

II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

FOLLOWING JESUS CHRIST. UNDERSTANDING ORTHODOX MISSION TODAY, IN THEORY AND PRAXIS

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ABSTRACT. The following article examines the notion of mission linked to discipleship and witness to Christ. It highlights the basics of Orthodox Theology of Mission according to the Orthodox heritage and modern theological thinking, taking also into consideration catholicity and unity in space and time. It discusses the reemergence of missionary awareness in the late 20th century and the problems facing our missional theology in pluralistic modern times. It concludes by examining the actual possibilities and shortcomings of Orthodox mission in the 21st century as well as recent initiatives to re-energize missionary vision and missiological scholarship in the Orthodox churches.

Keywords: preaching, missionary methodology, adaptation, martyria, migration

If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am but a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (1Cor 13: 1)

Catholicity, ecumenicity and unity are synonyms for holiness and truth, as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed implies. For Orthodox, the notion of unity is actualised not only in the synchronic dimension of space but also in the diachronic dimension of history. The quest for truth and proclamation of the truth does not rest content with encountering otherness in a lovely variegated world, but has an eye also to the past, the existent and familiar, which determines the unknown, the hoped-for and expected.

It is probably no surprise, therefore, that an Orthodox approach to mission should keep in mind and re-cast past, present and future in order to form a missionary theology for today and build up a contemporary praxis.

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The present paper will develop the following themes:

- Readiness for preaching
- The quality of preaching
- The modern period and the plurality of truth
- Truth and love
- The present missionary scene and today's priorities.

Readiness for Preaching

A Christian is one who believes in Jesus Christ as the pre-eternal Son and Word of God, and at the same time follows in His footsteps and walks as He walked. 'Praxis is the stepping stone to theory' (or 'contemplation'), as Gregory the Theologian says, and the entire subsequent tradition of the Greek Fathers agrees.² Doctrine is expressed in ethos. Faith nourishes the experience of life, and is in turn nourished by it. Just as Christ did not live a life free from pitfalls, so the Christian is often called to follow Him along stony paths. The Christian finally participates in Christ's cross and death, as well as in the Resurrection of Him who is the first-born from the dead. The rite of Baptism in the Orthodox Church, performed in the name of the Holy Trinity with the triple immersion of the baptizand in water and final emergence from the water, indicates also the participation of the baptizand in the three-day burial and resurrection of the Lord.

From the history of the early Church, we know that already in the first Christian community of Jerusalem the Christian message was conveyed at a swift tempo and condensed into a single phrase: 'Christ is risen!'. 'He is risen indeed!', replies the one who is already aware of this stunning news. 'How? What's this about?', asks the uninformed listener. That precisely is the gospel, the good news, the victory of life over death.

A deeper theological understanding of the news of the resurrection and an ethical change in the quality of human life accompany the message of the Resurrection, but they do not precede it.

The Samaritan Woman is regarded in the Orthodox Church as the first apostle, and is celebrated according to the church calendar as St Photeini on 26 February, as well as on the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman (fourth Sunday of

² Gregory of Nazianzus (the Theologian), *De Dogmate et Constitutione Episcoporum*, XX, xii / PG 35: 1079B: "Βούλει Θεολόγος γενέσθαι καὶ τῆς Θεότητος ἄξιος; Τὰς ἐντολάς φύλασσε, διὰ τῶν προσταγμάτων ὄδευσον· πράξις γάρ ἐπίβασις θεωρίας". (Vis theologus aliquando fieri, ac divinitate dignus? Serva mandanta; per Dei praecepta incede; actio enim gradus est ad contemplationem).

Easter, Sunday after mid-Pentecost). Initially, she had led a 'reprehensible' life... There, by Jacob's well, through a series of misunderstandings which are gradually removed, she begins to understand the nature of the person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who is talking with her. The first messengers of the Resurrection, the myrrhbearing women, were bewildered and afraid. The same difficulty was experienced by all the apostles, as the Gospels relate, and not only by the apostle Thomas who is called 'doubting'.³

Only after Pentecost does doubt become conviction, and fear is transformed into courage. The believers go out into the community and transmit the message of the Resurrection. The community responds and becomes the new Israel, the new people of God, a people of freedom, a people by election⁴ and not by descent.

Throughout the early centuries, preaching goes hand in hand with understanding, with deepening theological insight, with a progress towards moral perfection. One cannot therefore think of theology apart from ethics and apart from mission, and the development of a self-contained dogmatics is the fruit of times of indolence, alien to the freshness and youthful ardour of Christian faith. Similarly with ethics: when it becomes a requirement for individual (and profoundly self-serving) salvation, it is alienated from the original vision of the Kingdom of God, a vision that is *par excellence* communal, revolutionary, unifying and ecumenical.

The holiness of the early Church, despite the sometimes very austere descriptions in Acts, is as the Pauline Epistles show not a state of sinlessness, but a state of constant repentance.⁵

The Orthodox Church may often have lost its enthusiasm and its vision over the centuries (I am speaking here in sociological and historical terms, not in terms of theology); but it has never lost this sense that holiness is a state of repentance, which has its source in Christ and is bestowed in the Holy Spirit on the person who is open and in communion with Christ. 'The holy things for them that are holy', says the priest in the Divine Liturgy, just before he invites the faithful to receive the Body and Blood of Christ 'for forgiveness of sins and life everlasting'. The faithful are continuously being made holy through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

³ See Mt 28:17, Mk 16: 11-14, Lk 24:11, 38.

⁴ In speaking here of a 'people by election', we are altering in the present case the customary meaning of the term inherited from the Old Testament, referring to God's election of His chosen people. We mean here that this people is formed by itself freely electing to be such, by self-management, since we consider that even from the moment of creation God has chosen all peoples and all His creation for the life of His Resurrection.

⁵ So for example St Paul first reproaches the Corinthians and then praises them in his two corresponding epistles.

Hence, despite our human inadequacy, in the context of faith no one is unprepared to preach.

The Quality of Preaching

So, preaching in the broad sense –what today we call ‘mission’– is not an activity by those who ‘are saved’, people in a static state of sanctification, directed towards the prodigals. It is not possessed by superiority or anxiety. The missionary does not feel that he or she is a crutch for a disabled god who needs human assistance to supplement His own work. The missionary is by no means the giver of salvation, but merely the vessel that receives and diffuses the Grace which is abundant and is given to all. The missionary is the one who invites people into a community, to an encounter with Christ.

Mission is not accomplished by yelling and screaming, by impressive and magnificent parades, by misleading tactics, by manipulating human groupings and making them dependent, by direct or indirect bribery. Even more to the point, it is not accomplished through certainties. In other words, faith is not a certainty of an ideological sort. ‘Proofs’ of God are thus a temptation (a legitimate and natural one, but very dangerous nonetheless) because they tend to abolish human freedom. Faith is trust, a going out of oneself and encounter with the other. Missionaries do not ‘possess’ Grace and the Holy Spirit so as to distribute them as largesse to the poor in spirit. On the contrary, their aim is to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, and to be themselves ‘distributed’, out of ardent love for mankind, on the model of Jesus Christ who is ‘broken yet not divided’.⁶ Mission is a going out from oneself and a journey towards encounter. Mission is the sound of whispering music, the joy of sharing.

Round an outstanding personality such as St Paul, first and foremost, but also the other apostles, thousands of people preserved the faith from mouth to mouth. Distinguished historical scholars and almost the entire scholarly community accept the importance of lay participation in this word-of-mouth whispering which flooded the world.⁷

⁶ Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, priest’s prayer at the breaking of the Bread before Holy Communion.

⁷ I am referring essentially to the then known world, which was largely identified with the Roman world. The fact that the word *oikoumene* comes from *oikos*, ‘house’, hence also *oikogeneia*, ‘family’, [literally ‘those born in the house’], shows that the concept of *oikoumene* is not absolutely identical historically with that of the global community, since the element of *familiarity* (another cognate word in Greek) has psychologically decisive significance.

Especially integral to the way the new faith took root was the moral example of the new believers, sometimes to the point of martyrdom. The concept of witness, *martyria*, often used synonymously with 'mission' (especially, but not only, in Greek), contains the idea of martyrdom (*martyrio*). It is worth considering that the faith spread through the power of love, of inter-personal relations, of example and of blood – the blood of its own believers, not of others. I think this qualitative difference is noteworthy, because in history (and particularly in the history of religion) there are not a few recorded instances where ideas, convictions, ideologies and religions – not excepting Christianity in some of its historical guises – have been spread or more precisely imposed by force of arms, taking its toll from the opponents and as it were 'recipients' of the missionary message. A tragic irony. We should also refer in passing to other forms of more refined oppression of peoples through political and economic domination, where the religious element is not absent.

These remarks about missionary methodology do not concern the early Church exclusively, but later periods of history as well. In parallel with the activity of the major personalities, there is also the activity carried on quietly by the faithful. Thus the Baptism of Rus' is a historical milestone; but the actual Christianisation of that vast country took place through a combination of interventions from above and action from below. North to the polar regions, east to the Pacific coast across the steppes of Siberia and across the sea in Alaska, simple ordinary faithful, outstanding monks and ascetics and humble married clergy set a systematic example of witness to Christian faith.

The idea of adaptation, and still more those of the indigenisation, inculturation and integration of the Christian faith to the new people and new conditions, was a very serious process which contributed to distinguishing the pre-eminent faith of the Church from various traditions that had become mixed in with it. That which is essential, eternal and unchanging is transmitted through mission, while that which is transient, temporary or local is subject to a critical process in the light of the experience and culture of the peoples who are newly accepting the Gospel. There was a constant process of self-purification, and at the same time of enrichment. The faith, the gospel and the liturgy were expressed in the local languages, and linguistic and translation work of enormous significance is connected with mission.⁸ In many countries that received Christianity from Byzantium, their Christianisation was the beginning of their history, as distinct from a pre-history with an oral tradition. In parallel, this was the starting point for their historical self-awareness and coming

⁸ In the wider region of Alaska alone, 22 native languages are still preserved today. Many of these acquired a written language thanks to the missionaries. A glance at the web site <http://www.asna.ca/alaska/> allows the visitor some contact with the immensity of the task of translation. (All e-references last visited on 26.9.19).

together as a nation. Their first literature is Christian, usually translations of sacred texts but also original works with the character of personal journals, or collections of customs and folk traditions recorded by the missionaries, who in this case also served as ethnographers. The Roman Catholic Church originally followed this tradition grudgingly and in part, while of course Protestant faithful and missionaries never accepted a theory of sacred languages. Today, because of our later inertia, Orthodox are obliged to recognise that Roman Catholic or Protestant missionaries hold precedence in their contribution to the work of translation, especially translation of Scripture.

The whole of this Orthodox concept of mission, a continuous and uninterrupted labour of ants, a witness in low voices, had positive consequences not only for the extent of the missionary work, but also its depth and rootedness.

In general terms, there is no historical evidence of anger or rebellion against the missionaries or against the Orthodox Church in areas where Orthodox missionaries were active, apart from isolated episodes, and this provides historical justification for the nature and fundamental characteristics of Orthodox mission. The mass Christianisation of Rus' on the basis of Prince Vladimir's decision might today be severely criticised from the individualistic viewpoint of modern society; but even in this case, the facts and the retrospective self-awareness of the Russian people seem to justify a choice that was clearly in accord with the political customs of the times, and led the people to self-fulfilment.

The Modern Period and the Plurality of Truth

After this brief outline of the characteristics of Orthodox mission historically, we come to the issues raised by the realities of modern times.

With the progress of technology, transport, communications, the internet etc., it is ever more obvious that we live in a global village. The shadows and mythic quality in which once-unknown regions used to be wrapped has begun to disappear steadily in an ever brighter light. A light which, especially today, tends to become merciless.

Since the time of the great discoveries and conquests at the beginning of the modern period, and then progressively with the colonial expansion of the West, the 'other worlds' have been crowded out and displaced to the point of extinction (e.g. the Native Americans of North America), or else subjugated, as happened to the peoples of Africa almost in their entirety, and to a great extent also those of Asia. Even though we are past the colonial period, even today the 'first world' still lives largely on the exploitation of the 'third world'. Furthermore, there are certain peoples pressed on all sides by the dominant Western culture, such as the Ainu in the Japan, the Australian Aborigines, the

Maori of New Zealand, the Sami in Scandinavia and the tribal peoples of the former Soviet Republics, China, India and South-east Asia, who form a 'fourth world' stretching from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego.⁹ Living in the midst of nations that they never have a hope or possibility of governing, practically shut in by a system of property and justice totally foreign to their traditions, they attempt to organise, to maintain their way of life and their very right to life itself, forming bodies and organisations such as the World Council of Indigenous Peoples.¹⁰ Other, nomadic peoples, such as the Roma in Eurasia, have great difficulty co-existing in an environment which rejects them and to which they have no wish to adapt. Criminality on the one side and increasing racism on the other are the extreme interpretations of an intense fission and failure of communication.

Today, the 'first world' receives migrant populations from their former colonies, but also from parts of the world where life has long since become unliveable because of poverty, climate change, wars, authoritarian regimes and so on. Many of these people live among us as creative members of the societies that they have chosen as their second home. Others, however, live as pariahs, at the margins of society, without papers, rights, social services, work or prospects, more shadows than people...

It is obvious that the benefits of technology and civilisation are not apportioned equally in our world, which still does not form an oikoumene. Globalisation is not a sociologically and economically neutral concept, and the globalised economy does not entail at the same time a real human community, an ecumenical unity. The freedom of the market is ever more firmly entrenched as free movement of capital, but the poor devils who are life's pariahs do not enjoy the same privileges of free movement. In my own country, there are today more than 1,000,000 illegal migrants living at the margins of society (a number we should add to the total Greek population being 10,000,000), without the right to move on to the country they want to go to and usually without the right or possibility of returning home. Apart from the 'troublesome' ones who bring their wretchedness and misery to our front doors, there are also the others; those who remain in the place where they were born, who have absolutely no hope of going elsewhere and live side by side with the spectre of death, with daily anxiety about food, water, medical attention etc.

Perhaps it will surprise you that I raise these political issues. I believe, however, that they have an immediate place in a paper on mission because they

⁹ Thomas R. Berger, *Village Journey* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1985), p. 177.

¹⁰ WCIP was disbanded in 1996 because of extensive disagreements. Documents and resolutions that it produced are available at <https://www.cwis.org/document-category/world-council-of-indigenous-peoples-resolutions-and-papers/>, while more than one new organisation has been established with partly similar aims.

are directly related to the question of the oikoumene, of sharing, and at the same time the question of the unity of human beings and the unity of truth, and whether truth is absolute or pluralistic.

I want to begin with a troubling and tragic fact: despite our honest attempts to be proper Christians and faithful to our mission, the reality belies our efforts. And, even though there have been important steps forward in the context of a missionary theology on an ecumenical level, a glance at the reality round about us cannot but raise questions. Are there perhaps structural errors in the way we think? Are we constructing splendid theories which however have no connection to praxis? Are we perhaps precisely avoiding orthopraxy, hiding behind politically and theologically correct theories? Is it possible that, despite our good intentions, in essence we are not disposed to dialogue and are not in dialogue with contemporary reality; that we are very selective, however much we like to think that we are open... Are we perhaps not sharing ourselves? Is it possible that we are very happy sitting cocooned in our armchairs, examining ideas foreign to us like tourists, incorporating them like consumers, decorating our world of ideas with them – the best of them? Is it that we are happy to communicate –something that is certainly very pleasant, especially when it happens painlessly– but have difficulty in bearing witness, in being crucified? Has mission perhaps changed from a process of going out from the self into yet another egotistical process?

I imagine that people might look on the questions just posed with extreme suspicion, alert for the possible hidden agenda. So I hasten to stress that I certainly include myself first and foremost in this critique, and in general I do not make an exception for my own theological tradition. I am speaking about something that I know well from personal experience. It is the experience of a life of comfort, in contrast to the ascetic experience. Our world view calls us all to take up our personal responsibility, not to disclaim it. To be sure, it is the merciless light on the global village that gives rise to this critique. But at the same time, whatever critical remarks we make do not look to the pursuit of the impossible, which would only lead to disappointment. Furthermore, they are not looking to results, and our stance is not to be evaluated only or principally on the basis of its effectiveness or productivity.

For that matter, someone who does nothing does not make any mistakes either – but such a person is dead.

It was stressed earlier that buying people's consciences cannot be a method for mission. Similarly, I do not believe that social service, 'charity', or even political advocacy on behalf of those who have received the message, are all there is to mission. I would say now something that seems contradictory, but is actually complementary to this: when you bear witness to Christ, you become a witness to the truth of a person, the person *par excellence*, and not of a mask, a caricature. We Christians often turn Christ into a caricature. Let me put this

another way: There can be no such thing as a Sunday Christianity, where one serves other masters during the working days of the week. In this sense the Liturgy after the Liturgy, the revelation of the Kingdom, incarnates the Christian message in a truth which embraces all aspects of life but points beyond the blemished and unfair world of the fall to the resurrectional life of the Kingdom.

Truth and Love

In the Christian tradition, a tradition in which truth is identified with love inasmuch as 'God is love' (1Jn 4: 8), the matter of approaching the other comes to be of vital importance, with qualities that have to do with the truth of life. On the other hand, giving a meaning to life apart from love, elaborating some assertion which one might prove true without loving - this is an oxymoron, or a schema contradictory to the Christian teaching going back to the Pauline and Johannine record and interpretation of the life and times of the divine Word in person. With the formulations of Paul and John at the forefront, the entire primitive tradition of the Church agrees in confessing the complete identification of truth and love in the Holy Trinity.

In a trinitarian mode, we are called to live our lives and exist in communion. And this communion is certainly not confined to a closed ensemble of people, but on the contrary is extended without limit/unconditionally wherever there are human beings, embracing even our 'enemies'.

In the daily reality in which we live, however, sometimes our 'truth' is entrenched within interest groups ready to crush anyone who opposes them, and at other times our love turns into something amorphous and we lose the distinction between identity and otherness, as we leave the service of truth and ultimately nullify ourselves.

While the various social hierarchies and authorities organise themselves round fractionalism (grouping of people), and often as they tend to absolutism (and all power has that tendency by its very nature), they are led at the same time into a social 'heresy': they mistake the part for the whole. They are skilfully at ignoring the rest, the 'others', and concentrate on their own group to which they attribute dimensions of universality falsely so-called. [I am certainly not talking here about the Church, in deontological terms at least, since it does (should) not function as a group but as the body of Christ.]

Self-entrenchment often leads to fear of the other, and when this is cultivated it leads to further entrenchment, in a vicious circle. And the cultivation of fear leads inevitably to intolerance.

Those of us who serve the word of theology are not wholly alien to such pathological states, and nor are our Churches in their historical aspect. As we pointed out at the beginning, there are the extreme positions which invest

either in truth at the expense of love, or in an amorphous love at the expense of truth, nullifying those very concepts by this oxymoron. But beyond this, even the most measured positions of well-intentioned people acting in good faith come up against difficulties in trying to form a practical synthesis and put it into action.

Because we are called to live with those who are other – and [this applies] especially to those who want to actualise their existence in mission, meaning in real communion with all – it is now impossible, even if we completely turn a blind eye, to avoid facing the issue of being together, while being at the same time truthful to ourselves.

Here experience comes to our aid: the age-long experience of the tradition, the common consciousness of the fathers who preceded us and of the Church, in its synchronic and diachronic unity in the Holy Spirit.

The Present Missionary Scene and Today's Priorities

I will conclude with a few words about the Orthodox missionary scene and priorities at present. Today there is missionary activity in the classical sense in very many countries, on all continents. A glance at the web site of the Church of Greece's Office of Foreign Mission may indicate how complex the picture is.¹¹ This is significant progress compared with a few decades earlier. In the context of thinking on questions of mission at the International Missionary Conference (especially the 3rd one, in Tambaram, India, 1938) and subsequently in the WCC, and also in the context of Synodos (World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth), the Inter-Orthodox Centre 'Porefthendes' ('Go ye') was founded in Greece in 1961, and a first breeze of mission began to blow. At that time the protagonists of this effort, the present Archbishop of Albania Anastasios (Yannoulatos) and Elias Voulgarakis, late Professor of Missiology at Athens, were voices crying in the wilderness. This was unheard-of, as is apparent from their writings of the time. Mission seemed a preposterous idea, a rash and groundless youthful enthusiasm. Our theology at that time was deeply rooted in academic rigidity, misery, peevishness and ethnocentrism. Yannoulatos and Voulgarakis, with other colleagues, initially founded the missionary periodical 'Porefthendes' ('Go ye'), published in Greek and English (1960-70). Later, in 1967, after struggles lasting many years, the Office of Foreign Mission of the Church of Greece was set up, and the popular missionary magazine 'Panta ta Ethni' ('All Nations') has been published from 1981 up to the present. It is an important source of news about mission, but only sporadically carries short theological and theoretical articles.

¹¹ http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/gr_main/mission/ierapostolh.asp?main=klimakia.htm. See also the web site of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center in America, <http://www.ocmc.org>, which includes links to a number of articles on Orthodox mission in English.

Historically, the Orthodox Church lost a very important opportunity in the 1960s, when in the context of the anti-colonial liberation movements in Africa, particularly Kenya, there was an official request from significant figures in the African liberation struggle to link those peoples with the Orthodox Church.¹² This was occasioned by a desire to change churches, something that certainly on its own raised questions; but the dynamics of the situation ought to have led to more careful investigation. It took a while for the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria to get truly prepared for a vast task. The historical Patriarchate with ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the whole continent of Africa, having lost its influence to majority populations already after the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, extended traditionally its activity chiefly to the Greek communities on the Mediterranean coast of Africa, which corresponds historically to Roman North Africa.¹³ Together with the inward-looking and bureaucratic attitude in Greece, this led to inadequate handling of the situation, at first. When some initial steps were taken, they were timid. There was a lack in experience and know-how, difficult tensions in the field and unprepared or unsuitable leaders, so a great opportunity that created momentum was lost. Later on, things changed, however, with the intervention of those previously mentioned and some other lonely voices, and with the support of both the Patriarchate of Alexandria and the Church of Greece and Cyprus. But the precious time that had been lost could not be made up later. Today there are vibrant Orthodox missions in Africa, but none of them has acquired the character of a popular, majority movement. Islam came into Africa with a renewed dynamism, with the results that all of us today know so well.

The fall of the regimes in Eastern Europe during the 1990s set new priorities for reorganisation and action in Europe itself. There Albania was a singular case, with Archbishop Anastasios again taking a leading role.

Today the work of mission continues, without support or adequate funding, with all the characteristics of a labour of ants as has always been typical of Orthodox missionaries. Questions about the quality of the mission work might be raised in individual cases, under a specialised observation.

A great misfortune, in direct contradiction of the very dynamics of praxis, is the discontinuance of missionary studies at the Athens Theological Faculty of the University following the retirement of Prof. Elias Voulgarakis. This has done great damage, because critical theological discourse and international experience are not being appropriately channelled so as to educate, inspire and guide those involved in missionary work and Christians generally. In order to

¹² Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Albania, *Stin Afriki* [In Africa] (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 2010), 165ff.

¹³ For further reading on the historical context, see: Sوسان Raven, *Rome in Africa*, New York: Routledge, 1993.

make greater progress in missionary matters, remedying this deficiency should be the first priority. Some steps have already been taken. Since 2017 an undergraduate course has been restored and a variety of postgraduate courses in Missiology and Philosophy of Religion is now being offered within the frame of a postgraduate program of the Department of Social Theology and Religious Studies of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

As to the situation in Russia, the Church appears to be robust and powerful. If there should be a rise in interest in mission, however, one would need to beware of the relationship between the Church and political diplomacy.

All the Orthodox Churches of the Balkans are still experiencing difficulties today, albeit in different ways from during the communist period, but they are starting some external mission work, in particular in Romania.

Recently a group of missiology experts came together at the Inaugural Assembly of IOTA, Iasi, Romania, January 2019. A “missiology group” had already been shaped in preparation of the event. A follow up of this coming together is being planned, including meeting at different levels, ecumenical openness and a much wanted scholarly journal under the name *Salt: Crossroads of Religion and Culture* is being planned for the years to come.

The Orthodox Churches today are having to cope with very complex issues. They have to balance the past and the present, transcend fears, some of which are founded on reality while others assume giant proportions as a result of a morbid imagination, and to find much more creative and outward-looking ways of confronting the complexity of the modern world.

The feeling that we are under fire from all sides, a feeling persisting in south Eastern Europe, must be confronted with an opening-up of love and courage. This requires a lot of work in depth at the theological level, as well as in church administration and church life. Often we ourselves do not recognise the pearl of great price that is our tradition. And what a tragic irony! The more we yell and scream in our own defence, the more clearly it speaks of a lack of faith in God, in the Holy Spirit and in our own powers...

Particularly, the adverse conditions in my own country, Greece, since the crisis of 2010 deprive the Church of resources. But mission is not a matter of resources. It has to do with the heart. There is today a new wave of migration, an ongoing dramatic exodus of our younger generation, the best and most educated of our youth, to the ends of the earth looking for work and better fortune: and perhaps through this human tragedy, a new opportunity may be given to the ethos of martyrdom which governs our faith. From martyrdom to witness, “from death to life,” as we sing at Easter. This is, after all, the path of our Lord. We have only to follow his steps.