



UNIVERSITATEA BABEŞ-BOLYAI  
TRADIȚIE ȘI EXCELENȚĂ

DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY „ISIDOR TODORAN”  
Faculty of Orthodox Theology Cluj-Napoca

THESIS  
Summary

# THE MISSIONARY DIMENSION OF MONASTICISM IN THE CHURCH

*Paradigmatic landmarks of primary monasticism reflected in the mission of  
the Orthodox monasticism in the XX-XXI centuries*

Scientific coordinator,  
Rev. PhD Prof. Valer BEL

PhD student,  
Protos. CRUCIANU Ioan Serafim

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## SUMMARY

*The missionary dimension of monasticism in the Church – Paradigmatic landmarks of primary monasticism reflected in the mission of the Orthodox monasticism in the XX-XXI centuries, the research topic of the present paper, was approached from four perspectives during the research: biblical premises for the monastic life, the ecclesial dimension of monasticism, the particularities of monastic life as a sign of the Kingdom and the testimony of monasticism’s mission.*

*The choice of the research theme was inspired by the desire for in-depth knowledge of what the missionary work of monasticism in the Church means.*

*The need for research approach is justified first of all by my serving as a monk in a Monastery, and secondly by the fact that the research topic is of interest for both the monks and the other members of the Church (the community of the church).*

*The actuality of the research topic is justified by the fact that throughout the history of the Church, the theme has raised and raises many controversies and has known and knows different applications, depending on the circumstances.*

*The opportunity to approach this research theme is supported by the rapid and profound change of society and the need for continuous adaptation of monastic mission methods.*

*The aim of the research is the in-depth knowledge of the missionary dimension of monasticism in the Church and the identification of ways to adapt and implement the mission in contemporary society. To achieve the proposed goal, eight main objectives were defined, as follows:*

*Objective 1 – to identify the identity of monasticism in the Old Testament*

*Objective 2 – to identify the ideal and identity of monasticism in the New Testament*

*Objective 3 – to identify the missionary dimension from the ecclesial character of monasticism*

*Objective 4 – to describe the characteristics and the vocation of the monastic life (the ideal of the monk, withdrawal from the world, wilderness, hermit life and cenobitic life)*

*Objective 5 – to discover and display the missionary aspect in monastic vows*

*Objective 6 – to research the missionary aspect in monastic asceticism*

*Objective 7 – to identify and analyze the forms of monastic mission up to the 10th century*

*Objective 8 – to present ways to adapt and implement the monasticism’s mission of in contemporary society.*

*The documentation of the theme* was based both on the identification and the study of some reference works on the monastic mission, as well as on the personal experience accumulated during the thirty years of monastic life – experience acquired in the Romanian Monasteries and in two Italian Monasteries: Dumentza Monastery (Benedictine) and in the Bose Monastery (ecumenical).

*The research approach* began by identifying the main authors with reference works, which deal with relevant and current topics regarding the role of monasticism in the mission of the Church. *The research methodology* included various research methods, chosen according to the research objective, as follows: the analytical method, through bibliographic study, case study and survey; the monographic method, through direct observation; and synthesis, for introduction and conclusions. The bibliographic study was based on sources, books, monographies, speciality studies, encyclopedias, dictionaries, journal articles and electronic sources. To evaluate the impact of the event held during the doctoral research, the survey was used as a method, and the questionnaire as an instrument.

*The structure of the work* includes introduction, four chapters, conclusions, bibliography and appendices. The four chapters present the research themes aimed to bring a contribution to the existing level of research and also the opening of new perspectives, for understanding and implementing the mission of monasticism in the contemporary context.

*Chapter 1 – Old and New Testament premises for the monastic life* stands out through a series of preliminary information, which present the results of the research undertaken to study the meaning and etymology of the term monk, the analysis of the theme in the context of *The Holy Scripture* and the foundation of the monastic life on the evangelical advice.

Regarding *the Old Testament premises*, during the five sections of the first subchapter, the work first analyzes the premise that the Nazirite's vote could foreshadow Christian monasticism and investigates the possible connection between Christian monasticism and Essenianism. Next, monastic archetypes from the *Old Testament* are presented and the possibility of continuity of Jewish asceticism in Christian monasticism is analyzed.

In the second subchapter of the first chapter, the work allocates four sections for the presentation of the *New Testament premises and grounds for the monastic life*. In the first part, the primordial paradisiacal state of man and the mission entrusted to him by God are explained. In the second section, it is argued that man has freely weakened the grace communion with God, by falling into sin, and the consequences of the alteration of the human spiritual nature are presented.

Next, the third part emphasizes the fact that the likeness to God involves human reason, feeling and freedom. The practice of virtues and the free and conscious collaboration with the help of divine grace is the way through which man can reach the full state of holiness. The purpose of the last section of the subchapter is to explore the mission that the Creator entrusted to man, to glorify God and tend to become more and more like Him.

The first chapter of the work ends with the third subchapter, *The monastic life based on the evangelical advice*, structured in two sections. In the first section, both the evangelical commandments, mandatory for salvation and to remain in God's love, and the evangelical advice, specific to monastic life, are analyzed. The second section focuses both on the path of the commandments, followed by most members of the Church, and on the path of the monastic life, which is based on the three evangelical advices.

*Chapter 2 – Identifying the missionary dimension from the ecclesial character of monasticism.*

This chapter analyzes both the apostolic community in Jerusalem as a possible model of the monastic community from which the ecclesial character could also result, as well as monasticism as a possible integral part of the Church. The chapter is structured in two subchapters, it presents a research on monasticism from an ecclesial point of view and analyzes different approaches to monasticism throughout history, approaching the research theme from an ecclesiological point of view, where the missionary dimension of monasticism can be derived from.

The first subchapter includes five sections and aims to research the ecclesial character of monasticism through the lens of the apostolic community model. To begin with, a possible connection between Christian monasticism and Jewish asceticism is analyzed. Next, it is investigated whether the founders of the monastic life had as a source of inspiration the life of the apostolic communities and testimonies of the Holy Fathers are presented. The last two sections of the first subchapter have as their central theme the communion of soul and share of goods, practiced in the monastic community according to the model of the apostolic community, presenting the monks as practitioners of communion.

The second subchapter is structured in five parts that debate on the ecclesial character of monasticism in the decisions of ecumenical synods, in liturgical and ecclesial living, as well as its contribution to the life of the Church.

*Chapter 3 – Missionary aspects in the specific of monastic life* brings an element of novelty right from the title, presenting monastic life as a sign of the Kingdom of God. The chapter is structured in four subchapters and has as its central theme the identity, the ideals, the vocation

and the specifics of monastic life. The characteristic features of monasticism, vows and monastic asceticism are presented and it is argued that through its very life and through what is specific only to living the monastic life, the monk proves that the Gospel is authentic.

The first subchapter structured in four sections identifies and presents in detail the *characteristics of monasticism*. To begin with, the defining feature of monastic life is highlighted, the desire to live a life in intense communion with God. In the second part it is shown that the monk does not retire to the monastery because he hates the world, but in order to devote himself totally to a spiritual life and to strive with much more love for his own salvation and for the salvation of fellow men. In the third section of the subchapter, the retreat into wilderness and the wilderness as an arena of monastic asceticism are presented. In the last part of the subchapter, the transition from the eremitic to the cenobitic life is analyzed.

Regarding the *vocation of the monastic community*, the second subchapter presents the two dimensions of monasticism, the inner and outer dimensions. The research section focuses on understanding the inner dimension of the vocation of the monastic community, identifying its characteristics, its way and place of realization and expression, its meaning and its beneficiaries. The inner dimension of the vocation of the monastic community is presented in the light of *The Holy Scripture*, the experience of the the Holy Fathers and from the perspective of modern and contemporary theologians. In the final part of the subchapter, the external dimension of monasticism is addressed, characterized by the testimony that monks offer to the world about fraternal love that defines the inner life of the monastic community, based on God's love for man. The third subchapter details *the monastic vows as a sign of the Kingdom*, presenting the way in which the members of the monastic community succeed in preparing or anticipating the Kingdom of God through obedience, chastity and poverty.

In the last subchapter of chapter three, the work allocates five sections to present *the monastic asceticism as a way to outrun the Kingdom of God*, bringing a new research element by approaching the subject of the monastic life in the above-mentioned way. In the first three parts of the subchapter other practices of the monastic life besides those presented in the previous subchapters are presented, such as: solitude, spiritual strive and dispassion. The next section addresses hesychia as a means of asceticism and shows that by removing worries and withdrawing from the hectic world to a quiet place such as the wilderness or the cell, monks are able to balance their senses and fight against the passions. The last part of the subchapter argues that the monks' withdrawal from the world can be seen as a form of living by focusing

on life after death and resurrection, and preparing for this eternal life, thus emphasizing the eschatological dimension of monastic life.

*Chapter 4 – The testimony and the mission of monasticism in the Church and in the world* is structured in two subchapters and is built around great figures of missionary monks who, through their way of life, offered the world a complete picture of the evangelical teaching and the Christian faith, through their devotion and sacrifice in Christ.

The first subchapter, *Paradigmatic landmarks of the mission of monasticism in the first millennium*, is structured in nine parts. In the opening part, the subchapter focuses on the concrete ways in which monasticism was constantly and decisively involved in the mission of the Church in its early period, through absolute commitment and dedication. The next section contains accounts of how the monks carried on their mission, both in monasteries and in the wilderness, in the period between 550 and 620. The third part analyzes *the monastic mission through Eucharistic communion* and shows the monks' exhortation to a closer communion with Christ in the Sacred Mysteries. The fourth section of the subchapter deals with *philanthropy found in monks' lives* since the early period of monasticism. In the continuation of the subchapter, the following two sections present *the social teaching of Saints Basil the Great and John Chrysostom*, supported by the fight against social injustice, the call for social equality and extensive programs of charitable actions, based on Christian principles. The next part explores *the missionary role of Saint Basil the Great*, highlighting the diligence with which the monk involved himself in solving the most important dogmatic issues that troubled the church community of persons in the historical context of that time. During this section, the contribution of Saint Basil the Great in knowing, understanding, explaining, protecting and promoting the true creed is analyzed, and then a brief presentation of the missionary dimension of Epistles 52 and 226 is made. The eighth part of the first subchapter presents *the mission of the Studite monks in Byzantine society*, highlighting their prophetic role.

The last section of the first subchapter includes *the mission of the monks Cyril and Methodius* in the Land of the Khazars, the Tauric Peninsula, Moravia, Pannonia, Vienna and Rome, as well as the impact of the mission of the disciples of these two missionary monks in Bulgaria.

The second subchapter, *Missionary aspects of monasticism in the XX-XXI centuries*, is structured in six sections and presents examples that support the perpetuation of the missionary tradition of monasticism in the contemporary world. In the first section, testimonies and missionary activities are identified in a representative area of Romanian Orthodox monasticism: Durău Monastery and the villages at the base of the Pion-Ceahlău mountain. The next part presents examples of

missionary activities in another important centre of monasticism and ecumenical dialogue, represented by Bose Monastery in Italy. In the following three sections, concrete methods of mission in the XX-XXI centuries and the missionary impact of some Athonite monks are presented: Father Sophrony Sakharov, in Europe, Father Cosmas the Athonite, in Africa, and Father Ephraim of Philotheou, in America. The last section, *Testimonies of the mission of monasticism today*, is structured in three parts and presents examples of programs and activities that show that monasticism assumes an active involvement in the life of the Church and society through service, charity and personal testimony, actions in which the author of the present research paper was involved in his quality of monk. In the first part of the last section, *Mission and testimony through spiritual meetings at the „Holy Trinity” Măgina Monastery*, an event that took place during the doctoral research is presented. The period of the researched event was between March 2015 and January 2016. The program of the event included a series of 11 spiritual meetings, carried out with the aim of an interdisciplinary approach (from a theological, psychological and managerial point of view) of relevant spiritual topics. The event had as a motto the following statement: *Come – see, hear, know, understand, be aware, get involved and be happy!* In order to assess the impact of these meetings and the desire to get to know the participants' opinions as well as possible, a survey based on a questionnaire was carried out seven years after the event took place (the first part of the year 2023). The objectives of the research aimed to identify some general information regarding the organization of the meetings, the impact of the spiritual meetings and the extent to which the participants consider it useful to resume the events through which various topics of interest for the current context are addressed interdisciplinary. The results of the research are presented in the second part of the last section and show that the spiritual meetings helped the respondents both in their spiritual life (to be aware of the importance of prayer and reading the Holy Scriptures, to be more aware of other important spiritual aspects or to convey the teachings of the Gospel through personal example) as well as regarding personal development (to be more aware of the need for balance in life, to find the answer or solution to various problems, to identify some directions of personal development and strengthening or to establish new personal and professional contacts).

In the third part of the last section, *Mission and testimony through contribution to sustainability*, some research approaches supported by the author's personal involvement are presented, as a mission activity to support sustainability, a concept that must also be supported by a spiritual approach in decision-making in organizations, considering their social impact.

*Conclusions.* The mission of monasticism in the contemporary world is a complex and diverse one, involving a series of actions and responsibilities. One of the most important aspects of the mission of monasticism is prayer, through which monks pray for the good of the Church, as members of it, and for the world in which they live. They also preserve and transmit the true faith inherited from the Holy Fathers, thus contributing to the theological life of the Church. The exemplary life lived by monks in monastic communities is a model for today's society, a pole of balance and a call to coexistence in unity and communion, and the monastic spirit is essential for maintaining spiritual life in the Church. The monks also defend the Church from heretical and secularizing tendencies and create a spirituality centered on the Holy Scriptures and serving of the neighbour.

Monks have an important role in the evangelization of the contemporary world. They provide an example of authentic Christian life and inspire people to follow the spiritual path. Through their example of life and their teachings, monks are spiritual leaders who guide and inspire those around them to draw closer to God.

The mission of monasticism is not limited to monasteries or monastic communities, but has a strong influence on society at large. Monasticism is a form of Christian confession in the world, by involving monks in social and humanitarian issues of society, promoting Christian values in the world and cooperation between different religions and inter-religious dialogue. Through their mission, monks contribute to the fulfilment of the Church's mission to transform the world into a better and more expanded place of justice, based on Christian values.

The monastic life is a special vocation, it is a sign, a paradigm, an anticipation and a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.



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