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SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

**Mission and unity in the writings of the Orthodox
Church, of the Roman Catholic Church,
of the World Council of Churches and
of the evangelical movements**

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Keywords

- **Mission**
- **Unity**
- **Ecumenism**
- **Orthodoxy**
- **Catholicism**
- **Evangelical Christians**

Thesis Summary

The 2010 celebration of one hundred years since the first missionary conference provided Orthodox theology the opportunity of making an analysis of the way in which Church mission evolved and was defined from an inter-confessional perspective. It was, in fact, the special appeal of the missionary conference held in Edinburgh (Scotland) in 2010, addressed to all the Churches and to all Christian denominations, calling on them to examine in great detail the mission and evangelisation they had pursued until then – so that the ensuing missionary conferences would include their observations and suggestions. The one question I have retained is this: Considering their specific theological foundations and the missionary practice they pursued in the past, could Churches and Christian denominations hope for a common missionary testimony in the future? And starting from that point, would this potential testimony constitute a first step forward on the path of reestablishing a full communion of faith?

Taking into consideration the active participation of the Romanian Orthodox Church in most inter-Christian conferences dedicated to church mission, valuable references, observations and suggestions made by Romanian theologians ought to have figured in a detailed study on mission and unity; after all, those Romanian theologians had either contributed to composing some of the documents referring to mission, or had written about the theme of church mission from an Orthodox or inter-confessional viewpoint, eventually publishing exceptional articles and books about it,

Consequently, entitled **Mission and Unity in the Writings of the Orthodox Church, of the Roman Catholic Church, of the World Council of Churches and of evangelical movements**, the present study

pursues the evolution of missionary thinking from the perspective of the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches and the evangelical movements in order to cover the entire spectrum of Christianity – keeping in mind the majority percentage of protestants in the World Council of Churches. The time period I have chosen is the 70's, as during that time all the interlocutors I have studied evinced a prominent concern for mission and unity. Moreover, these two topics will be frequently encountered on the agenda of most discussions within the Churches, forums and movements presented throughout the study.

Naturally, the first chapter (*Mission and unity seen from an Orthodox perspective*) focuses on the concern of the Orthodox Church over Christian mission and unity. Since extremely valuable missionary ideas have emerged from all inter-Orthodox conferences on mission, organized under the aegis of the World Council of Churches; they have been included in the subchapter entitled *Inter-Orthodox Consultations on the Mission of the Church*. We have also clearly delineated less or more recent concerns referring to the search of Christian unity, including them in the subchapter entitled *The Orthodox Church and the Search for Christian Unity*, as well as the then intense preparation for the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodoxy, which we have expanded on in the following subchapters: *Theological debates on the main themes of the Holy and Great Synod*, *Non-Orthodox theological commentaries on the themes of the Holy and Great Synod*, and *The contribution of the debates of the Holy and Great Synod to the development of themes pertaining to Church mission and to the search for Christian unity*.

From the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church, those years were marked by the well-known “aggiornamento” that did not only heavily

influence Catholic Church life, but also discovered new dimensions of the mission of the Church. We have presented that aspect in the chapter entitled ***Mission and unity defined by the “aggiornamento” movement in the Roman Catholic Church***. In it, we have debated over the circumstances of summoning Vatican Council II, as well as the documents issued by this prominent forum of decision and debate, i.e.: the *Lumen Gentium* dogmatic constitution, the *Ad Gentes divinitus* proclamation, the *Apostolicam Actuositatem* proclamation, and the *Gaudium et Spes* pastoral constitution. At the same time we have analysed several ecclesiological aspects of Vatican Council II and their implications for the issue of Church mission.

Next, the chapter entitled ***Meetings and debates on mission and evangelisation within the World Council of Churches*** highlights a forum which at the specified time period organized a few international missionary conferences, as for instance those held in Mexico City and Bangkok. Needless to say, the general assemblies held at Amsterdam, Evanston, New Delhi and Uppsala around the same period of time were equally important and had a great missionary orientation thanks to the spirit of the time and to the impact of the Orthodox Churches that joined the World Council of Churches at the time.

Nowadays, Evangelical movements are harder to define than in the 70's when they were more evidently visible in the large spectrum of Christianity – being under the influence of famous preachers such as Billy Graham in the USA; he was responsible for the organization of the first Evangelical Congresses, held in Wheaton (1966), Berlin (1966) and Lausanne (1974), where a gradual progress of theological thinking on Church and mission was being recorded. The chapter that describes this

phenomenon is entitled ***The Evolution of Missionary Theological Thinking in Evangelical Movements.***

The following chapter, ***Mission and Unity – Convergent and Divergent Points***, is a chapter of synthesis, attempting first and foremost a retrospective on *The development of the missionary concept of the interlocutors we have studied* and then making a comparative analysis of the interlocutors' theological foundations, pertaining to themes like: *the relationship between Church and mission, the Kingdom of God and the Church, the Trinitarian theology, the theology on Jesus Christ, the Son of God Incarnate, mission and eschatology, anthropology and soteriology* and *the issue of interpreting the Holy Scriptures*. There follows a separate chapter on *inter-confessional theological views on Christian unity* and a subchapter entitled *A common testimony? Possibilities and limitations*, which approaches both the problematic issue of proselytism as a counter testimony, and the issue of a social commitment as a potential ground for a common testimony of faith.

Closing the present study, the ***conclusive chapter*** points out that for the time being it is not possible to achieve the goal of a common testimony of faith through Church mission – from the perspective of this study, although this goal was the most essential imperative that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ bound us to right before His Holy Ascension. As for the second aspect of the theme under discussion, i.e., that of accomplishing a common mission, witnessing to the same teaching of faith – in accordance with the testimony of the Orthodox Church – is absolutely necessary prior to taking the Holy Communion from the same chalice. That is why returning to tradition and to the missionary testimony of the One Undivided Church is a necessary condition both in order to offer a common testimony of faith to the

world and to take bigger steps towards receiving the Holy Sacrament of Communion from the same Eucharistic chalice.

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