellow humans, is of paramount importance in accepting the difficulties and the deficiency. For the communion and relationship with others are related to the reality of the person, "the image of God passes into the human being."¹³ The sign language is the language of communities of people who are deaf to hearing and speech. This language has a national legislative character, it has the status of a mother tongue for people with disabilities of hearing and speech, and is used in social interaction. Historically, this method of communication, such as the very integration of people with this disability, has gone from rejection to acceptance and promotion.

"The missionary vocation of the Church, the missionary call of the Church comes from the conscience that all men should be saved, and that it is the only guarantor of the salvation message left to the world by Christ. The Church is not only the depositing of faith, but also responsible for the salvation of men."¹⁴

Access to the religious services of the Orthodox Church for hearing and speech impaired was one of the constant concerns of the clergy. As a result of this spiritual need, Orthodox religious communities have started to be established in the world for them.

The Orthodox members of the communities of hearing and speech deficient in Romania were attending Christian jobs, but they were mere spectators, for them the Lord's message preached in words was incomprehensible because of their deficiency. For the Romanian Orthodox Church, allowing this category of believers, who in our country has a large number of

¹¹ DANIEL, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Patuleanu Constantin (coord.), *Social philanthropic and medical assistance organized by the Romanian Orthodox Church in the past and today*, the Basics Publishing House of the Romanian Patriarchy, Bucharest, 2012 - an Article published by the pr. Prof. Dr. Petre Semen, p. 43.

¹² Ibidem, p. 45

¹³ HRISTODOULOS, Archbishop L Athens and Primat of Greece, *the Social Mission of the Church*, translated from Greek by Archim. Mihail Filimon,

¹⁴ PR. Mihai HIMCINSCHI, Young people and the mission of the Church today, in *Theology at the University, 25 years of tradition ownership, theological training and scientific research*, Arad, 30 oct.2 nov. 2016, pr coordinator. Prof. Prof. Univ Dr. Cristinel Ioja, pr. Univ Lect Dr. Filip Albu, archid. Help DRD Univ Tiberiu Ardelean, Astra Museum Publishing, Arad, 2016, p.257

people, to understand religious services, the message of the Catechesis, etc., was one of its concerns.

Since 1999, the Romanian Orthodox Church has implemented the use of sign language in the official religious services and has accredited a theological specialization at the Faculty of Theology “Saint martyr Philothea” in Pitesti, which allows young theologians to become priests of communities of persons who are deaf of hearing and speech in Romania. This is the beginning of the catechism of deaf persons, because the sign language allows them to fully understand the word of God, and they are now fully integrated into the Christian Orthodox Community. By means of the signs, the priest can send exactly the liturgical message, and the believers understand it with a sign.

The Christian-Orthodox Community in Cluj-Napoca was established on 1st of July 2003, from the high trust of His Excellency Archbishop Bartholomew and includes all the Orthodox faith members of the communities of hearing and speech flawed from Cluj-Napoca. So far, there are several localities in which Orthodox parishes have been established for hearing deficiencies: Pitesti, Oradea, Bucharest, Timisoara, Iasi, Focsani, Teleorman, Bacau, Bistrita, Alba Iulia, Ramnicu-Valcea, Sighisoara, etc.

For people with hearing and speech impairments, the word must be turned into a sign to understand. The language used by the deficient hearing and speech believers for the transmission of messages is the sign language. The integration of hearing impaired persons into the Orthodox Church called for the drafting of a vocabulary of religious signs through which the believers could understand the Holy Mysteries.

The parishes, newly established from the administrative point of view, function like the normal parishes, the only difference being the organization of the service space, so that the believers can see the signs throughout the course of the conduct of the Holy Services.

The acceptance of the sign language as the mother tongue of persons who are deaf to hearing and speech, its acceptance in the Commission of religious services, and especially the theological preparation of the priests of these communities in the service of sign language allowed the faithful deaf to access the word of God, access to the Holy Mysteries. Deficient believers who until recently only witnessed religious services, by implementing the religious sign language and setting up special religious communities, now have the capacity to participate actively in them.

The Parish of the hearing and speech deficiency “The Saint hierarchs and Confessors Iorest and Sava, the Metropolitans of Transylvania and Iosif, the Bishop of Maramures” is the place where the Orthodox believers of Cluj-Napoca receive the word of God, transmitted from the altar by sign language. It is an 18- year- old community, like many other similar communities in the country. Believers are persons born with this deficiency or acquired as a result of illness. The Holy service is delivered both in sign language and by speech.

The main purpose of using this language is the full understanding of the word by the believers, because “the fundamental aim of the divine word is to build the human person in the fulfillment of the good, truth and justice.”¹⁵ “In the Church, the word feeds by prayer, by reading and obedience to the Holy Scriptures, and is strengthened by the Holy Mysteries, by divine grace. In the church man learns to hear words about the word”¹⁶, and the sign language allows the hearing impaired believers to understand this word, to get spiritualized, and to follow the path of salvation together through the Holy Mysteries.¹⁷

The hearing-impaired believers must carry their cross, accept it. Our Lord Jesus Christ wished that all men, regardless of their condition, should reach the word of God. “By calling the crowds, Jesus shows that in order to follow Him, they must meet the same conditions for all believers, not just for the disciples, [...]. It was the Lord’s intention that all who will follow him should not be merely detached observers of His work, but people who grow up in faith and understanding through participation in His mission and passions.”¹⁸

This is the mission of all the priests serving in the communities of persons who are deaf of hearing and speech, to bring believers to understanding the word of God, by adopting a specific language and a method of organization of their own.

Orthodox parishes for the deaf of hearing and speech were established to serve these believers, the priest being the bond between them and God, the sign language being the method of understanding the messages of the Holy Mysteries. An important step taken by the Romanian Orthodox Church, an important step toward the salvation of these believers.

¹⁵ Pr. Miron ERDEI, *The word in ethics and ethics at ethnicities*, an Article published in the *ethos and Etnos* paper, theological and social aspects of Christian testimony, ACTA International Conference “Ethics – ethnicity – confession”, Cluj-Napoca, December 3-6, 2007, YLOAIE Stefan Coordinator, Cluj University press, p. 221.

¹⁶ . Ibidem, p. 224.

¹⁷ Constantin ONU, *Sign symbolism*, Biblical Institute and Orthodox Mission Publishing, Bucharest, 2009, p. 76.

¹⁸ Cristian SONEA, *Apostolate and responsibility, a theological view on the mission of the secularist*, Cluj University press Publishing House, 2015, p. 62

The bibliographical references, used in the elaboration of this work, helped me to look into a topic specific to the way I serve in close relationship with the topics dealt with in the national and international theological literature.