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I. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

THE EDUCATION OF THE APOSTLE JOHN BETWEEN DISCIPLESHIP AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

OLIMPIU NICOLAE BENE¹

ABSTRACT. The synoptic gospels present the Apostle John, during the three years of discipleship next to Jesus Christ, in a different way than the Gospel of John. Along with his older brother, James, and the Apostle Peter, he is part of the small, intimate group, which is present at all the important events of the Saviour's ministry. Jesus chooses to change John into a disciple of "love," of gentleness, of compassion by accepting him, by unconditional love, and by entrusting him as the son of Mary, the Mother of God. The paradigm of life is shaped in his new relationship, a fact proved by the writing of the fourth Gospel: he does not mention his name, he describes himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved", the emphasis on love is twice as great as that of truth and justice.

Keywords: Apostle John, Gospels, disciple, education, parents, the paradigm of life.

The theme of the life of the Apostles, of the disciples chosen Apostles by Jesus, as it is rendered by the writings of the New Testament, raises a series of important questions for the contemporary man. What is the ratio between discipleship, education, and discipline? Respective between discipline – the action of discipline and, what do we call in theology, divine pedagogy? Divine pedagogy is the expression of love, but our question focuses on two possible models of it: the pedagogy of unconditional love and that of conditional love.

When we talk about the process of the apostle John's education between discipleship and the fourth Gospel, we focus on the issue of Christ pedagogy, which has contextualized itself in an educational system specific to the Semitic world, but which retains the characteristics of the rabbinic schools of Jesus' day – the school of Hillel the Elder – a liberal wing of ancient Pharisees²: deep respect

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² See Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dizionario di teologia biblica*, EDB (Bologna: Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, 2021), 371.

for the law, by emphasizing purity and abstinence – and Shamai’s school,³ respectively some of the accents of the peripatetic education specific to the Greco-Roman culture.

In essence, where does the problem arise?⁴ We are talking in the present about the pedagogy of Jesus. A pedagogy that considers the specificity of the person in the educational process. A different reporting to His Apostles, a pedagogy that is still as valid today as it was 2000 years ago.

The disciple in the Jewish world and Greco-Roman society

In common language “disciple” is the young man who willingly allows himself to be guided by a master or a teacher, thus becoming the student or his disciple in order to learn a trade or activity.

The word μαθητής⁵ is not found in LXX. Only the verb μανθάνω, corresponding to the Hebrew לָמַד (lāmad), it is used 35 times with the common meaning of “to learn”, “to train”, “to inform”, “to study”. Moreover, in TM the noun itself תַּלְמִיד (talמיד) appears only in 1 Chron 25:8 when it comes to the “disciples” of the teachers who sang at the Temple in Jerusalem. The non-use of the word “disciple” in TM is probably explained by the conscience of the chosen

³ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dizionario di teologia biblica*, 372.

⁴ Our interest focuses on two different approaches, or more correctly put, on a perspective presented from two angles.

⁵ Moisés Silva, ed., in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 219-227; Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, „Μαθητής”, in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, IV, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1933 and 1979, 417-464; TDNT 4:390-461; EDNT 2:372-74, 383-84 TDOT 8:4-10; NIDOTTE 2:801-3. D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 6th ed. (1956); E. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (1960); J. Lyons, *Structural Semantics: An Analysis of Part of the Vocabulary of Plato* (1963), ch. VII et passim; H. D. Betz, *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament* (1967); S. Freyne, *The Twelve: Disciples and Apostles: A Study in the Theology of the First Three Gospels* (1968); M. Hengel, *Nachfolge und Charisma* (1968); R. P. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark’s Gospel* (1968); D. Daube, “Responsibilities of Master and Disciples in the Gospels,” *NTS* 19 (1972-73): 1-15; E. Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (1981); M. Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (1981); F. F. Segovia, ed., *Discipleship in the New Testament* (1985); M. J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel as Reflected in the Use of the Term μαθητής* (1988); R. N. Longenecker, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (1996); H. Perdicoyianni-Paléologou, “Les familles de διδάσκειν, de μανθάνειν et de παιδεύειν dans les papyrus (jusqu’à la fin de l’époque romaine),” *Athenaeum* 91 (2003): 550-59; R. M. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (2006); S. W. Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (2006); H. Pattarumadathil, *Your Father in Heaven: Discipleship in Matthew as a Process of Becoming Children of God* (2008).

people that only God is his only Teacher and that only his teaching must be followed and studied. Even the descendants of the Old Testament prophets are not called תַּלְמִיד (talmîd), but מְשָׁרֵת (mešārēt) – “servants”. Thus, Joshua Navi was Moses’ “servant” (cf. Ex 24:13; 33:11), Elisha “served” Elijah (cf. 1 King 19:21), Gehazi was Elisha’s “servant” (cf. 2 King 4:12), and Baruch was only the secretary and interpreter of Jeremiah, for after the death of the prophet he did not continue his activity (cf. Jer 32:12).⁶

Regarding the rabbinic tradition, it is known that in the period before the Maccabean wars (2nd century BC), in response to the attempt to establish Greek schools of philosophy in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Mac 1:16; 2 Mac 4:9.12), appears in Judaism the “school” or “institute” of Rabbi. The word רַבִּי (rabî) is a derivative honorary title of the adjective רַב (rab) – “great,” and has the literal meaning of “my great [teacher]”. In the Judeo-Hellenistic community, it corresponds to the Greek term of διδάσκαλος – “teacher”. The one who attends the school of a Rabbi is appointed תַּלְמִיד (talmîd) from the Hebrew verb לָמַד (lāmad).

At the school of a Rabbi (then called “rabbinic school”) one could study not only the Mosaic written law, but also the oral one, known as the “tradition of the elders” (cf. Mk 7:3-5; Mt 15:2). Attending school required an intellectual effort and a long period of preparation on the part of the disciple. Only in this way could he become a “wise man” or a “rabbi”, and then be able to teach others and found his own school. According to rabbinic literature, there were in ancient times various schools of rabbis and their disciples that bore the name of “houses” (the most famous were “Hillel’s house” and “the house of Shammai”), often in contradiction with each other.

In the rabbinic schools, like the schools of philosophy in Ancient Greece, more was taught orally: the teacher repeated in front of the students from memory several times the text of the Mosaic Law. The same method of teaching was used in the transmission of interpretations, scriptural commentary, or moral maxims, except that they were concentrated as much as possible in synthetic formulas. To facilitate mnemonic learning, a Rabbi not only uttered the text out loud, but also used sung recitation.

As for the “disciple”, he basically used two methods of learning: listening and observing. On the one hand, he listened and recorded all the words of the master and his students, asked questions, and in time participated in discussions. On the other hand, he observed and followed the teacher’s gestures, trying to imitate them. The description of the various teaching and learning methods practiced in the rabbinic schools collected much later in the Talmud,

⁶ Christian Blending, „Disciple”, in Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, I (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1975), 480-494.

convey not only the words but also the practical examples used by a Rabbi. The apostle Paul was also formed with these methods at the school of Gamaliel, a teacher of the law famous and "honoured by all the people" (cf. Acts 5:34; 22:3; Gal 1:14).⁷

The disciples of Jesus

In the New Testament the word μαθητής is found 233 times in the four Gospels (72 in Mt; 46 in Mk; 37 in Lk; 78 in Jn) and 28 times in Acts (of which once in the female gender in FAp 9.36: μαθήτρια). As for the corresponding verb, μαθητεύω (to be a disciple, to learn, to instruct), it is found only three times in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 13:52; 27:57; 28:19) and once in the Acts of the Apostles (14:21).

The word μαθητής is used in the four Gospels to specifically indicate those who considered and accepted as their Teacher Jesus Christ. With this term was identified both the multitude that followed Jesus: "a great multitude of his disciples" (Lk 6:17), „the whole multitude of disciples" (Lk 19:37); as well as a small group of disciples: "He chose from among them twelve, whom he called Apostles" (Lk 6:13).

Even if he was not an official teacher (cf. Jn 7:15) but just a simple carpenter (cf. Mk 6:3), Jesus Christ taught and discussed in synagogues (cf. Mk 1:21-28; 6:29; Mt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9-14) and in the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Mk 11:27-12:44). He was considered by the crowd a Rabbi being asked to answer not only the religious issues, but also the legal ones of his countrymen (cf. Lk 12:13-15).

According to the Gospels, it is Jesus Christ himself who forms his group of disciples: at first four, the two pairs of brothers Simon and Andrew, James, and John (cf. Mk 1:16-20), then a fifth, Levi (Matthew), and then many others (cf. Mk 2:13-17). Later he chooses from among them only twelve (cf. Mt 10:2-5; Mk 3:14-19; Lk 6:13-16) which he sends to continue his mission (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15-18). The Disciples call him the "Master" sometimes in the Hebrew-Aramaic form of ραββί (cf. Mt 26:25.49; Mc 9:5; 11:21; 14:45; Jn 1:38.49; 3:2; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8), but most of the time with its Greek equivalent διδάσκαλος (10 times in Mk; 6 in Mt; 12 in Lk; 3 in Jn). According to the Gospel of John it seems that the historical process of forming the group of twelve disciples was

⁷ Emilio Voigt, *Die Jesusbewegung: Hintergründe ihrer Entstehung und Ausbreitung: Eine historisch-exegetische Untersuchung über die Motive der Jesunachfolge*, BWANT 9/169, (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2008).

more complex than that presented in the Synoptic Gospels: Jesus Christ had the first contact with some of John the Baptist's disciples (cf. Jn 1:35-42) to whom others were then added (cf. 4:1).

The word "disciple" indicates in the Gospels and the disciples of John the Baptist (cf. Mt 9:14; 11:2; 14:12; Mk 2:18; 6:29; Lk 5:33; 7:18; 11:1; Jn 1:35; 3:25), that is, those who followed John and who, according to the teaching received from their master (called "Rabbi" in 3:26), prayed and fasted (cf. Mk 2:18; Lk 11:1). The disciples of John the Baptist included the apostles Andrew, Peter, and John. "Disciples" are also those who followed the teaching of the Pharisees: "disciples of the Pharisees" (Mt 22:16; Mk 2:18; Lk 5:33). And the Pharisees also presented themselves as "disciples of Moses" (9:28), that is, faithful guardians of the Law of Moses.⁸

In the book of Acts, those who believed in Jesus Christ, whether or not they knew Him during His earthly life, are called "disciples" (cf. Acts 6:1; 9:1; 10:26). Thus, after Pentecost, the term "disciple" became synonymous with those who followed "the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25), both members of a community (Acts 6:1.2.7; 9:1.19.25.26.38; 11:26.29; 13:52; 14:20.22.28; 15:10; 18:23.27; 19:1.9.30; 20:1.30; 21:4.16), as well as one person (Acts 9:10.26.36; 16:1; 21:16). Among them are mentioned a "certain Ananias" (Acts 9:10); Saul whom the "disciples" in Jerusalem "feared him not believing he was a disciple" (Acts 9:26); in Iope a "disciple by the name of Tavita" (Acts 9:36); Timothy "who had good testimonies from the brethren of Lyra and Iconius" (Acts 16:1-2); an "old disciple" Mnason from Cyprus (Acts 21:16).⁹

In some verses the "disciples" are identified with other terms: "the saints" (Acts 9:41), "Christians" (Acts 11:26), or simply "brethren" (Acts 11:29; 15:7.10; 21:4.7). Probably, for the author of the Acts of the Apostles, "disciple" indicated all those who believed in Jesus Christ, of Hebrew or pagan origin (Acts 13:46.48.52; 14:19-22.28; 18:23.27; 19:9.30; 20:1.30), while the "saints," "Christians," or "brethren" were members with authority or office in the early church (cf. Acts 1:15; 9:13). Also, in the Acts of the Apostles, "disciple" is also used to designate the disciples of Saul (the future Apostle Paul) when he was in Damascus: „And taking him his disciples by night, they lowered him over the wall, leaving him down in a basket" (Acts 9:25).

According to the Holy Gospels, Jesus Christ calls to become His disciples whenever, regardless of the economic situation, level of culture, social position, moral character or religious life. Among them we find sinners (cf. Lk 8:2; 19:1-10),

⁸ Rengstorf, Karl Heinrich, „Μαθητής”, 417-464.

⁹ Paul Ellingworth, „ '(His) disciples' (An analysis of scribal flexibility in patterns of inclusion and omission in the Greek New-Testament)", *Novum Testamentum* 42 (2000): 114-126.

publicans (cf. Mk 2:14), righteous (cf. Lk 23:50; Jn 1:47), zealots (cf. Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13), members of the Sanhedrin (cf. Jn 7:50), fishermen (cf. Mk 1:16), wealthy (cf. Mt 27:57), married persons (cf. Mt 8:14), prostitutes (cf. Lk 8:2). The condition for becoming a disciple is to follow Him and accept His teaching.

From this point of view, important differences arise between the disciples in the rabbinic schools and those who follow Jesus Christ. Like the Greek philosophy schools, in the rabbinic schools the disciple was the one who chose the school and the teacher; in the New Testament the Saviour is the one who chooses his disciples, calling them to follow Him.¹⁰ It seems that this explains why the verb μαθητεύω (which in Greek has both the passive meaning of “to be an disciple” and the active meaning of “to make disciples”) it is met only four times in the New Testament, referring to Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 13:52; 27:57) or to those sent by Him on a mission (cf. Mt 28:19; Acts 14:21). For the same reason the verb μανθάνω is rarely used (cf. Mt 9:13; 11:29; 24:32; Mk 13:28; In 6:5; 7:15), didactic valence being rendered by preference with the verb διδάσκω (to teach [someone else]), which usually refers to Jesus Christ (44 times in the Gospels).¹¹

The call to discipleship is expressed in the four Gospels using the verb ἀκολουθέω (to follow) and the expressions ἔρχομαι ὀπίσω (to go after) and δεῦτε ὀπίσω (to follow). In classical Greek the verb ἀκολουθέω has the meaning of “to travel with someone”, “to accompany someone”, “to follow someone”.

In the New Testament this verb is found mainly in the Gospels (59 times in the Synoptic Gospels and 18 times in the Gospel of John). In the Synoptic Gospels he refers to the “great multitude” that followed Christ from one place to another (Mt 4:25; 8,1:10; 12:15; 14:13; Mk 3:7; 5:24; Lk 7:9; 9:11; 23:27); to “many sinners” who after Levi’s call follow Jesus at the lunch offered in his house (Mk 2:15); to the “women” who followed Christ from Galilee to serve Him (Mt 27:55; Mk 15:41; Lk 8:2-3). In all these examples, the action of “following” Christ is not preceded by a particular call from the teacher. Instead, there is a consequence which is the initial and definitive answer to Jesus’ call. It is expressed by the imperative ἀκολούθει μοι – „follow Me” (Mt 9:9; Mk 2:14; Lk 5:27; Jn 1:43) or the expressions ἔρχομαι ὀπίσω μου – „go after Me” ἢ δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου – „come after Me” which we find only in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 4:19; Mk 1:17.20; Lk 9:23; 14:27).

To follow the teaching of Jesus and thus become his disciple, however, involves certain conditions: separation from family, riches, social situation (cf. Mt 4:20.22; Mk 1:18.20; Lk 5:11; 14:26-28), a true act of repentance and total

¹⁰ For a wide debate on this topic see Morna D. Hooker, *Endings: Invitations to Discipleship*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004).

¹¹ Keith J. Elliot, „Μαθητής with a Possessive in the New Testament”, *TZ* 35 (1979): 300-304.

self-renunciation that can go as far as carrying one's own cross with Christ (cf. Mk 8:34). The Savior invites to follow Him and become His disciples even to those who offer themselves spontaneously (cf. Mt 8:19-22; Lk 9:57-59.61), but one can even reach a refusal as is the case with the rich young man (cf. Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 18:23).

In the New Testament, disciples of Jesus Christ can be divided into three concentric groups. First, a large group that includes all those who willingly followed the Savior and to which several women belong (cf. Lk 8:1-3). Of these, Jesus will choose both his "twelve" disciples (cf. Lk 6:13:17; Mt 8:21), as well as the "other seventy [and two]" whom He will send with the twelve to preach in the cities and villages where He intended to go (cf. Lk 10:1). Some will abandon Jesus during the discipleship period (cf. 6:64-66), and others will prefer, for various reasons, to remain his mysterious disciples: Joseph of Arimathea (cf. Mt 27:57) and Nicodemus (cf. Jn 19:38-39). Starting with the Acts of the Apostles, anyone who believes in Jesus Christ becomes a "disciple".

A second group of disciples consists of only the twelve "apostles" who were personally called by Jesus to follow Him and teach in His school (cf. Mk 3:16-19). The number twelve has a traditional symbolic significance, being similar to the number of tribes of Israel. After being with the Savior in His public activity for three and a half years, before ascending into heaven, they receive from the Master the mission to become teachers in turn: "Therefore, go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).

Finally, a small circle of disciples consisting only of Peter, James, and John who accompany the Savior at certain times of His activity such as: the Transfiguration (cf. Mt 17:1-13; Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36), the miracle of the resurrection of Jairus' daughter (cf. Mk 5:37-43; Lk 8:51-56), the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (cf. Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:33-42). These three were "reckoned pillars" of the Church by the Apostle Paul (Gal 2:9).¹²

Regardless of the group, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ presupposes absolute fidelity to Him, expressed by following Him and practicing his teachings (cf. Mk 8:34-38; Lk 14:26-33). For the twelve, discipleship involved the very abandonment of the profession and the family (cf. Mt 19:27; Mk 10:28; Lk 18:29). After the Resurrection of Christ, they were designated as His envoys, preaching in His name the gospel to all flesh (cf. Mt 28:19). Such an attitude went beyond the normal relationship between the teacher and the disciple known until that time, which gave the word "apprentice" a new meaning. But all these requirements do not refer only to those who were the first disciples

¹² See also Christian Blendinger, „Disciple“, 480-494.

and who knew the Savior personally, they also address Christians of all times, who by baptism become “disciples” of Christ.

Apostle John in the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel

One of the 12 apostles of Jesus, of whom the New Testament relates, is John (Ἰωάννης). A fisherman from the Sea of Galilee, who was called by Jesus to become a disciple and apostle with his brother, James. The traditional opinion of the Church, except for some contemporary theories,¹³ recognizes John as the author of five of the writings of the New Testament: The Fourth Gospel¹⁴, Epistles 1–3 John and Revelation.¹⁵ John is mentioned in each of the disciples’

¹³ However, these biblical books show differences and similarities in style, vocabulary, and theology that lead to varied conclusions about the identity of the author. See Tracee D. Hackel, “John the Apostle, Critical Issues,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), el. ed.

¹⁴ The church father Irenaeus, ca. ad 185, asserted that John the apostle wrote the Gospel of John (*Adversus Haereses* 2.22.5; 3.1.1). The fourth-century church historian Eusebius differentiates between John the apostle and John the elder (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.1–7). He identifies the apostle as the writer of the Gospel of John and says that if Revelation was not written by the apostle, then it was probably written by the elder. Eusebius bases his statement on a difficult passage from the early second-century bishop Papias (only preserved in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.3–4).

¹⁵ The canonical order of the five John’s books does not represent the chronological order of their writing. For example, 1 John was written, in the opinion of specialists, either after the Gospel, or before, for the purpose of being a draft for the Gospel, or before the Gospel was completed by writing. As the author of the epistles, tradition has identified the “the elder John.” This John is mentioned by Papias (and quoted by Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.4) as one of two disciples of the Lord who were not members of the Twelve. (Urban C. von Wahlde, “John, Letters of,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), el. ed.. Eusebius was unclear whether 2 John and 3 John belonged to John, son of Zebedee, or another John (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.25.3). He was the first to introduce a formal distinction between the Apostle John and the elder John (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.39.4). This was perhaps based on a misinterpretation of Dionysius’ earlier reference “that there are two monuments in Ephesus, each bearing the name of John” (cited by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* VII.25.16; compare also *Ecclesiastical History* III.39.2–6). Jerome (ca. ad 347–420) attributed the Gospel and 1 John to the apostle, but not 2 John and 3 John. He followed Eusebius in distinguishing between two Johns and suggested 2 and 3 John may be the work of John the elder (Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 9, NPNF2 3:364; compare, too, Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 18) See also James P. Sweeney, “John, Second Letter of,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), el. ed.. The author of Revelation presents himself as “John,” both in the opening verses and at the end (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), although he does not claim to be an apostle. Since he received a revelation from Jesus Christ, he is often called “John the seer.”

lists in the New Testament (Mt 10:2–4; Mk 3:16–19; Lk 6:13–16; Acts 1:13),¹⁶ it was part of the inner circle of Jesus, together with Peter and James, being a direct witness to: the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:37), the transfiguration (Mk 9:2), and the agony in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:37).

According to Mark, Jesus gave the two brothers the Aramaic surname *Boanerges*, translated as “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17). The name may be linked to their fiery temperaments (Mk 9:38–41; Lk 9:51–56).¹⁷ In this regard, Culpepper interprets the name as a sign of what they could become: mighty witnesses and voices from heaven.¹⁸ John rarely speaks in the Gospels. During the only time when he is alone with Jesus, he says: “Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us” (Mk 9:38 NIV; a shorter version is found in Lk 9:49). Jesus then corrects John and explains that the use of his name is not restricted to the disciples. This scene may be an example of John's intolerance.¹⁹

If in the Mateean story (Mt 20:20), the presence and request of the “mother of the sons of Zebedee” makes the names of the two sons related to their parents. In the Marcan account appear only the sons, remembered by their names: Jacob and John (Mk 10:35–37). In the context of Mt 20:20–28, the author insists on misunderstanding about the nature of Jesus' messianity. The third proclamation of the Passion is immediately followed by a political request, for a privileged position in the new *kingdom*. What does it tell us that the request is made, indirectly, by the mother and not, directly, by the apostles, as in the Gospel of Mark? Moreover, the mother's request is made in the midst of the circle of the 12 apostles,²⁰ to whom he revealed, for the third time, the sufferings, the scourging, the condemnation to death. In this context, the fact that the mother makes the request for the sons probably reflects negatively on them, not her.²¹

What does this detail tell us about John, about the relationship between him and his parents, especially about the relationship with his mother? His father's reputation is also mentioned in this passage, but it is insufficient for

¹⁶ Dan Nässelqvist, “John the Apostle,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), el. ed.

¹⁷ Dan Nässelqvist, “John the Apostle,” el. ed.

¹⁸ R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994) 39–40, 50.

¹⁹ Dan Nässelqvist, “John the Apostle,” el. ed. R. A. Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 41–43.

²⁰ See the angry reaction of the other apostles on the way to Jericho, in the nearby of the Passion.

²¹ In the construction εἰπὲ ἴνα, the ἴνα is nonfinal, expressing the content of what Jesus is to say regarding James and John rather than its purpose (cf. 20:33; D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 475). See also David Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), el. ed.

Jesus to grant them the dignities required through their mother. The strong, domineering character of the mother, in the critical moments of the approaching Kingdom, reveals the high standard that she had not only now, but as a life attitude. A standard that, imposed on children, is expressed through a conditional love. Jesus reminds them that in the kingdom of God, he who desires to be the greatest will have to serve others, the first must be a servant of all (Mt 20:20-28). Sacrifice, the opposite of the ambition of the reward, the self-giving for other springs from an unconditional love, like that of Jesus.

When parents express a conditional love, with the aim of achieving standards by children, a fear arises in the child's heart: fear of not reaching the standard, fear of implications. Finally, it is the fear of not being loved, the fear of not being forsaken, abandoned by the parents. And this fear translates into the relationship with God. The fear of not being loved by God, of not being forsaken by Him, which leads to an intransigent attitude towards those around you. The critical spirit for the correction of others, it is actually the cry for its own justification. This explains the spirit of justice, of intransigence of the disciple John recounted in the Synoptic Gospels.

How does John relate the stories of his formation as a disciple 20-30 years after the synoptic writings, in his own Gospel?

The account in the Fourth Gospel

John is never explicitly named in the Gospel of John, probably out of the considerable respect he had for John the Baptist.²² He is indirectly mentioned in John 21:2, which says that "the sons of Zebedee" were together with Peter and some of the other disciples at the lake of Tiberias. However, one unnamed disciple is presented as closest to Jesus: he leans on Jesus' chest at the Last Supper (Jn 13:23); he acts as an intermediary between Peter and Jesus (Jn 13:24-25); he is entrusted with the care of Jesus' mother (Jn 19:26-27); he reaches the empty tomb before any other disciple (Jn 20:4); he is the first to believe in the resurrection (Jn 20:8); he recognizes the risen Lord and identifies him for Peter (Jn 21:7).

²² This aspect can be seen from the space that the author of the Gospel attaches to the role of John the Baptist in messianic preparation, both in the prologue and in chapter 1.

He is called “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (e.g., in Jn 21:20).²³ This beloved disciple is Peter’s companion. He is sometimes called “the other disciple” (Jn 18:15; 20:2).²⁴

John emphasizes through all these details that Jesus loved him unconditionally, so the emphasis moves both in the Gospel and in his epistles from justice, intransigence, to love: the unconditional love of God.

What was the event that shaped this attitude in John’s life as well? The possible answer that we can see in the description of the Gospel is related to his entrustment as a son to the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God.²⁵ She, the one chosen by God to shape the earthly attitude of Jesus towards unconditional love, would also shape John’s attitude towards forgiveness, gentleness, compassion, love.²⁶

In this sense, the model of changing the life of the Apostle John remains a continuous challenge for the Church and contemporary society. The need to learn the unconditional love of God, characteristic of the one who becomes *a new creation* (2 Cor 5:17), having a new life, as St. John Chrysostom said,²⁷ it is

²³ Ramsay Michaels argues that the longstanding tradition that the Beloved Disciple is John the Apostle, son of Zebedee, “deserves the utmost respect” (J. Ramsay Michaels, *Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 24). Nevertheless, he concludes that the anonymity of the Beloved Disciple should be maintained. He notes that the author of the Gospel of John remains unnamed, as do many of the other characters in the Gospel, such as the woman at the well (John 4:4–42), the man healed at the pool (John 5:1–15), and the man born blind (John 9:1–38; Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 24). Michaels further proposes that the Gospel of John might be attributed to John not because of authorship, but because John the Baptist is prominent in the first chapters (Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 16–7).

²⁴ Dan Nässelqvist, “John the Apostle,” el. ed. Other suggestions for the identity of the beloved disciple include Lazarus, Thomas, John Mark, or Matthias. The beloved disciple is portrayed both as an individual and as a symbolic figure. According to John 21:24, the beloved disciple is identified as the author of the Gospel of John (see the events leading up to John 21:24 in John 21:20–23). See also, Eller, Vernard. *The Beloved Disciple: His Name, His Story, His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Brown, Raymond E. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

²⁵ Vezi detalii la Constantin Preda, „Patimile și Moartea Mântuitorului după Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan (In.18,1-19,42)”, *Mitropolia Olteniei* LIV (2003), nr. 1-4, pp. 53-59.

²⁶ „The child does not need gold, but a good and skilled teacher to form it.” (*Despre slava deșartă și despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, trad. pr. Dumitru Fecioru, revizuită de Maria Rizeanu și Ierom. Policarp Pîrvuloiu, PSB 16, *Clement Alexandrinul, Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, Sfântul Grigorie Teologul, Fericitul Ieronim, Fericitul Augustin*, (București: Basilica, 2016), 351

²⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 11.4 (PG 61,475-476), in. P. Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (NPNF)* 1-12, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 323: „We ought to live for Christ not just because we belong to him, not just because he died for us and not just because he rose again on our behalf. We ought to live for him because we have been made into something different. We now have a new life. The old things which have passed away refer to our sins and impiety, as well as all the observances of Judaism.”

expressed through a freedom with its moral limits.²⁸ Undressing from the old human nature (Eph 4:22-24),²⁹ that belongs to a way of life alien to God,³⁰ specific to living in passions,³¹ it is followed by a restoration of the whole being. The new person, the new man, is identified with the new humanity inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ.³² Col 3:10 clarifies that this new man is not yet fully new, but is in the process of renewal (ἀνακαινούμενον).³³ This renewal process is focused on knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις).³⁴ Thus Christians must wait for their full transformation in the image of Christ, through a continuous “change of mind” (Rom 12:2), thought equivalent to knowledge in Col 3:10.

²⁸ Augustine, *Enchiridion* 9.31, J. Baillie (ed.) *The Library of Christian Classics* 7, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 357: „We are then truly free when God orders our lives, that is, forms and creates us not as human beings— this he has already done—but as good people, which he is now doing by his grace, that we may indeed be new creatures in Christ Jesus. Accordingly the prayer: “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” (Ps 51,10)”.

²⁹ Origen, On Psalm 91.12-13, in *CCL* 69, 215: „The “old man” includes all born as earthly men in their old nature.²¹ It is this “old man,” this ancient condition of humanity, that is put off in Christ. Although his body continues, he nonetheless undergoes a change to new life engendered by living baptism. What he was has been “put off.” His old life is renewed by the holy water and the copious mercy of the anointing. He becomes new rather than old, whole rather than corrupt, fresh rather than enfeebled, an infant rather than an old man, eternal rather than ephemeral.”

³⁰ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 45.6, in *CCL* 2, 982: „The apostle clearly identifies the old man. For he “put off the old man which belongs to your former manner of life,” not with respect to the decay of any substance. For he is telling us to put away not the flesh but those things that he has elsewhere shown to be oriented to the fleshly way of life, indicting not the body as such but its works.”

³¹ Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 2.4.22 (*PL* 26, 507C–508A): „The “old nature” whom he tells them to put off has, in my opinion, been aged by wickedness. For, going constantly astray in his former way of life and in the desires of waywardness and acting like a beast in works of corruption, he himself suffers corruption and decay.... But the Word of God kills in such a way as to make the dead one come alive. He then seeks the Lord whom he did not know before his death. He does not corrupt but kills the old man. ... As the outer man decays the inner man is renewed.”

³² Clement Alexandrinul folosește expresia: „omul cel nou, replăsmuit în Duhul Sfânt al lui Dumnezeu”. Clement Alexandrinul, *Cuvânt către elini* 112,3, PSB 4, p. 154

³³ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa asserts: „Those who, according to Paul’s advice, have stripped off the old man, as a filthy garment, together with his deeds and lusts, and have clothed your own in the bright garments of the Lord, as those shown on the mount of transfiguration, rather, have clothed yourself in our Lord Jesus Christ himself and in love, that is, in his robe, and you have become in his image, becoming uncaring and more divine...” Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Tâlcuire amănunțită la Cântarea Cântărilor* 1, PSB 29, p. 118.

³⁴ „To be a disciple is to learn from the Lord all that brings you near to Him, so that we may follow the Lord, that is, to listen to His words, to believe and submit to Him as a master, king, physician and teacher of the truth, in the hope of eternal life”. (*Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, Despre botez*, trad. pr. Dumitru Fecioru, revizuirea traducerii: Policarp Pîrvuloiu și Adrian Muraru; PSB 4, *Sfântul Vasile cel Mare. Scrieri dogmatice și exegetice*, (București: Basilica, 2011), 198.

Knowledge is commensurate with the image of the One who built it (κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν), which by allusion to Gen 1:27, identifies the Christian with the new creation, the new humanity renewed by God in Christ.

Conclusion

The synoptic gospels present the Apostle John, during the three years of discipleship next to Jesus Christ, in a different way than the Gospel of John. Along with his older brother, James, and the Apostle Peter, he is part of the small, intimate group, which is present at all the important events of the Savior's ministry. The nickname "son of thunder", his direct interventions characterized by total dedication, intransigence, ambition, judgment can be understood in the light of the description of his parents, father and mother. A father fully dedicated to his work, known in the highest circles of the aristocracy in Jerusalem; an intransigent mother, willing to fight for her children, regardless of their critical situations. Jesus chooses to change John into a disciple of "love," of gentleness, of compassion by accepting him, by unconditional love, and by entrusting him as the son of Mary, the Mother of God. The paradigm of life is shaped in his new relationship, a fact proved by the writing of the fourth Gospel: he does not mention his name, he describes himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved", the emphasis on love is twice as great as that of truth and justice. Thus, the model of changing the life of the Apostle John remains a continuous challenge for the Church and contemporary society.

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THE CONCEPT OF “CONQUEROR” IN THE LETTERS OF THE APOCALYPSE (chapters 2-3)

TRAIAN GHEORGHE MOCAN¹

ABSTRACT. This study examines the notion of “conqueror” as found in Revelation 2-3, specifically at the end of the seven letters addressed by the Saviour of the churches of Asia Minor. An exegetical investigation was carried out, following the immediate context in which the term is used, but also the general message of the letter. A central place is occupied by the promises made to the victor and which give us a broad perspective on the relationship that Christ has with His Church. These promises are an integral part of the body of each letter, an indispensable and motivating rhetorical element.

Keywords: spiritual victorious, reward, immortality, participation, protection, authority, perfection, royalty, stability, Revelation, the letters of Revelation, Revelation 2-3.

In the volume *Faithful to the End: An Introduction to Hebrews Through Revelation*, Terry L. Wilder, J. Daryl Charles and Kendell Easley² suggest that the general epistles (from Hebrews to Revelation) are true calls to fidelity to God. Placed in the final part of the New Testament, these letters are intended to be a last encouragement to the Church, regardless of the age, it is going through. The battle for spirituality will always be life and death, the prospect of victory is imperative. If after the ascension of Christ, the situation of the Church worsened, His promises were so important, precisely because they offered consolation and support. Hence the favorite theme of suffering in all these epistles, but especially in Revelation. Keeping the faith becomes more and more difficult, and the challenges more and more intimidating. Faith communities go

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² Published by B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2007, 336-400.

through difficult exams, and it seems that only a minority can go all the way. Perhaps nowhere is this clash seen - in an eloquent and concise manner - until the end of the seven letters of Revelation. One by one, the seven churches in Asia Minor receive promises from the Savior that direct the hearts of believers to the future reality.

The seven letters of Revelation 2 and 3 are anticipated - including in terms of content - by the first chapter of the book. From the first verses, Christ is present during the churches, which appear in the text through the metaphor of the “candlestick” – 1.12-13,20). According to Michael J. Gorman, the effects of this presence are *security*, *hope* and *discipleship*, and the seven messages develop these paradigms in a creative way.³ In the imminence (or even in the midst of) persecution, the Christian communities of Asia Minor needed the victorious image of Christ, the One who overcame death.

If the author shared with his recipients “suffering and kingdom and patient” (Rev 1,9), then it means that these are the three great subjects of the first century. In a classic work, Thomas L. Torrance rightly observed that the three ingredients - *tribulation*, *kingdom*, *patience* - represent the unanimous experience of Christians in the apostolic age, elements that mature them in the faith. The trials to which Christ’s followers were exposed, the prospect of God’s kingdom, and the implicit patience they had to show, were all an integral part of their lives. From its inception, the Church has inevitably interacted with these three dimensions.

As we know, “the first audiences of Revelation faced a wide range of challenges in their local settings”⁴, “beyond these, there would have been the everyday concerns of providing for their families, dealing with disappointment, wrestling with doubt concerning the choices they had made in casting in their lot with the Christ-followers, and the like.”⁵

Precisely because of this, in their essence, the letters address two realities: “the reality of various kinds of persecution, and the strong temptation to accommodate, with accommodation perhaps being seen by some as the way to avoid or stop the persecution. The seven messages tell us that there is a wide spectrum within the churches, from the highly accommodating to those who are persecuted - undoubtedly for not accommodating.”⁶ In the end, there was

³ Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation*, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 123-124.

⁴ David A. de Silva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Context, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 811.

⁵ David A. de Silva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Context, Methods & Ministry Formation*, 811.

⁶ Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 131.

only one of two things: either an opposition to the world, which often led to martyrdom; either accommodation to world standards, or, implicitly, apostasy. The seven messages sent to the churches of Asia Minor are eloquent proof of this.

Under these circumstances, it was very encouraging that each letter ended with a promise made by Christ (2,7; 2,11; 2,17; 2,26-27; 3,5; 3,12; 3,21). This promise is addressed to “the one who will win”, even if sometimes victory involved martyrdom. The Lord of the Church relies on several daring believers, ready to bear the battle of faith and carry the banner of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

The Greek term that describes the notion of “victory” is νικάω. It indicates a victory, resulting from a clash of forces. The image of the victor, as it was applied in the ancient world, we find in three registers: (1) *Military*: “Soldiers conquer on the battlefield by strength, courage, weaponry, and tactics... Temples and coins at Ephesus, Pergamum, Laodicea, and other cities depicted the emperors Augustus, Titus, and Domitian in military dress receiving victory wreaths, holding trophies, or attended by Nikē, who personified victory”⁷; (2) *Athletics*: “The verb nikan was used for victory in athletic and musical competitions. Such contests were held during festivals honouring deities like Artemis at Ephesus and at festivals for the emperors.

At Ephesus, the games inaugurated during Domitian’s reign provided opportunities for athletes to conquer”⁸; (3) *Faithfulness*: “Those who remained true to their convictions in the face of opposition also “conquered.” Such a victory is achieved not by inflicting violence, but by enduring it. The Maccabean martyrs, who endured torture and were executed for their faithfulness to Jewish law, were compared to athletes (4 Macc 1,11; cf. 6,10; 9,30; 11,20; 17,15) and soldiers (7,4; 16,14; 17,24). In John 16,33, Christ conquers a world dominated by evil through his death and resurrection, since these actions are a triumph for divine love and life. By remaining faithful to Christ, his followers conquer the world in which hatred and untruth operate (1 John 2,13-14; 4,5; 5,4-5).”⁹

According to Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida¹⁰, νικάω is most eloquently used in 1John 5,4: “for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” Again, the Church’s struggle is placed in direct relation to the world, in its pagan sense, as we should understand including the statements with which each letter ends.

⁷ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2014), 265.

⁸ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 265.

⁹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 265.

¹⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, vol. I (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 500.

The victors mentioned in the text can be associated, in fact, with the earthly destiny of Christ. Everyone must fight like the Son of God, who did not back down before any challenge, and the solemnity of this image is confirmed even in the book of Revelation (3,21; 5,5; 17,12-14). And so, as Christ was ascended to heaven and received the place he had before, His conquerors will receive extraordinary rewards. Likewise, the promises made to the victors attest to the unique role that the Church had to play on the stage of antiquity. Therefore, “through this earthly historical Church that the Lamb of God gains a purchase upon history and exerts His redeeming power among the nations.”¹¹

As we will see, all these rewards are related to the future, that is, they are - in their essence - eschatological. In the tumult of history, the Church was called to bind all her hopes to the age to come to the time when evil will be eradicated, and Christ will reign forever. Moreover, each church was promised something special, and the metaphors used were always related to the context of that community. As always, Christ speaks here in the language of the recipients, appealing to common elements, which they can understand without difficulty.

Participation’s reward

The first letter, to the Church at Ephesus¹², ends with the words: “To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (2,7). As we see, the promise made to this church has three coordinates. The first refers to *the action* itself, in this case a fundamental need: food. The second indicates *the source* of this spiritual food: the “tree of life”. The third has to do with *the location* of the tree of life in the “heaven of God.” We can also interpret these coordinates with the following questions: “What does the winner receive? Access to spiritual food”; “Where does this food come from? From the tree of life”; “Where is this tree?” In God’s heaven.”

In His divine care, Christ solves the greatest need of the soul: “I will give the right to eat” (δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν). The promise is stated in two verbs: δίδωμι (in the future) and ἐσθίω (in the aorist). The verb δίδωμι refers “to grant someone the opportunity or occasion to do something”¹³; and ἐσθίω refers to

¹¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*, 22.

¹² For details of isagogy, see: L. M. McDonald, “Ephesus”, in Craig A. Evans, Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 318-321.

¹³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 163.

"to consume food, usually solids, but also liquids."¹⁴ Hungry with each generation that is born, the soul will constantly seek to be saturated with the spiritual. His food is not of this world, but of the "tree of life" (τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς), which must relate to that of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2.9). "Perhaps the OT tree of life was chosen as emblematic of Christian reward because a tree image was long associated either with the goddess Artemis or with Ephesus, where the great Artemis temple flourished. What paganism promised only Christianity as the fulfilment of OT hopes could deliver."¹⁵

In the New Testament, the "tree of life" appears only in the book of Revelation. In addition to the passage studied, we find it in two other places: 22,14 ("Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city") and 22,19 ("if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll"). In general, *the tree of life* "is a symbol of God's provision for all of humanity's needs in a life lived in obedience to and intimate fellowship with him."¹⁶

The tree of life is found in "God's paradise," an expression of a deep theological and spiritual charge.¹⁷ There are only two previous occurrences of the word παραδεισος in the New Testament: Luke 23.43: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" and 2Corinthians 12.4: "was caught up to paradise...". In the first situation we have *the promise* of Jesus made to one of the two robbers crucified with Him; in the second we have *the description*, in the third person of the Holy Apostle Paul about a revelation that he had. In the case of Jesus' promise, paradise is described as a metaphysical reality, and His presence in this place is certain ("you will be with Me ..."). In Paul's experience, the statement suggests the same overwhelming presence of God, a context in which the apostle sees things that cannot be told.

Paradise is, therefore, the place where God is and where man is expected in his eschatological destiny. This place is referred to - by the expression "Abraham's breast" - and in the parable of the ruthless rich man, spoken by the Saviour precisely to highlight the eternal destiny of men (Luke 16.19-31).

¹⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 247.

¹⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 442.

¹⁶ Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), Chapter 3, Section 6, para 18.

¹⁷ Terence E. Fretheim, "Heaven(s), Dome/Firmament, Paradise", in Donald E. Gowan (ed.), *The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 200-202

Therefore, the three components - the verb "to eat" and the indication "tree of life" and "heaven of God" - plastically suggest the whole paradisiacal reality. In this way, "the promise is a narrative, like a summary, of hope, as it is known in Old Testament and apocalyptic culture, about the eschatological restoration of paradise and people's access to the fruit of the tree of life. At the same time, however, the promise shows that the hope of men materializes exclusively in Christ, the One who, once presented in a prototypical way, respectively in the symbol of the tree of life, in heaven, is now actually present inside His Church, offering a new promise to those who will win, namely that it will make them partakers in the fulfilment of the latter."¹⁸

The reference to paradise can also be related to a contextual element. "A possible local reference involves the grove Ortygia outside of Ephesus, thought to be the traditional birthplace of Artemis. This sacred grove, called a *paradeisos*, still drew pilgrims in the first century. The paradise available to the worshipers of Artemis paled in comparison to the coming paradise of God."¹⁹ Such an association would have better highlighted the uniqueness of the heavenly paradise.

Promises such as those transmitted to the Church at Ephesus have precedents in Jewish literature. "The same end-time hope is referred to with virtually identical language in several early Jewish texts (Test. Levi 18:10-11; Pss. Sol. 14:2-3, 10; 4 Ezra 8:52; 2 En. 8:3-7 [cf. also 1 En. 25:4ff.; 3 Enoch 23:18; 4 Ezra 2:12; Apocalypse of Moses 28:2-4; Odes Sol. 20:7)."²⁰ All these texts speak of the hope of the Jews - from different generations - for the future reward. The idea of reward is something deeply rooted in the human heart, and this cannot be accidental. Precisely because of this, in a concrete way, Christ promises the victor access to the intimate space of His presence. This participation surpasses any other earthly reward because it is, in the end, the Christian's longing.

Immortality's reward

The second letter, the one to the Church in Smyrna, ends with the words: "The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death" (2,11), "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give your life as your victor's crown" (2,10). We can consider the expression "I will give your life as your victor's crown" an anticipation of the promise of protection: "will not be hurt at all by the second death".

¹⁸ Ioannis Skiadaresis, *Apocalipsa Sfântului Ioan Teologul: cele dintâi și cele de pe urmă*, trad. Nicolae Burăș (Iași: Doxologia), 97-98.

¹⁹ Mark W. Wilson, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002), 67.

²⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 440.

The victor is promised “the victor’s crown” (στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς), phrase that still appears in James 1,12: “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him”. According to Craig R. Koester²¹, the notion of “crown” (στέφανος) it was used in the ancient world in three fields: *athletics*²², *military service*²³ and *public service*²⁴. In sports, because “each competition was dedicated to a certain deity, “the victor’ wreaths connoted sacred honour. Metaphorically, philosopher urged people to overcome their passions and attain a wreath of virtue.”²⁵ In the military field, because “wreaths were worn by those who triumphed in battle. The goddess Nikē (or Victory) was associated with the wreath, and the goddess Roma was depicted giving wreaths to emperors in military dress.”²⁶ And finally, in the field of public recognition, “benefactors and others who performed civic service were publicly honored with wreaths... Recipients were commended for faithfulness, integrity and generosity.”²⁷ These forms of recognition — sporting, military and civic — are eloquent in understanding the eschatological reward that Christ will give to the church from Smyrna.

The promised eternal life is associated in the text with immortality, that is, the graduation of the Christian to go through the second death. “A connection between death and Smyrna existed in the ancient world. Its name was identical to the Greek word for the sweet-smelling spice in which dead bodies were wrapped for embalming (e.g., that of Jesus; John 19:39). Several mourning myths became associated with the city, particularly that of Niobe, the Greek mythological figure whose tear-stained face was thought to be etched in the

²¹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 277-278.

²² For details of isagogy, see: J. R. C. Couslan, “Athletics”, in Craig A. Evans, Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 140-142.

²³ For details of isagogy, see: G. L. Thompson, “Roman Military”, in Craig A. Evans, Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 991-995.

²⁴ For details of isagogy, see: D. W. J. Gill, “Roman Political System”, in Craig A. Evans, Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 995-999.

²⁵ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 277. Similarly, St. Paul the Apostle describes the whole life of faith in terms of a sporting competition (2Tim 4,8; 1Cor 9,25). St. Peter the Apostle urges its recipients in the same terms (1Pet 5,4), but also St. James the Apostle (1,12).

²⁶ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 277. “Revelation pictures the persecution of the church as a war in which Christians are combatants, whose weaponry is they witness to truth (11,7; 12,11; 13,7). For them, wreaths are like the honours given to soldiers.”

²⁷ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 277-278.

marble of nearby Mount Sipylus. A city associated with suffering produced a church known for its suffering."²⁸

In the context of the whole book, the notion of "second death" can be associated with Revelation 20,4-6. "Christ's resurrection gave him power over the entire sphere of death (he now has "the keys of death and Hades," 1:18b), which enabled him both to bind the satanic prince of that realm and to protect his own people from its ultimate harmful effects. And this thought from 1:18b is the basis, not only for "not fearing" (v 10), but also for the concluding assertion that overcomers "will not be harmed by the second death" (2:11b), since the description in 1:18a introduces this very letter (2:8). Those who do suffer the "second death" will not participate in the resurrection of the saints or in the life of the new world to come, but will experience unending punishment."²⁹ Finally, we can consider this redemption of the second death "overcoming the moment of disobedience of which the first men were guilty (Gen. 3,3-11)."³⁰

These two promises (the crown of life and redemption from the second death) are in fact one. Both have to do with life in its ultimate dimension, an eternal life that overcomes death and all its power. The everlasting dream of men - immortality - becomes reality in the reputed victory of Christ on the cross. No trial from without, no disturbance from within, and not even martyrdom can destroy Christian hope in eternal life. He who overcomes all this by faith, who remains steadfast no matter what the circumstances, shares with himself Christ his own eternity. It is a complete blessing that only God can distribute to people.

Protection's reward

The third letter, the one to the Church in Pergamum, ends with the words: "To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it" (2,17).

²⁸ Mark W. Wilson, *Revelation*, 71.

²⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 453.

³⁰ Ioannis Skiadaresis, *Apocalipsa Sfântului Ioan Teologul: cele dintâi și cele de pe urmă*, 99. "Following the same trajectory and aiming to highlight the ways of thinking and expression of the author of Revelation, we are able to assume that the scenes we refer to below were narrated by St. John the Theologian under the influence of the narrative of the first chapters of Genesis, in the content of which is exposed, on the one hand, the tragedy of the fall of the first people and, on the other hand, the feeling of compassion of God towards them."

The Saviour’s promise contains two elements: “the hidden manna” (τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου) and “a white stone” (ψῆφον λευκήν). The first element refers to the food providentially offered by God to the Jews who travelled through the wilderness. In their immediate context, this food was vital, saving their lives and bringing them to Canaan. What was then a necessity for the body, here is a necessity for the soul. Even more, this spiritual food is promised for the afterlife, in a fullness that cannot be reached by anything. G. K. Beale³¹ suggests a connection between the reference to the “hidden hand” and the promise made to the Church in Ephesus: “I will feed them from the tree of life” (2:7). Looking at things synergistically, the two churches are promised unconditional access to eschatological joy, understood in the Eucharistic key.

In addition to Old Testament references, non-canonical Jewish literature also provides valuable details. “One Jewish tradition claims that Jeremiah rescued the ark with its pot of manna and hid them in a cave on Mount Nebo until God should rather his people (2 Macc. 2:4–8). Another states that an angel hid these sacred temple objects in the earth and is to guard them until the end times (2 Bar. 6:8). Jesus uses the manna imagery in his teaching: He himself is the true bread of God and whoever eats of him will live forever in the age to come (John 6:30–58). During his earthly ministry, Jesus’ teaching is largely hidden from the Jews (Matt. 13:34–35) and from his disciples (Luke 18:34). Another idea that was apparently current in the late first century is that the messianic age would be inaugurated by restoring the gift of manna (cf. 2 Bar. 29:8).”³² Observing these occurrences - scriptural and non-scriptural - it becomes obvious that the manna refers to the eschatological feast, to that permanent contemplation of Christ.

The victor is also promised “a white stone with a new name written on it” (τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον). “A white stone had various uses in antiquity: a token of admission, a voting piece, a symbol of victory, a Christian amulet, or something used in an initiation into the service of Asclepius. White stones were also the writing surface for official edicts. One such relevant decree was issued in 9 B.C. by Paulus Fabius Maximus, the governor of Asia. This edict, confirmed by the provincial league, decreed that Augustus’s birthday should be made an official holiday in Asia as well as to mark the beginning of the municipal new year. It was inscribed in Latin and Greek on a white stone and set up in the imperial cult temple in Pergamum. The decree was apparently distributed throughout the province because copies have been found in five Asian cities.”³³

³¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 463.

³² Mark W. Wilson, *Revelation*, 75.

³³ Mark W. Wilson, *Revelation*, 75.

As with other letters, the cultural context plays an important role. Believers in Pergamum were familiar with the notion of white stone, which always had a precise meaning. Sometimes, the possession of such a stone could decide a person's access to a certain setting. However, the marking of this stone with a new name makes it even more special. "The internal movement of Revelation, however, makes it probable that the new name is Christ's name, which is written on the stone as his new name is written on the believer (cf. Rev 3,12)."³⁴ We are justified in believing that no other name can be newer and more important than the name of Christ. On the other hand, living their whole lives in communion with Christ, there would be no greater joy than to bear His name.³⁵

Taken together, these details suggest the idea of protection. God, who has guarded Christians throughout his earthly life, continues to protect them in the new eschatological reality. The Conqueror will be rewarded with the very comforting presence of the Saviour, in full communion with Him. Nothing can disturb this reality which has to do with the sovereignty of Christ. If He remains in control of things and history is fully subordinate to Him, the Christian has nothing to fear.

Authority's reward

The fourth letter, the one to the Church of Thyatira, ends with the words: "To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations - that one 'will rule them with an iron sceptre and will dash them to pieces like pottery' - just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star" (2,26-28).

The Saviour's promises consist of two powerful statements: "I will give authority over the nations" and "I will also give that one the morning star". The conqueror is promised, first, "authority over the nations," just as Christ received authority from God the Father. For the notion of "authority" we have ἐξουσία, that refers to "the right to control or govern over something / someone."³⁶ This

³⁴ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press) 290.

³⁵ For details on the notion of "name" in the Bible, see: John Goldingay, "Name", in Donald E. Gowan (ed.), *The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, 337-340.

³⁶ Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 475. We have an expressive use of the word in Luke 19,17: "Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge (ἐξουσία) of ten cities."

authority was to be exercised over the "nations" for which the word is used ἔθνος, always in the plural and referring to "those who do not belong to the Jewish or Christian faith."³⁷ The dominion that Christ promises to the conqueror is over the nations that - over the centuries - have opposed God's revelation to Israel and, by extension, to the Church. Just as Old Testament prophets and psalmists spoke words of judgment against unbelieving nations, the victors of the Church of Thyatira will judge this attitude rebellious and defiant.³⁸ The framework in which this mastery will be fully realized is described at the end of the book of Revelation. "That rule is finally established when the rider on the white horse strikes down the nations with his iron sceptre (19:15). The victors, seen as the armies of heaven riding on white horses (19:14), will begin to exercise their rule during the thousand years (20:4)."³⁹

Second, the Saviour offers the conqueror "the morning star," an expression that can be an analogy to Balaam's third oracle ("A star will come out of Jacob - Num. 24,17). "The image of a star from Jacob became a stock messianic expression in intertestamental Judaism. The messianic leader of the Jewish revolt in A.D. 132 was given the name Bar Kokhba, which is translated "son of the star." Second Peter 1:19 is another New Testament text that links Jesus with this metaphor: "And the morning star rises in your hearts." In antiquity, the planet Venus was linked to the morning star. From Babylonian times, it was a symbol of rule. The Roman legions carried Venus's zodiac sign, the bull, on their standards. Therefore, the church and the empire had conflicting notions about what the morning star heralded for the world."⁴⁰

The meaning that the Old Testament suggests to us on the morning star must be supplemented with the proper Christological meaning. Therefore, the star "is representative (by metonym) as messianic rule, as is evident from its use in 22,16 as a further explanation of the Isa. 11,1 prophecy, which has begun to be fulfilled in Jesus. This meaning of the image is confirmed from Num. 24,14-20."⁴¹ In the light of this interpretation, we can consider that the victor receives - through the metaphor of the "star" Christ himself, His beneficent presence and the grace that flows from this communion.

³⁷ Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 126. Christianity took the Jewish use of the word and attributed it to those who did not assume the faith, thus being synonymous with "pagan".

³⁸ Exegetes usually put this expression in connection with Psalm 2: 8-9, an Old Testament fragment that is interpreted here in a Christological key. What David prophesied hundreds of years before will be fulfilled in the last days in Christ and in the future in the eternal destiny of His followers.

³⁹ Mark W. Wilson, *Revelation*, 80.

⁴⁰ Mark W. Wilson, *Revelation*, 80.

⁴¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 485.

The two constituent elements, the rule of nations and the reception of the morning star, are complementary. Both suggest the idea of a special authority reserved by Christ to those who will win the battle for morality and testimony. They will be placed in a unique position, they will enjoy the privileges held by the Saviour himself, and they will share states of mind of unprecedented intensity. Undoubtedly, we have here one of the brightest rewards ever promised.

Perfection's reward

The fifth letter, the one to the Church of Sardis, ends with the words: "The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels" (3,5). There are three promised rewards here: dressing in white, writing the name in the book of life, and confessing the name of the victor before the angels. All these elements are part of a unique register of biblical literature, which greatly increases the hermeneutic difficulty.

First, the victor is promised that "will be dressed in white" (περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς). The verb περιβάλλω, usually translated as "to dress" means "to put on clothing to adorn the outward form of something."⁴² The semantics of this word send to an attentive attire, with an aesthetic sense and which ultimately leads to a pleasing image to the eye (not coincidentally the textual situation usually suggested by exegetes is that of Luke 12,28: "...how God clothes the grass of the field..."). The beauty of the clothing is also given by the white color of the clothes. The text uses the word λευκός which, in Greco-Roman culture, was more than a color in itself: it can just as well be translated as "bright" or "brilliant". "White garments symbolize a range of positive meanings that center on the concept of ritual and moral purity. Heavenly messengers are frequently described as wearing white garments (2Macc 11,8; Matt 28,3; John 20,12; Acts 1,10; Rev 4,4; 19,14) and in Dan 7,9; 1Enoh 14,20, God is described as wearing white (just as deities in the Greco-Roman world were thought to wear white). Priests in the ancient world often wore white (Exod 29,4; Lev. 16,4), as did worshipers who participated in sacrifices and processions."⁴³ In this case, "the white clothes" are "metaphors of conversion as reclothing, sometimes in

⁴² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 525.

⁴³ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1997) 223.

relation to baptism itself.”⁴⁴ This notion is “also prominent in the Pauline Letters (Gal. 3.27; Col. 3.10-12 etc.). These particular clothes have wider and older associations with celebration and triumph (Eccles. 9.8).”⁴⁵ We have, therefore, a whole symbolism of purity, holiness and honour.⁴⁶

Second, the Saviour commits Himself to the conqueror by words: “I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life” (οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς). The notion of “the book of life” it is associated by most exegetes with two Old Testament texts: Exodus 32.32 (“But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written”) and Ps 69.28 (“May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous”). In the first instance, Moses pleads before God that the people who have fallen into idolatry should not be rejected, even suggesting their erasure from His book; On the second occasion, David utters a curse against his enemies, asking God to erase their names from His book. “Those passages warn of sinners being blotted out of God’s scroll, earning that they are threatened with death.”⁴⁷ And in the New Testament we find (at least) two passages that lead to the same notion: one of these is the statement of Jesus: “do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10,30); and the other an excerpt from the writings of the apostle Paul (Phil 3,20-4,3). Revelation contains two more references to the “book of life”: 13,8 (“All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world”) and 17,8 (“The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because it once was, now is not, and yet will come”). Thinking about the immediate context, we can make a connection between the registration of citizens in the Roman Empire (an honourable fact in relation to those who were not citizens) and the writing of names in the book of God.⁴⁸ In a spiritual sense, this record is a definitive assurance.

⁴⁴ Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group 2014) 172.

⁴⁵ Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 172-173.

⁴⁶ For exegetical and dogmatic details of these three elements, see: Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 314.

⁴⁷ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 315.

⁴⁸ “When authorities in some cities passed judgment on a person for a capital crime, that person’s name was removed from the list of citizens and the death sentence was carried out.” (Craig R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 315)

Third, Christ promises that “will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels” (ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ). Closely related to the white robes and the writing of the name in the book of life, this testimony which Christ undertakes to bear before the angels is, in its own way, a confirmation of perfection. The verb ὁμολογέω, which means “to express openly one’s allegiance to a proposition or person”,⁴⁹ is used only here in Revelation. Most exegetes believe that we have here an allusion to the statement of Jesus from Luke 12,8: (“I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God”) and Matt 10,32 (“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven”). “The text in Revelation conflates, or combines, this word of Jesus, but it does not mention the aspect of denial found in both Synoptic sayings. Since a public forensic context is indicated in the earthly acknowledgment, heavenly courtroom scene is undoubtedly envisioned for the divine acknowledgment.”⁵⁰

All three elements of the reward - white clothes, writing the name and solemn affirmation - lead to the idea of perfection. In the eschatological reality, finally, the Christian can reach that state to which he dreamed so passionately from the earth. We have here a full fulfilment of an endeavour which only the victors are able to submit.

Stability’s reward

The sixth letter, to the Church in Philadelphia, ends with words: “The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name” (3,12).

The two rewards offered by Christ to this church are expressed with the help of two verbs: “to do” (ποιέω) and “to write” (γράφω). The Savior promises, therefore: “I will make a pillar in the temple of my God” (ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ) and “I will write on them the name of my God” (γράψω ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου). We have on the one hand, the metaphor of *the pillar*, placed in the temple and, on the other hand, of *the name of God*. Thus, the

⁴⁹ Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 418.

⁵⁰ Mark W. Wilson, *Revelation*, 84.

pillar is tied to the Temple, the new name is tied to the very person of God and the heavenly Jerusalem.

For the notion of pillar, we have the word στῦλος, which refers to "an upright shaft or structure used as a building support."⁵¹ We need to know that "every Greco-Roman city had temples that were supported by pillars capped with exquisite capitals of the Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian orders. Coins from the Asian cities often featured pictures of their civic temples. For example, the temple of Artemis appears on many coins of Ephesus, some showing the correct number of eight pillars that fronted the temple while other types are miniaturized, showing only four pillars. Asian temples were built to withstand earthquake damage. Their foundations were laid on beds of charcoal covered with fleeces, which caused the structure to "float" on the soil like a raft. Each block was joined to another by metal cramps, so the platform was a unity. The temples would be among the most secure structures in the city."⁵² Another possible comparison is with the temple of Solomon (1Kgs 7,15-21; 2Chr 3,15). The pillars of a building - no matter what its destination - give it stability and durability. They represent the resistance structure without which all other elements are zero.

The detail we need to keep in mind is that the reference is not made to "the actual temple nor to the Christian community, but rather to the heavenly temple, and is a metaphor for eschatological salvation."⁵³ Speaking of heavenly realities, the metaphor of the pillar is more imposing. Fulfilled in eternal life, this state promised by Christ can no longer be changed by anything from the outside, especially by the power and cunning of the devil. Like the pillars of ancient buildings (and beyond), the victors will remain forever in the presence of the sovereign God.

The second metaphor, closely related to that of the pillar, is *the name* (ὄνομα). This name is: (1) "of God himself"; (2) "of the city of God" (the new Jerusalem); and (3) "of Christ himself". So, we have the Father, the Son and the (heavenly) Jerusalem - a triad of a special amplitude. Notice this priority of the Father that we read about throughout the New Testament. The Son always relates to the Father through an attitude of exemplary respect, which is seen even in the above-mentioned gesture. If - as we observe in the Gospels - the

⁵¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 87.

⁵² Mark W. Wilson, *Revelation*, 87.

⁵³ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 241. "For the emphasis on the *pillars* in a description of the eschatological Jerusalem, see 1Enoch 90,28-29, where the phrases *old house* and *new house* symbolize the earthly and the eschatological Jerusalem, respectively, with includes the temple thought it is not specifically mentioned." (*idem.*)

whole work of the Son finds its full fulfilment in the Father, then it is normal for the victor to be - by this inscription of the name - anchored in the Father.

Heavenly Jerusalem is a theme that will be repeated at the end of Revelation: "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (21,10). The apostle Paul also talks about "the Jerusalem that is above" and which is "our mother" (Gal 4, 26). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives us a broader description of the heavenly Jerusalem in words: "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly" (12, 22). Therefore, the image of the heavenly Jerusalem is present in the imaginary of the New Testament, both in Paul and in John, which confirms its use in the Judeo-Christian environment. Jerusalem - with all its history and symbolic significance - is the most appropriate metaphor. Here we have the idea of stability, grandeur, and delight - elements that define the eschatological atmosphere so well.

The third element is that of the name of Christ, and this fact has at least two implications. "First, the writing of Christ's name on their foreheads is the ultimate sign of ownership, but an ownership not of enslavement but of ultimate and glorious freedom. Second, the "new name" is almost certainly an intentional foreshadowing of the vision in 19:11-21, where Christ the heavenly warrior defeats and thus destroys the beast. There is Christ's "new name" is "King of kings and Lord of lords"; and now in anticipation of that scene the victors in Philadelphia are promised to have that name written on them as well."⁵⁴

The main metaphor - that of the *pillar* - undoubtedly refers to the notion of support, strength, and permanence. An indispensable architectural element, the pillar (or pillars) of a building forms its structure of resistance, the often-unseen part that supports it. This fact is observed, indirectly, in the case of the ruins, when - although the building collapsed - the pillars still stand, proving their durability. The conqueror will enjoy eternal stability on the part of Christ, thus sharing a destiny to which he has always longed. Delivered from impotence and limitations, he will have the life of God, in a kingdom that will never end.

Royalty's reward

The seventh letter, to the Laodicean Church, ends with the words: "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne" (3,21). The word

⁵⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation: a New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011) 57.

"throne" does not actually appear in the Greek text, but is only implied by the verb "to sit (seated)", for which the term is used καθίζω: "to be in a seated position or to take such a position."⁵⁵ We need to know from the beginning that "while the promise that Christians will reign with Christ occurs occasionally in the New Testament (2Tim 2,12), it occurs with striking frequency in Revelation (1,6; 5,10; 20,4; 22,5) and is a conception partially modelled after Dan 7,18 and 27."⁵⁶ This connection between Daniel and Revelation is not an isolated phenomenon, both being books with apocalyptic content and, therefore, the similarities are self-evident.

Another connection, this time in the immediate context of the statement, is between this promise and the preceding statement that the Lord enters the one who opens them and sits at the table with him (v. 20). "Impressed by the fact that cognates of δειπνέω occur in other Eucharistic passages (Luke 22:20; John 13:2, 4; 21:20; 1 Cor 11:20, 21, 25), together with the context, a number of scholars have inferred that the sacrament is in view. The Risen Jesus would then be calling the Laodicean believers not so much to conversion but to renewal, symbolized by the Eucharist qua fellowship meal, signifying a restored relationship between the divine and human co-participants. Other allusions to the Lord's Supper in Revelation are less direct."⁵⁷

With or without this connection, "the promise to the victors in this case most likely intends to affirm that at the eschatological consummation of things they will share not the right to reign as such but will experience as the ultimate privilege of their redemption: being enthroned as royalty. At the same time, one must not miss the exceptionally high Christology that such language entails—that the Son and the Father sit on the same throne and thus share equally in the divine majesty that belongs to God alone."⁵⁸

This promise must be associated with one of Christ's statements in the Gospel of Luke: "And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (22,29-30). This statement probably applies, "not just to the parousia but to what began even in the lives of the

⁵⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 215. The verb is used in connection with Jesus (Jn 4,6; 20,12), but also in connection with other persons: the paralytic (Acts 3:10) or the poor (Jas 2,3).

⁵⁶ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 261.

⁵⁷ Nicholas Perrin, "Sacrament and Sacramentality in the New Testament", in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, eds. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 100.

⁵⁸ Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation: a New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 61.

disciples, either at the transfiguration or Pentecost [cf. Mark 9:2–8]). Those in the church who begin to overcome may even enjoy the inauguration of this promise before death, since it is clear from [Revelation] ch. 1 that believers are already participants in Christ’s kingdom (so 1:5–6, 9; see also on 2:26–28).”⁵⁹

Although the promise made to the conquerors of Laodicea is related exclusively to their eternal destiny, we can consider that Christ shares a certain authority with his Church, placing it in a privileged position since this historical and earthly reality. Limiting and ephemeral, this elevation of the Church over all the world is, in essence, spiritual. The Lord never intuited an earthly supremacy of the Church on the scale of history, a political positioning of it, if He - during the messianic activity - did not operate in these terms. But through the authority that the Church exercises in the spiritual world, she anticipates the full authority she will receive from Christ at the end of time.

“We are victors because of the victory He won. As the Son shares the throne of His Father, we share the throne of the Son... Because of our union with the victorious Lamb, we not only get heaven; we also get a throne.”⁶⁰ This association between the throne of Christ and our throne, in fact the same dignity that the conqueror will share with Christ, together with all the privileges that flow from here, are significant elements. The spiritual battle that the Church must fight is not in vain. The horizon of waiting is beyond this world, finding its ultimate fulfilment in this shared royalty. The imposing image of God as king in the Old Testament and that of God as father in the New Testament is transformed here into that of the King who shares His royal dignity with the victors. The prospect is overwhelming, especially because of its eternal dimension.

Conclusion

The entire book of Revelation considers “history as the only possible and necessary framework for understanding and expressing God’s will.”⁶¹ In this framework, daring and pure, the Church of Christ consistently bears her own testimony. The vocation of the Church is to keep the Church in this perimeter and to always have the consciousness of universality. The fate of the world on the scale of history depends on the victory of the Church, even if this is not always obvious, and the seven churches in Asia Minor - through the exhortations and promises received - confirm this truth.

⁵⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 545.

⁶⁰ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2016), 139.

⁶¹ Jacques Ellul, *Subminarea creștinismului*, trad. Octavian Soviany (Arad: Sens, 2018), 40.

Although, from a strictly narrative point of view, each promise contains specific metaphors, unique formulations, and particular details, some generally valid statements can be formulated. First, *the sacrificial element* is observed. In different ways, the faithful in the seven churches go through different forms of suffering, which gives them the chance of victory. The situations that each community goes through are, in fact, providential opportunities for each to be able to prove their own devotion. "The greatness of the Book of Revelation lies not in its external framework, but in the loyalty of its author to what he believed to be a divine warfare and in the success of his book in arousing other to similar loyalty to moral and spiritual truth. The journey of life does not depend for its success upon time and place, but upon the development of a life within, which may be described as spiritual illumination."⁶²

Secondly, *the Christological element* is observed. The notion of conquerors "should not fix our attention solely on the individual overcomer, but on Christ himself who through his sacrifice makes the victory possible. His victory gives the believer the potential to persist in faith and persevere in hope to the end."⁶³ Believers in Asia Minor have a chance to win the spiritual battle because Christ Himself has won. Everything must be read in a Christological key, especially this profound connection between the passions of the Saviour and the sufferings of His Church. Victory on the cross, permanent companionship, and future rewards are all related to His messianic work. Without this saving work, done exclusively by Christ, everything would have been doomed to failure, both individually and at the community level.

Third, *the eschatological element* is observed. It is evident that all the promises of Christ go beyond the horizon of earthly life. They are so great, so precious, that they can only be valid on the horizon of eternity. The rewards promised by Christ are for the purpose of encouraging Christian communities. Placed in an obvious eschatological horizon, their message "remain faithful to God in Christ by the power of his Holy Spirit until he returns in glorious victory over all his enemies. Remain faithful until God returns."⁶⁴ Through these promises, in the most concrete way possible, the Saviour binds believers to the realities of the world to come. Everything that happens in their earthly existence, even the most mundane events, is quantified providential in the future reality.

⁶² Carl Everett Purinton, *The Re-Interpretation of Jesus in the New Testament* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009), 161.

⁶³ Gregory J. Laughery, *Living Apocalypse. A Revelation Reader and A Guide for the Perplexed* (Destinée S.A., 2008), 36.

⁶⁴ Matthew Y. Emerson, *Between the Cross and the Throne. The Book of Revelation* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 77.

Fourth, *the parenthetical element* is observed. Each community is promised a certain reward, so God does not forget anyone. The primary recipients were really encouraged to know that there is the prospect of victory and that nothing - not even death - can take believers out of God's hands. "For today's readers, the continuing relevance of Revelation lies in its power to present this heavenly perspective in every situation in which God's authority seems to be defeated by the powers of the world. Its purpose is not to provide simple information about the future, but to help the Christian live in the way that God's final purpose for the world demands."⁶⁵ All the promises of Christ have this motivating purpose: they must cause the believer to stand firm, to resist any temptation, and to do good even in a world invaded by evil.

The promises made by Christ to the seven churches express, albeit in an indirect way, what in dogmatic theology is called *assurance of salvation*. It is, as is well known, that confidence of final salvation. This assurance - which every Christian is called to experience - is based on God's preservation, the internal witness of the Holy Spirit and believers' perseverance. This emotional and spiritual comfort was very important for the generation of St. John the Apostle, especially in the conditions in which persecution became an increasingly present reality. Christian communities needed an encouraging message, and it could only be Christological. Without Christ, without His protection and goodwill, all their hopes were in vain. Their need for certainty is obvious, but also for the Church over the centuries. The more adverse the times, the more faith must be strengthened, both at the individual level and at the community level. And, beyond all this, the perspective of the victor must be put in the right place, as a finality that God has ordained for every believer.

⁶⁵ Richard Bauckham, "Înțelegerea cărții Apocalipsa", in Pat and David Alexander (eds.), *Manual biblic*, trad. Iulia Bodnari (Oradea: Casa Cărții, 2012), 771.

II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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

EVI VOULGARAKI¹

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 Syndesmos (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.

THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL AND THE ORTHODOX DIASPORA. NATIONAL TEMPTATIONS AND MISSIONARY CHALLENGES

DIMITRIOS KERAMIDAS¹

ABSTRACT. This article explores the issue of the Orthodox diaspora from an ecclesiological, nationalist and missionary perspective. To achieve these themes, the article is divided into four main parts. In the first part, is evaluated the new situation of the Mother Orthodox Churches, founding new canonical territories. At the same time, the rule of having only one bishop in a city was violated, leading to parallel canonical jurisdictions. Unfortunately, most of the time this reality is created because of national interests and not missionaries. However, the solution can only be obtained synodically. In the second part, where he talks about the document *Orthodox Diaspora*, approved at the Holy and Great Synod in Crete, the article criticizes certain decisions, as well as the lack of reaching a final consensus regarding diaspora. Exploring this non-canonical situation, the article proposes two solutions that do not exclude each other. The first of these refers to the possibility of an ecclesiastical emancipation of the Orthodox diaspora. The second concerns the establishment of a “First” by delegation. The last part of the article talks about the missionary witness of the diaspora. In essence, the mission is just a natural continuation of the Liturgy. That is why the article proposes as a typological model the proclamation-dialogue-cooperation.

Keywords: diaspora, mission, unity, ecumenism, Holy and Great Council, ecclesiology

The Orthodox diaspora between integration and national claims

Since the twentieth century, old borders between East and West, North and South, were replaced by new geopolitical, geo-cultural, and geo-religious spaces. International public space is now defined by the interaction of different ideas, especially after the collapse of old ideological blocks (like the “Iron Curtain”),

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the direct exchange of information from one corner of the planet to the other (*social media*), the mass-migration movements, and the dynamic cohabitation of people of different national and cultural backgrounds (the modern megacities). National and cultural de-territorialization (*glocalism*) means that people's self-awareness is not anymore subjected exclusively to the conditions of a given geographical territory or of a circumscribed civil entity (as was happening, for example, in pre-modern Empires or in the modern national states)². For this, the dominance of mono-religious political centers (Constantinople, Moscow, Vienna) is today disputed, as new multi-cultural environments have become carriers of new networks of culture, either local or trans-national (San Paolo, London, New York). Besides, postmodernity has challenged not only the supremacy of finance and technology over religion, but it has also questioned the ideological achievements of modernity itself. This, among other effects, has encouraged the dynamic return of religions into the public sphere.

In this complex landscape, Orthodox migrants realize that their departure from their home countries means their integration into new ones; in other words, *diaspora*, is at the same time a *spreading out*, that is, scattering in the space, and *settling* in new socio-cultural contexts³.

The so-called "Orthodox diaspora" showed an admirable ability to adapt to the social conditions of the hosting countries. It is sufficient to recall, by way of example, the impact that Russian emigres of Paris had to the promotion of

² Historically the Churches in the East exercised their jurisdiction within the boundaries of the Roman *limes*, which they adopted (with some adjustments) establishing a wide network of dioceses, Archdioceses, and Metropolitanates. From their side, modern Orthodox Autocephalous Churches, though certainly post-imperial, reflect the "Constantine" Church-State model as envisaged in the foundation of the local Churches (e.g., the Orthodox Church of "all Greece", of "all Russia", etc.).

³ In the last century, the number of Orthodox Christians in America and Western Europe (Germany, Spain, France, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy) increased significantly. Today, about 1.000.000 Orthodox live in Germany (compared to only 4.000 in 1910) while in America (Brazil, Canada, Mexico) the number exceeds 700.000. In the U.S.A. – where Orthodox presence dates to the Russian missions of the eighteenth century and was strengthened mainly with the migratory flows of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – is estimated that about 1.800.000 Orthodox (immigrants or second-generation immigrants) are settled, originating from the Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the Balkans and the Middle East (instead of 500.000 in 1910). Finally, it is estimated that about 700.000 Orthodox are based in Australia. See Pew Research Center, Nov. 8, 2017, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century", 24-25. These data do not change fundamentally the demographic barycenter of Orthodoxy (which retains the largest number of her approximately 260 million believers within the jurisdictional territories of the Patriarchal and Autocephalous Churches) but prove the need to administrate the ecclesiastical structures of these communities according to the data of 21st century, considering the new migratory flows that have further broadened the horizon of Orthodoxy from East to West.

Orthodox spirituality and to the creative dialogue with the intellectual debates of their time. According to Metropolitan of Dioclea, Kallistos Ware, the reality of the diaspora is an expression of divine providence, as it prevented the Orthodox from isolation and helped them to bear witness to their faith by projecting the Orthodox heritage and listen carefully the other Christians and the secularized world. "It is surely not by chance that God has allowed Orthodox to be scattered throughout the west in the twentieth century. This dispersal, so far from being fortuitous and tragic, constitutes on the contrary our *kairos*, our moment of opportunity."⁴ Others, like John Meyendorff, in a somehow optimistic tone, saw the Orthodox diaspora as a "welcome phenomenon" that encouraged the Orthodox to develop their spirituality, sustain the ecumenical movement and emphasize the return to the tradition of the ancient Church⁵. On the contrary, others have noted that "it is unimaginably difficult" to be today an Orthodox in the West, for this implies a rupture with the context in which one was born and grew up, and a "decoration" of his/her religious belief with Western elements⁶. It should not be ignored also that the Orthodox who live in the diaspora are potentially in a situation of "ecclesiological heresy"⁷ – the reference here is to the condemnation of "ethnophyletism" by the Major Synod of Constantinople of 1872 as an "anti-evangelical teaching" and of those who accept religious nationalism as "schismatics"; these condemnations were reiterated by the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016).⁸

⁴ See Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin 2015, 5th ed.), 181.

⁵ John Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church. Its past and its role in the World Today* (New York, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1981, 4th ed.), 170: "We are therefore confronted today by the gradual emergence of a Western Orthodoxy, a welcome phenomenon, which will assist the Orthodox youth who had adopted the language, culture and customs of the countries where they were born, and are to all intents and purposes as Western as their Latin brothers, to preserve the Orthodox faith."

⁶ Cf. Christos Yannaras, "Nationalism, the denial of Greekness," (in Greek) in Id., *Finis Graeciae* (Thessaloniki: Ianos 2014), 386, 394.

⁷ Cf. Gregorios Papathomas, "Autocephalism and Diaspora. A cause-and-effect relationship," (in Greek) in Id., *Κανονικά Έμμορφα. Δοκίμια Κανονικής Οικονομίας II* [Ecclesial-canonical Questions. Essays of Canonical Oikonomia II] (Katerini: Epektasi, 2015), 409.

⁸ See the "Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church", accessed October 25, 2021, www.holycouncil.org, para. 3 (where the Council reminds the condemnation of ethnophyletism in 1872) and para. 15, which reads: "In opposition to the levelling and impersonal standardization promoted by globalization, and also to the extremes of nationalism, the Orthodox Church proposes the protection of the identities of peoples and the strengthening of local identity." From his part, Archbishop of Cyprus, Chrysostomos, noted in his address to the Council: "It is ethnophyletism that did not allow the issues of Autocephaly and Diptychs to come to our Council; it is also the reason that the quasi-canonical solution provided to the issue of the Diaspora. In our time, when national barriers are being abolished one after the other, we Orthodox are not only self-contradicting ourselves but we are also making ourselves fools by making the nation a constitutional element of our ecclesiology and our ecclesiastical identity."

At any rate, the diaspora has raised the (difficult) task to apply ancient ecclesial institutions to new geo-social conditions and to territories whose jurisdictional status remains unclear because of the existence of parallel co-jurisdictions. Moreover, having in mind that the *genesis* of Orthodox communities beyond the boundaries of the Patriarchal and Autocephalous Churches was largely determined by the national origin of the faithful, one could say that the diaspora was called since the beginning of its existence to reconcile the eschatological, that is, the supra-national vocation of the Church, with the “national” function of the different ecclesiastical jurisdictions.

It should be stressed that condemnation of “ethnophyletism” does not concern national and ecclesiastical pluralism *as such*, for pluralism does not contradict the practice of the ancient Church, where different liturgical and theological traditions were able to coexist with each other (Antiochian, Alexandrian, Jerusalemite, Roman, Ambrosian, Gallic, etc.). Yet, the Orthodox Church observes to date the provisions of the ecumenical councils on the existence of one sole bishop in each city or geographical area (see canon 8 of the first ecumenical council, canon 8 of the third ecumenical council, canon 12 of the fourth ecumenical council) and, by extension, on the need to avoid overlapping jurisdictions, especially if motivated by national motives⁹. In particular, the problem the diaspora lies in the fact that:

1. The various Patriarchal and Autocephalous Churches claim to have universal jurisdiction, as they appoint hierarchs beyond their territorial jurisdiction.
2. The so-called “Orthodox States” aim at the political influence of the West (or at least at securing its political favor), by encouraging the dependence of the communities of the diaspora from the national Church-Mothers.
3. The more ecclesiastical nationalism is emphasized the less the diaspora is integrated into the situations and needs of Western societies.

The break of the unity of the “one” ecclesiastical body around the “one” bishop has not only canonical and ecclesiological impacts,¹⁰ but ecumenical

⁹ “‘Racial (religious) nationalism’ expresses the idea of establishing either an Autocephalous Church in a state context or an ethno-ecclesiastical community in the context of the so-called ‘Diaspora’, based not on the local-territorial [eucharistic-ecclesiastical] criterion, but on the *ethno-racial*, national or linguistic and common ethnic origin.” G. Papatomas, “Ethnophyletism and [the so-called] Church ‘Diaspora’,” (in Greek) in Id., *Κανονικά Έμμορφα*, 375.

¹⁰ National co-jurisdictions in the diaspora introduce the “messianic” function of Nation as a means of “another form of confession of faith, [a messianism that] consciously or unconsciously is emphasized more than anything else, while at the same time there is a lustful relationship and dependence of the Church on the Nation and on the dominant national ideology”. Gregorios Papatomas, “The contrasting relationship between the local Church and the Ecclesiastical ‘Diaspora’ (Ecclesiological unity *versus* ‘co-ownership’ and ‘multi-jurisdiction’),” (in Greek), accessed October 25, 2021, <https://www.academia.edu/18004585/25>.

effects as well, not only for the fact that the canonical order is not respected but also for it gives the impression that Orthodoxy tolerates a disorder which infects her position on issues like the admission of heterodox, the pastoral administration of mixed marriages, the translation of liturgical texts into Western languages, Orthodox social teaching, and so on¹¹. Indeed, when Orthodox are questioned on their spirituality, they immediately clarify that their answer concerns, depending on the case, the “Greek”, the “Russian”, the “Romanian”, or the “Serbian” tradition¹². Therefore, Orthodox diaspora inevitably lives in a hermaphrodite situation of many diverse “Orthodoxies”, a reality that perpetuates a painful ecclesiastical fragmentation¹³.

One must also add that young generations in the diaspora face today diverse challenges, like religious and cultural diversity, the growing difficulty to

¹¹ Another problem of the diaspora is the different use, until today, of the ecclesiastical calendar, resulting the separate celebration of the great Christians feasts, which is a deficit for the common witness to the other Christians. Unfortunately, the issue of the ecclesiastical calendar (and the common celebration of Easter) did not reach the conciliar discussions of Crete.

¹² In the 1960s Christos Yannaras had stressed that “if a Protestant Christian of New York decides to convert to the Orthodox faith, he is obliged to choose a new nationality if he happens to be only American. This is because he must be subordinated to one of the thirteen Orthodox bishops who shepherd an equal number of Orthodox flocks in a single city!”. Yannaras had diagnosed correctly that the cause of this surrealistic phenomenon is precisely nationalism (for the sake of which “the Orthodox Churches have renounced the conditions of their spiritual hypostasis”) and that universality, for Orthodoxy, “is not a territorial term, it does not mean the extension of the Church nor a global organization” but is expressed “in the identity of faith, in the identity of the worshipping life, and the administrative identity associated with apostolic succession.” See Christos Yannaras, *Η κρίση της προφητείας* [The crisis of prophecy] (Athens: Ikaros Books 2010, 4th ed., PDF ebook). Of course, Yannaras did not deny, some years later, the right of the Greek State to exploit “the Greek universality of Orthodoxy.” See Christos Yannaras, “The separation between Church and State,” (in Greek, in Id., *Κεφάλαια Πολιτικής Θεολογίας* [Chapters of Political Theology] (Athens: Gregorios 1983, 2nd ed.), 199-200. One could ask, following Yannaras’ latter statement, whether Orthodoxy’s universality is only “Greek” or if at the same time there are other “national” universalities (Greek, Slavic, Arabic, and so on). It seems thus that the post-national spiritual awareness of the Orthodox cohabits with the tendency to defend national religiosities.

¹³ The principle of the establishment of Churches based on territorial rather than on national criteria extends the universality of the Church, while ethnophyletism divides the faithful between “same-race” and “hetero-race”, a distinction completely foreign to the Gospel and Christian practice. According to John Zizioulas, “the bishop gathers in his person all the local Church, above all other differences, and there must be no bishops for certain categories of people. We are therefore faced with a very serious matter, and we cannot say that the Diaspora has nothing to do with the canonical practice of the Church. Therefore, in my opinion, it is essential to mention this ecclesiological and canonical principle, otherwise, we do not respect our tradition and ecclesiology.” See Secrétariat pour la Préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de l’Eglise Orthodoxe, *Synodica XI* (Chambésy: Centre Orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique 2015), 77.

understand the “traditional” liturgical language of the Church, and the reception of Western culture without denying the “Eastern” characteristics of their religious background¹⁴.

The resolution of this issue is, therefore, of primatial importance, since it has already been established that Orthodoxy should exercise her ministry “in a rapidly developing world, which has now become interconnected through means of communication and the development of means of transportation”, which presupposes “overcoming the internal conflicts of the Orthodox Church through the surrendering of nationalistic, ethnic and ideological extremes of the past.”¹⁵

Of course, the issue of the diaspora does not concern one or some Churches, but Orthodoxy as a whole, and therefore the only way to resolve it is synodically. On the other hand, definitive decisions should not be taken with the “aphonia” of the diaspora, which is increasingly aware of its *own* specific identity. Finally, the organization of the diaspora must consider the ongoing ecumenical dialogues and the existence of heterodox structures in the same territories as the Orthodox.¹⁶

The teachings of the Holy and Great Council on the diaspora

Considering all the above, one should ask if the provisions adopted by the Holy and Great Council of Crete can lead to the definitive ending of the existing fragmentations and the attenuation of the nationalistic temptations the Orthodoxy experiences in her body¹⁷. The questions that will concern this essay are:

¹⁴ The question of the reception of the West remains one of the thorniest problems in Orthodoxy. Often, movements of spiritual or theological renewal (Slavophiles, Greek theology of the 1960s) dedicated themselves to a sterile anti-Western criticism, whereas other schools of thought were able to meet fruitfully with the West in the fields of theology, intellect, and culture (like the Russians of Paris). The issue can be summed up as follows: the more Orthodoxy becomes “ethnocentric”, the more the differences and, by extension, the opposition to the West is emphasized, while the more she discovers her evangelistic and, therefore, supranational hypostasis the more she embraces the problems not of the one or another nation, but of the entire world. For this issue see Georges Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds., *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press 2013); Dimitrios Keramidas, *Ortodossia greca ed Europa* (Assisi: Cittadella Editrice 2016).

¹⁵ “Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches: October 12, 2008,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 53, no. 1 (2008): 305-312, here paragraphs 4 and 2.

¹⁶ See O. Clément, “Tous, préparons ensemble le Concile,” in Secrétariat pour la Préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de l’Eglise Orthodoxe, *Synodica I* (Chambésy: Centre Orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique 1976), 117-118.

¹⁷ The issue of Orthodox diaspora was officially raised in 1923, at the Pan-Orthodox Congress of Constantinople, where Patriarch Meletius IV proposed the annexation of the diaspora to the

1. What is – or what can be – the mission of the Orthodox diaspora in relation to the amendments of the Holy and Great Council?
2. Will the Orthodox of the diaspora continue to live in a problematic canonical *status*, or will it be able to propose itself as a valid component of the twenty-first century global Orthodoxy?

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in his opening address to the Holy and Great Council, stated that “the phenomenon of the Orthodox Diaspora assumed unforeseen dimensions prior to the past and present centuries through the rapid migration of peoples, from Orthodox regions to Western countries, who require pastoral care. This led to the well-known, and not strictly canonical situation whereby more than one Bishop exists in one and the same city or region, proving a scandal to many people inside and outside the Orthodox Church.”¹⁸ From his part, Archbishop of Albania Anastasios stressed that “the greatest heresy, the mother of heresies, [is] egocentrism; personal, collective, racial, localist, ecclesiastical, and so on, which poisons human relations as well as any form of harmonious and creative coexistence [...] The opposite to peace is not war but egocentrism; [between] individuals, States, and different groups.”¹⁹

At any rate, the Council’s deliberations were taken within the framework of the provisions adopted by the fourth Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (2009), which, after examining the works of the third (1990) and fourth (1993) Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commissions, established “Episcopal Assemblies”

direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. According to his proposal, the national communities would have remained parishes with their own shepherds while their Presidency would have been exercised by a Patriarchal Exarch. Thus, the Ecumenical Patriarchate would have been the “major” canonical link between the Orthodox Churches in America. In 1930, the Preliminary Committee of the Orthodox Church proposed as a subject of the “Pre-Synod”, the study of the canonical state of the Orthodox Church in America. In the 1960s the diaspora figures among the 105 topics of the agenda of the Holy and Great Council, as a sub-section on the subject “Relations of the Orthodox Churches to one another.” See Ioannis Karmiris, “The Panorthodox Conference of Rhodes,” (in Greek) *Theologia*, 32, no. 4 (1961): 511. It is worthy of mention that from the outset theologians of the diaspora (O. Clément, J. Meyendorff, and others) argued in favor of the rapid canonical solution of the issue. The First Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (1976) placed the issue first in order in the list of the 10 most urgent and needed immediate resolution issues. See Secrétariat pour la Préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de l’Eglise Orthodoxe, *Synodica II* (Chambésy: Centre Orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique 1978), 125.

¹⁸ Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Opening Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Inaugural Session of the Holy and Great Council,” accessed October 24, 2021, www.holycouncil.org.

¹⁹ Anastasios (Archbishop of Tirana, Dures and all Albania), “Inaugural Speech at the Holy and Great Council,” accessed October 24, 2021, www.holycouncil.org.

in the territories of the diaspora (hereinafter: EA),²⁰ composed by the canonical hierarchs of the Churches, under the presidency of the hierarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate²¹. In Crete it was thereby reiterated that “during the present phase it is not possible, for historical and pastoral reasons, an immediate transition to the strictly canonical order of the Church on this issue, that is, the existence of only one bishop in the same place”²². Having that clarified, the Council decided to maintain the structure of the EA “until the appropriate time arrives when all the conditions exist in order to apply the canonical exactness (*akribeia*)”, that is, until a definitive solution should be achieved, in accordance with “with Orthodox ecclesiology, and the canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church”²³.

Members of the EA are “all the bishops in each region who are in canonical communion with all of the most holy Orthodox Churches” as well as “those Orthodox Bishops who do not reside in the region, but who have pastoral ministry in parishes in the Region”²⁴. The competencies assigned to the EA are:

- To safeguard and contribute to the *unity* of Orthodoxy through the fulfillment of her theological, ecclesiological, canonical, spiritual, philanthropic, educational, and missionary obligations.
- To coordinate *activities of common interest* in each region in areas of pastoral care, catechesis, liturgical life, and religious education²⁵.
- To *represent* the Orthodox to the heterodox, to non-Christians and the wider society and civil authorities.
- To prepare a plan to organize the Orthodox of the region on a canonical basis²⁶.
- To maintain, preserve and develop the *interests of the communities* that belong to the canonical Orthodox bishops of each region, as the competencies of the EA “should in no way interfere with the

²⁰ See *Episkepsis*, no. 452 (January 15, 1991): 21-22, and no. 498 (November 30, 1993): 23-24.

²¹ Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, “The Orthodox Diaspora,” (hereinafter: OD), 3. EA were created in the following regions: i. Canada, ii. United States of America, iii. Latin America, iv. Australia, New Zealand and Oceania, v. Great Britain and Ireland, vi. France vii. Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg, viii. Austria, ix. Italy and Malta, x. Switzerland and Lichtenstein, xi. Germany xii. Scandinavian Countries (except Finland), xiii. Spain and Portugal.

²² OD, 1.b.

²³ OD, para. 1.a. The institution of EA by the Preconciliar Conference had a temporary and transitional character, as it would have paved the way for a canonical solution of the issue by the Holy and Great Council. See *Synodica XI*, 291.

²⁴ OD para. 2.a-b.

²⁵ Specifically, the promotion of “collaboration between the churches in all areas of pastoral ministry,” OD, para. 2.

²⁶ See OD, para. 2.c; cf. also arts. 2 and 5 of DOS.

responsibility of each Bishop for his eparchial jurisdiction, or restrict the rights of his Church, including its relations with international agencies, governments, civil society, mass media, other legal undertakings, national and treaty organizations, as well as other religions”²⁷.

The purposes of the EA, therefore, are:

1. To reveal the unity of Orthodoxy.
2. To promote cooperation and joint actions in each region²⁸.
3. To safeguard the specific “interests” of each community²⁹.

Of the above-mentioned priorities, the first two have a “centripetal” tendency, that is, they converge towards a virtual “center” (that of “unity” and “joint action”), while the third represents a “centrifugal” movement, as it legitimates the “interests” (*sic*) of each ecclesiastical community, as reiterated in para. 2, art. 5 of the approved “Rules of Operation of Episcopal Assemblies in the Orthodox Diaspora” (hereinafter: ROD).

The authority of the EA is thus restricted to sole coordination, without excluding the authority these have to decide on pastoral matters, on the condition that each jurisdiction addresses to the respective Church-Mother what requires common actions. In short, the administrative autonomy of the EA seems limited, as it neither constitutes an independent ecclesiastical entity nor puts any limitations to the canonical rights of the “national” bishops.

As Metropolitan of Switzerland Damaskinos (Papandreou), Secretary of the third Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, specified, the institution of the EA was meant to be an “analogical” application of the metropolitan system by bringing together three concentric circles; in the first, there is the *Eucharistic* manifestation of the Church, that is, the liturgical experience of the worshipping community. Then, the *ecclesiological* cycle of the organic unity of each community

²⁷ OD, para. 5.1-2.

²⁸ According to para. 11 of DOS “upon the decision of the Episcopal Assembly, it is possible to form from its members Committees for Mission as well as for Liturgical, Pastoral, Financial, Educational, Ecumenical and other issues, chaired by one of the Bishop-Members of the Assembly.”

²⁹ As for the decisions of the EA, the principle of unanimity (*consensus*) was adopted, which, by one view strengthens the unifying role of Assemblies (see 2.c and DOS, art. 10). According to another approach, unanimity does not negate the possibility of the prevailing the opinion of the majority (see canon 6 of the first ecumenical council). Former Archbishop of America, Demetrios, pointed to the principle of unanimity as the main reason for the non-submission of proposals on behalf of the Orthodox of America in the preconiliar procedures, as the U.S.-Canada Episcopal Assembly did not achieve mutually acceptable positions. Archbishop Demetrios (Elder) of America, “Orthodox Diaspora. Perspectives following the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church,” *The Ecumenical Review*, 72, no. 3 (2020): 479.

around its bishop comes to the fore, and, finally, the *synodical* communion of the bishops affirms the “regional” unity of the different jurisdictions. According to Damaskinos, the connection of the three circles to the canonical tradition should offer a solution of the existing anomaly: thus, the Metropolis (or Archdiocese) should reflect the canonical order, the diocese the national origin of the communities, and the parish the sacramental origin of these communities.

This threefold circle (Eucharistic, episcopal, synodal) had a double ambition: to highlight the Eucharistic awareness of the Church as the very source of the ecclesial *hypostasis* of the communities of the diaspora, and to solve pastoral problems, encouraging a spirit of convergence, understanding, and cooperation among the local hierarchies. In this respect, the positive intentions of the institution of the EA cannot be called into question. However, this configuration has a significant structural deficiency that compromises its conciliatory intention, for it formalizes the canonical bond of the bishops of the diaspora with their Church-Mothers, a bond that intervenes between the Eucharistic/parish level and the synodical unity of the hierarchs. “National” bishops can mediate between their local communities and the Autocephalous Churches and, thus, ecclesiastical unity (the third circle of the model) remains incomplete, as it does not recognize the existence of a “First” with clear administrative prerogatives, but it urges the Churches to communicate more with the “national” Church-Mothers than with each other³⁰. According to OD:

The Episcopal Assemblies do not deprive the member bishops of their administrative and canonical competencies, nor do they restrict their rights in the Diaspora. The Episcopal Assemblies aim to form a common position of the Orthodox Church on various issues. In no way does this prevent member bishops from remaining responsible to their own Churches and expressing the views of their own Churches to the outside world” (para. 5).

Hence, the EA are *sui generis* ecclesiastical realities, as – although they exercise their competencies “in accordance with the principles of the Orthodox conciliar tradition” (OD, para. 9) – they are neither “Synods” of self-governing Churches nor extraordinary “Assemblies of Bishops”, given that they meet regularly “once a year, at the invitation of the Chairman” (OD, para. 7.1).

³⁰ The Chairmen of the EA convene the sessions and preside over them; they have the responsibility to supervise – without imposing – the actualization of the decisions taken by the EA (DOS, art. 9), and maintain the competence to represent before civil authorities, the society, and other religious organizations the common stance of the Orthodox Churches of the region. Cf. DOS, 4.b. The other hierarchs don’t have this right *ex officio*, except by delegation from the Chairman.

It becomes, therefore, clear that the emancipation of the Churches of the diaspora is conditioned by their dependence on the Church-Mothers³¹. Of course, a provision was made that “for matters of a more general concern that require, by the decision of the Assembly of Bishops, a pan-Orthodox approach, the Assembly’s chairman refers it to the Ecumenical Patriarch for further pan-Orthodox actions in accordance with the established pan-Orthodox procedure” (OD, para. 6; cf. ROD, art. 10.2). In addition, the EA have the right to communicate and cooperate with the other jurisdictions “for specific linguistic, educational and pastoral issues of a particular Church,” so that “the diversity of national traditions may secure the unity of Orthodoxy in the communion of faith and in the bond of love” (ROD, art. 5.2)³². At any rate, the communities of the diaspora continue to be annexed *de jure* to their ecclesiastical centers, making impossible to recognize a “First” in each region. In short, there is the risk that ethnophyletism, which, although already condemned in 1872, returns triumphally and with synodical approval!

Therefore, the ecclesiastical identity of these communities, although strengthened by the Council, remains pendent, as they find themselves in a state of continuous *transition*, unable to enculturate in the local geo-social and geo-cultural contexts.

The diaspora as a local Church

But how can the “part” coexist with the “whole”, that is, how can the “specific” actions of every single Church be organically integrated into a single whole? In other words, in what way the diaspora can adapt to the circumstances of Western societies? Is it possible to abandon the model of the Assemblies in favor of proper Synods without causing further fragmentations between the communities? The dilemma is whether the ecclesiastical emancipation of the diaspora will be further advanced (at the expense of the “rights” of the

³¹ This structural or constitutional impossibility of forming a common Orthodox position in the diaspora due to the prevalence of the “specific” positions of the (Autocephalous) Churches is evident, for example, in the question of mixed marriages, a frequent reality in the diaspora, which pastoral treatment depends not on the local ecclesiastical communities, but on the judgment of the Autocephalous Church-Mothers. In the synodal text “The sacrament of marriage and its impediments” we read (II 5.c): “Concerning mixed marriages of Orthodox Christians with non-Orthodox Christians] the possibility of the exercise of ecclesiastical *oikonomia* in relation to impediments to marriage must be considered by the Holy Synod of each autocephalous Orthodox Church according to the principles of the holy canons and in a spirit of pastoral discernment.”

³² DOS, 5.2; see also *Synodica IX*, 258.

Autocephalous Churches) or the stagnant waters of this canonical anomaly will be maintained in order to avoid causing further tensions in inter-Orthodox relations³³.

These points lead us to the question of diversity and unity. According to Orthodox ecclesiology, a regional Church is constituted territorially and does not exclude, in principle, the diverse character (linguistic, cultural, national) of its single components³⁴. Such diversity, nevertheless, cannot be expressed outside the synodical frame where, as all Orthodox recognize, emerges the recognition of a “regional” ecclesial entity with a head or “First”, who enjoys concrete authority (see apostolic canon 34 and canon 9 of the council of Antioch). Without the consent of the “First” no bishop can be appointed (see canon 6 of the first ecumenical council). For the same reason, there cannot be two or more bishops in the same place (canons 8 of the first and 12 of the fourth ecumenical councils). The Orthodox Church has always recognized these canonical rules as an inviolable criterion of ecclesiastical communion at a regional level³⁵. In other words, communion between the members of a regional Church is realized not only horizontally (with each other), but also – and

³³ Former Archbishop of America, Dimitrios, referring to the case of the U.S., reported that “in our case, during the six successive Assemblies (2010-2015), a methodical and responsible study was conducted, and several proposals to overcome the canonical anomaly were presented [...] Some church jurisdictions in the United States ... presented the view – and indeed insisted on it – that on account of the objections raised, it would perhaps be preferable for the so-called Orthodox Diaspora to remain in its present state rather than to proceed with changes. They argued that despite being in a state of “canonical anomaly”, a change to the current situation would cause turmoil and confusion within the Orthodox Jurisdictions in America (and by logical extension the other areas of Orthodox Diaspora).” Archbishop Demetrios, “Orthodox Diaspora,” 479.

³⁴ See canon 2 of the second ecumenical council.

³⁵ John Zizioulas, “The Synodal Institution. Historical, ecclesiological and canonical problems,” (in Greek) *Theologia* 80, no. 2 (2009): 13: “The episcopal composition of the Synod has an essential theological basis and therefore it was rightly imposed ecclesologically in the ancient Church. The Bishop, as the head of the Eucharist, is the expression of the unity of the local Church herself, but also of her unity with the other local Churches since the synods have always aimed towards the unity of the Church.” It is necessary to mention, of course, the claim that the canons issued by the Ecumenical Councils cannot be applied literally to the conditions of the twentieth-first century, as the “cities” of the ancient councils are not the same with modern megacities. See also *Synodica XI*, 90-91. In support of the above view, one example is sufficient: thanks to the evolution of transportation and the opening of the market regulations, an Orthodox can be some days of the week (or of the year) member of the diaspora and in other days or week return back to his/her mother Church. What determines in this case his/her ecclesial identity? It would be unrealistic to argue that sojourn in the diaspora, even if only temporarily, has no impact on his/her view over the international environment in which s/he lives or works and that s/he remains indifferent to the fellowship with believers of other Christian denominations.

necessarily – vertically, with the “First” of each “regional” ecclesial entity who represents it to the other Churches. Anything different from the order “many Bishops ↔ One Synod ↔ One/First” is a deviation from what Orthodoxy considers to be the “golden rule” of church unity.³⁶

One could ask if it is possible to apply this principle to the specific conditions of the diaspora. This would inevitably imply removing all dependencies from the Autocephalous Churches and recognizing a “First” among the various communities. Following the footsteps of the Council of Crete, we believe that two options can be projected: a process towards the full ecclesiastical emancipation of the diaspora or the establishment of a “First” by delegation.

Solutions of ecclesiastical emancipation³⁷

1. Consolidate the structure of the EA and officialize their character and gradually strengthen the “common” actions of the communities at the expense of the specific “interests” of each jurisdiction. This would facilitate the formation of a “many jurisdictions → many Church-Mothers → one Assembly” structure, i.e. a *sui generis* ecclesiastical reality, different from the order “one Church ↔ one Bishop.” Yet the latter, though being the only accepted at a pan-orthodox level, seems unable to ensure the unity of the diaspora, due to the interference of the “national” Church-Mothers.
2. Give the mandate to the Chairmen of the EA to exercise the ordinary prerogatives of the “First”³⁸. This would either lead gradually to the

³⁶ A bishop representing a local Church does not express his “own” positions, but what is “common” in the Church he presides over, i.e. that that belongs to his flock and can be shared with the worldwide Church. The conciliar text on the diaspora rightly states that the EA express the “common will” (para. 1.a.), the “joint action” (para. 2.c.), the “common position” (para. 5; see ROD, art. 4), and the “common interests” (ROD art. 5.b), the “common representation” (para. 2.c.) of the communities.

³⁷ “Emancipation” here does not imply the detachment of the Orthodox of the West from their roots nor the “existential struggle” between Eastern and Western Christendom, but the liberation from ethnocentric ideologies, which will favor the synthesis between East and West, the “dynamic meeting of these two traditions of Christianity, based on an authentic approach and redefinition of the ‘Orthodox origins’ of Christian faith”, especially at a time when the vision of a unified Europe has taken shape. P. Vassiliadis, “Orthodoxy and the West. The entrance of Western spirit in the Orthodox space,” (in Greek) in Id., *Η Ορθοδοξία στο σταυροδρόμι* [Orthodoxy at the Crossroad] (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis 1992), 125-126.

³⁸ Such was the proposal of the late John Meyendorff in 1983: “In areas and countries where two or more Orthodox autocephalous Churches are sending clergy to exercise a permanent ministry, canonical order requires the establishment of a united Church. Procedures to be followed are to be elaborated by consultation between all parties involved on the universal or

ecclesiastical emancipation of the diaspora jurisdictions from the Church-Mothers or to the complete fragmentation of Orthodoxy in the West³⁹. Of course, such an option would make able the diaspora to witness, through the “First” hierarchs, its proper identity through statements, pastoral actions, and other outward initiatives, especially in the fields of inter-Christian and interreligious encounter.

Solutions of “First” by delegation

1. To assign the supervision of the diaspora, in whole or upon a case-by-case basis, to a particular Autocephalous Church. This solution has already been applied in the past (see the assignment, from 1908 to 1922, by the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the Church of Greece of the spiritual direction of the Greek-Orthodox communities of Europe and America, or the provisional administration of the so-called “New Lands” by the Church of Greece). The Church (or Churches) that will assume such responsibility will have to carry out this mandate far from national aspirations or state dependencies. Such an arrangement should have a temporary and transitional character, while the supervising Church will have the responsibility to transcend the various communities into “one” sole community.
2. The annexation of the diaspora to the direct administrative authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. This proposal can be justified *de jure* (on the basis of canons 3 of the second, 28 of the fourth, and 36 of the fifth ecumenical councils) and *de facto*, as the Church of Constantinople have survived thanks to her long supra-national

local level. Pluralism of languages and traditions will be maintained and guaranteed wherever necessary, through the establishment of appropriate structures organized on a temporary basis.” John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church* (New York, Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press 1983), 109.

³⁹ In the area of the diaspora the granting of Autonomy, according to para. 2.e of the conciliar text “Autonomy and the Means by Which it is Proclaimed”, is possible “except by pan-Orthodox consensus, upheld by the Ecumenical Patriarch in accordance with prevailing pan-Orthodox practice.” In the preface of the document, it is clarified that “[it is] the exclusive prerogative of an autocephalous Church to initiate and complete the process of granting autonomy to a certain segment of its canonical jurisdiction – autonomous Churches shall not be established in the geographical areas of the Orthodox Diaspora.” It should be stressed that the canonical regulation on diaspora should consider that when communion with the Church of Rome will be restored the latter will exercise the pastoral administration of the Orthodox of Western Europe.

conscience in the context of the Byzantine and later of the Ottoman Empire, as well as through her inter-Orthodox, inter-Christian and interreligious initiatives during the last two centuries. This mission along with collaboration with international organisms and ecclesial bodies (Catholic Church, European Union) has rendered the Church of Constantinople an important international religious subject with a long-standing experience that has constantly stimulated the openness of the Orthodox Church to modern challenges.

Diaspora and missionary witness

God knows only one “diaspora”: that which operates the conversion of the world. In the early New Testament literature, the Jews, along with the Gentiles, formed God’s “new people” with the task to bring the whole of human gender to communion with God. James greeted “all God’s people scattered over the whole world” (Jm. 1:1). Just as the scattered Christianized Jews were a means for the Gentiles to meet Christ, today the scattered Christians can offer their faith so that all nations come together in the one Lord⁴⁰.

A starting point, therefore, for the reflection on the role of the diaspora could be art. 5.1a of ROD, that refers to the fulfillment of its “missionary obligations”. Although such obligations are part of a wider set of duties (including charity, education, pastoral care), the mission is, by its very nature, the greatest challenge of twenty-first century Orthodoxy. In general, the term “mission” signifies the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in all global situations as well and the unifying and sanctifying work of the Church towards those “inside” and “outside”. More specifically, the Council stated that:

The Church of Christ in the world is called to express once again and to promote the content of her prophetic witness to the world, grounded on the experience of faith and recalling her true mission through the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the cultivation of a sense of unity among her flock. In this way, she opens up a broad field of opportunity since an essential element of her ecclesiology promotes Eucharistic communion and unity within a shattered world⁴¹.

⁴⁰ See entry “Diaspora,” (in Greek) in *Λεξικό Βιβλικής Θεολογίας* [Dictionary of Biblical Theology] (Athens: Artos Zois 1980), 261.

⁴¹ Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, “The Mission of the Church in Today’s World,” accessed October 25, 2021, www.holycouncil.org, F.9.

But how this “prophetic witness” can be effectively promoted today? According to Crete, the mission of the Church consists of *the preaching of the Gospel* and the *apostolic work*⁴². The proclamation of the Gospel concerns those who live today in a “pre-Christ” situation or ignore Him. The apostolic work, on the other hand, is manifested wherever the Gospel has been already spread but the enculturation of faith in the life of the people has not been yet accomplished⁴³. In either case, it is a Lord’s commandment the missionary *exodus* of the Church to the world, to every expression and dimension of human existence, to manifest prophetically the eschaton, that is, the Kingdom of God, *within* the history⁴⁴.

On the other hand, re-evangelization designs the special need to update the “apostolic work” to the needs of today’s globalized and secularized world. Re-evangelization embraces the preaching of the Kingdom to those peoples whose faith is weakened and reminds what defines human history: Christ and His gospel⁴⁵.

Evangelism and re-evangelization are accomplished by inter-Christian dialogue, which’s purpose is to project to the heterodox the Orthodox faith and tradition in the goal of restoring Christian unity,⁴⁶ and by interreligious cooperation, which contributes to the promotion of mutual trust, reconciliation, and peace⁴⁷. In all these cases, the mission is at the core of Christian action, which is the bearing of witness to the truth about God (which implies the sharing of the life of Trinity), the ecclesiasticalization of the world, and the sharing of the Eucharistic altar (the “liturgy after the Liturgy”), which distributes to the “near or far off” what was been already offered in the Eucharist gathering⁴⁸.

It follows that mission is a ministry of a continuous “liturgy” offered by the Church to the world, in every part of the universe. This liturgy derives from

⁴² See Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, “Encyclical,” accessed October 25, 2021, www.holycouncil.org, para. 6.

⁴³ See Holy and Great Council, “The Mission,” B.3: “In the face of this situation, which has led to the weakening of the view of the human person, the duty of the Orthodox Church is, as it has been projected today, through its preaching, theology, worship and pastoral work, the truth of freedom in Christ.”

⁴⁴ Cf. Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, “Message,” accessed October 25, 2021, www.holycouncil.org, para. 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 2.

⁴⁶ Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World”, accessed October 25, 2021, www.holycouncil.org, para. 4.

⁴⁷ Holy and Great Council, “Message,” para. 4 and 10.

⁴⁸ Holy and Great Council, “Encyclical,” para. 6: “Participation in the holy Eucharist is a source of missionary zeal for the evangelization of the world. By participating in the holy Eucharist and praying in the Sacred Synaxis for the whole world (*oikoumene*), we are called to continue the “liturgy after the Liturgy” and to offer witness concerning the truth of our faith before God and mankind, sharing God’s gifts with all mankind.”

a center, Christ, and is transmitted to all creation, revealing the truth about God and distributing His gifts to humankind. Mission invites humans to reject whatever keeps them away from the center-Christ and seek what in the various socio-cultural contexts can lead to communion with God⁴⁹.

Proclamation-dialogue-cooperation

Can the above missionary values be applied to the diaspora? The Orthodox who migrated to the West brought with them the heritage and values of their homeland and the nostalgia for their religious and cultural tradition. Often, their confrontation with the West did not avoid apologetic attitudes and was expressed as a denial of everything that had a Western imprint. Other times, this encounter led to the overcome of old sterile anti-Western mindsets and to the re-evaluation of Eastern theology. At any rate, the “territory” where the mission is realized is not that of the one or the other State but that of the “discipleship of all nations” (Mt. 28:19), while its *raison d’être* is not found in being an extension of national Churches, but in giving birth to communities that worship God’s eschatological Kingdom. In this way, the various national references can become “courtyards” through which the light of the Gospel can illuminate the lives of peoples and cultivate a sense of spiritual unity beyond all partial ethno-religious narratives.

Orthodox diaspora is not located to any particular “center”, but it is spread out to the edges of the earth (Acts 1:8), even if it lives in heterogeneous and multiform environments⁵⁰. The diaspora can synthesize the most relevant elements of Christian witness:⁵¹ the proclamation of the Gospel to “those outside”; the dialogue with the heterodox and faithful of other religions;⁵² the collaboration with other Christians to recover the world’s Christian spiritual

⁴⁹ For Archbishop of Albania Anastasios, the Church is always “Apostolic” and offers the gospel of Salvation to the whole world, continuing the work that Christ started 2.000 years ago. See Anastasios, “Inaugural Speech”.

⁵⁰ After all, “the word ‘diaspora’ alludes *conceptually* to scattering and dispersion, while *ecclesiologically* and *canonically* it alludes to nothing!” Papatomas, “Autocephaly and Diaspora,” 411.

⁵¹ It should be noted that the diaspora is a result of the migration of Orthodox and not of missionary activities (except for the Russian missionary presence in North America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries). For this reason, no Autocephalous Church – the Ecumenical Patriarchate perhaps being excepted, on the basis of canon 28 of the fourth ecumenical council – can claim any kind of “maternal” rights” on these communities.

⁵² Holy and Great Council, “Message”, para. 3.

roots;⁵³ the use of ethno-diversity as a means to transcend national narratives, which insofar have exercised a negative impact on inter-Orthodox relations.

Can, therefore, the presence of the diaspora in the complex global reality be based on the triptych “proclamation-dialogue-cooperation” and recover all the authentic elements of the Orthodox tradition, transforming them into evangelical means to unify the modern societies? The answer is “yes”, on the condition that one accepts that the diaspora needs communities less contingent on national “centers” and more missionary-orientated, which function is not to be a mirror of national aspirations but to act as Eucharistic and missionary bodies that share their pastoral experience with all Autocephalous Churches (as provided by the ROD, art. 5.2) and facilitate Pan-Orthodox solutions to major problems. Following this path, the diaspora will be indeed beneficial to the worldwide Orthodox Christianity of the twenty-first century.

⁵³ On the one hand, Orthodoxy is becoming more “Western” and, on the other, the West has recognized her co-habitation with the Orthodox as an inevitable element of her *Christian* identity.

ROLES OF THE DIASPORA CHRISTIANS IN MISSION AND EVANGELISM FROM AN AFRICAN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT. This paper will focus on the specific roles that the diaspora orthodox Christian can play in mission and evangelism today. The main objective is to bring into the attention, and especially from a missiological point of view, the fact that the diaspora Christians can have an active role to play in the mission of the church. The active Orthodox Church missions has been understand to mean overseas mission and especially in Africa, Asia and in the Albania. However, in the course of the orthodox Christian migration history, there has been missiological connection between the diaspora Christians in the hosting countries and their respective home countries. The focus of this paper is on this missiological connection and how it can translate to an active role of the involved Christians to the mission of the church in Africa. The paper tracks the mission praxis of the diaspora Christians in Africa and beyond.

Keywords: roles, diaspora Christians, mission and evangelism, philanthropic works, diakonia, witness.

Historical Survey of the Diaspora Orthodox Christians in Africa

Orthodoxy in African is witnessed in three main categories, name; the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This paper concentrates only to the orthodox Christians under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa have its headquarters in Alexandria, Egypt and extend its ecclesiastical jurisdiction into the entire Africa. It serves the eastern orthodox churches which comprise Greek speaking and Russian speaking orthodox faithful mainly living and working

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in major African cities as well as the native African orthodox communities. Most of the native Orthodox Christians are in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Congo, while significant number of Greek and Russian Orthodox Communities are in South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.²

Throughout history, the Alexandrian church has been known for; a) its involvement in the ecumenical councils and its great contribution to the formation of the Christian doctrines through its bishops like Athanasius the Great (AD 298-373), b) formation of the Nicene-Constantinople's creed and Christian doctrines like that of incarnation, c) allegorical method of interpreting of the Holy Scriptures through its famous catechetical school; through which the first Christian philosophers like Clement of Alexandria and Origen successfully explained the biblical faith philosophically and systematically, d) monasticism, whereby ordinary Christians like Antony the Great (251-356) took a total commitment to the following of Christ (Mk 19:17-21) and made it to the desert to live a life of asceticism and contemplation. Monasticism inspired many people like St. Pachomius (292-346) who developed the cenobitical or communal monastic way of life which has influenced the world monasticism. According to John Baur (2005), the Arabic conquest marked a turning point in the history of the church in Egypt because the implementation of Islamic policy was discriminative to the minority who opt to remain Christians. This kind of legislative policies affected also the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, and because of persecutions the Patriarch and a large number of Christians fled Egypt. However, after the Turks took Egypt in 1517, and Persecutions were over, the patriarchate re-opened with few Greek speaking followers.

The decline of orthodox Christians in Egypt made the patriarchate look beyond to other orthodox Christians living in Africa. These other orthodox Christians were mostly the Greek communities who had settled in major African cities for farming and trade. They had come into Africa after they fled Greece during the Turkish occupation. The first such community in sub-Saharan Africa settled in Beira, Mozambique in 1899 where they built an Orthodox Church and school. In most case these Greek communities had their own churches, cultural centres and schools. Although for years these communities were not open to the native Africans, their presence attracted very few Africans either because of intermarriage or interest in becoming orthodox Christians. Those who showed serious interests were allowed to join the Greek schools and learn the Orthodox faith, Greek language and culture. The best example is the Ugandan students

² Njoroge John. 2014. Article: Ecumenical Dialogue in the perspective of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism; Resources for Theological Education*. Volos Academy Publication: Volos (in cooperation with WCC publication, Geneva and Regnum Books International, Oxford) 327 – 332.

who joined a Greek school in Moshi Tanzania. This school belonged to a Greek community of sisal farmers and they had a Greek priest by the name Fr. Nikodemos Sarikas, who cooperated with Fr. Ruben Mukasa Spartas of the Orthodox Church in Uganda.

Over the years, both the Greek and Russian communities have opened up and more interaction with the native African Christians is much visible. Currently the Greek Orthodox Christians are the majority recorded as follows in South Africa (138,000), Zimbabwe (3,000), Cameroon (1,200) Zambia (800), Uganda (450) and Kenya (100).

South Africa has the largest diplomatic communities from Russia and other traditional orthodox countries like Bulgarian, Romania and Serbia. South Africa has had three Russian orthodox churches but the most known is St. Sergius of Rodonezh the wonderworker in Midrand a suburb in Johannesburg³. This church was consecrated on 2nd March 2003 by then the DECR Chairman Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad (now Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia) co-celebrating with then Metropolitan Seraphim of Johannesburg and Pretoria (the Patriarchate of Alexandria)⁴. This church has been an icon of attraction to orthodoxy for many people in South Africa and neighboring countries.

According to the latest estimates, up to 5,000 Russian-speaking people currently reside in South Africa; majority of whom came to ⁵South Africa from the former USSR in 1990s.

There is a Romanian Orthodox Community in South Africa. The Romanian parish of St. Andrew the Apostle was started in the year 2000 by the Romanian believers from Johannesburg⁶. These churches are under the jurisdiction Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, however now with the contradictory issue of recognition of Ukrainian Autocephaly by the patriarch Theodoros II, and even having 102 native African clergymen⁷ joining the Moscow patriarchate it

³ Russian Orthodox Church in Midrand South Africa; Available at www.jozirediscovered.co.za accessed on 28th October 2021.

⁴ A talk with the rector of the Church of St. Sergius of Radonezh in Johannesburg (South Africa), Archpriest Daniel Lugovoy. Available at: http://www.spc.rs/eng/whether_africa_or_russia_orthodox_parish_life_basically_same. Accessed on 28th October 2021.

⁵ A talk with the rector of the Church of St. Sergius of Radonezh in Johannesburg (South Africa), Archpriest Daniel Lugovoy. Available at: http://www.spc.rs/eng/whether_africa_or_russia_orthodox_parish_life_basically_same. Accessed on 28th October 2021.

⁶ Romanian Orthodox Parish 'St. Andrew the Apostle' in Johannesburg South Africa; Available at <https://ropasa.co.za>, Accessed on 28th October 2021.

⁷ Moscow "adopted" 102 clergymen of the patriarchate of Alexandria, forms exarchate of Africa" in Orthodox Times new. Available at www.orthodoxtimes.com Accessed on 13th January 2022. This has also been an agenda of the Patriarchate of Alexandria synod meeting in Alexandria from 10th -12th January 2022.

would be an interesting topic that would change the history of the orthodoxy in Africa. There are also native African orthodox believers in the diaspora. Majority of these are students who went to study in America and Greece and decided to remain in the host countries even after their studies. This area of native African orthodox believers in the diaspora hasn't been paid attention to particularly on their role in mission of the church.

Diaspora Christians Attachment to their Home Countries

Diaspora Christians are uniquely attached to their home countries in various ways which are missiological in nature. The ways through which the diaspora Christians are attached to their home countries and as well as to the host countries is a paradigm that require to be studied for the sake of active mission of the church.

The fundamental attachment thriving almost among all those living in diaspora is identity. Identity starts with seeking self-identity and acceptance in a new context. Self –identity can be understood in the context of feeling of the '*one-self*' and fundamentally the value that defines who we "*are*". This is achieved by looking for people of the same cultural values, languages, nationality or even peers in a given fora of life, who either affirms the inner feelings of the "self" or contribute to value addition to the same. When this feeling is affirmed or added value to achieving it, one creates high levels of "*sense of belonging*". This has been well demonstrated when one observes the patterns of the orthodox Christians in African diaspora.

Creating Greek, Russian or even Romanian speaking community goes beyond the Eucharistic gathering on Sundays or feast days in the orthodox liturgical tradition. This brings about the sense of belonging to a community because they share the joy of communicating in their native languages, to help children develop their home language skills and culture(s). This is why these communities do keenly observe national holidays, conduct festive concerts, and host cultural events as per their home countries. These activities are normally understood by the hosts but not by the natives of the hosting countries. The natives of the hosting countries feels what is going on within the diaspora orthodox communities is alien to them, minimizing missional curiosity. This challenges the diaspora orthodox Christians to open up more to the natives in order to raise the missional curiosity that pave ways for conversion to orthodoxy.

Another fundamental promoter of self-identity and sense of value is the family. Diaspora orthodox Christians like any other persons in the diaspora do keep a very close connection with their families and relatives back home. This is achieved through different means like visits by family members and hosting relatives as they seek employments in the hosting countries. When this is successfully achieved it brings a strong sense of value and dignity to the person in the diaspora, while the same reciprocate to the members of the family back in the country of origin. The sense of value and dignity is God's gift to humanity despite place of origin or residence, class or race, gender or even religion. God created every human person with special values and worthiness which emanates from being created in the Image and Likeness of God⁸.

Additionally, diaspora Christians are attached to their home countries through observing religious and cultural festivals. One of the strongest area of attachment is the orthodox faith, which is imbued to the language and patriotism. According to the Romanian community in South Africa adherence to the faith brings them together *"Through the sustained material and moral efforts of the parish with its organized spiritual, social and cultural activities, has contributed in keeping of the Romanian Orthodox faith and values among the believers and within the framework of South African society"*⁹. This trend has propagated different orthodox churches in the diaspora to give more emphasis on nationalism over evangelization and witnessing of the orthodox faith in the host countries. The best examples are the different orthodox churches in the United States of America and the importation of orthodox clergy to serve the diaspora communities from the country/ national church of origin. While on one hand this is an advantage to the diaspora Christians in regard to their attachment to their home countries, on the other hand, it is a disadvantage to the witnessing of the mission of the church in the hosting country. This comes along because of the given priorities by the diaspora Christians which necessary are not missional in nature.

Diaspora Christians' Priorities and the Mission of the Church

In most cases, the diaspora Christians are concerned of their own welfare in the host country; these includes (a) livelihood, meaning work/employment, actually this is one of the primary reason for migration from their countries of origin to the hosting countries, (b) legality of their residency and work (c) welfares of their families back home and, (d) sustainability of their identity through faith. As far

⁸ See the story of creation in Genesis 1: 26-27.

⁹ Romanian Orthodox Parish 'St. Andrew the Apostle' in Johannesburg South Africa; Available at <https://ropasa.co.za>, Accessed on 28th October 2021.

as the mission and witnessing of the orthodox faith in the hosting country is concern, the leaders of these diaspora communities are called to direct their adherents to the apostolic nature of the church. According to metropolitan John Zizioulas, the apostolicity of the church doesn't mean only the historical continuity and unbroken lineage of bishops to the apostles and the apostles to Christ, thus forming the so-called apostolic succession, rather the apostolicity here means and emphasizes a collegiality of persons with an eschatological function¹⁰. Eschatological function denotes the original apostolate of Christ's teachings and His '*calling and sending*' the twelve to proclaim the good news to the world as per the great commissions¹¹. The twelve disciples form the inward layers of the teachings (*didascalias*) of the church and they even today remain in the church as the pillars of the church; *and the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb* (Rev. 21:14). Furthermore Archbishop Anastasios Yiannoulatos enlightens: apostolicity of the church implies having an "apostolic fire and zeal to preach the gospel 'to every creature' (Mk 16:15), because it nurtures its members so that they may become 'witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8)¹²". This new understanding of the apostolicity of the church as an actual mission endeavor of the church highlights a significant approach to mission and its purposes in the world today. This approach reminds the Orthodox Christians that they are called to participate fully in witnessing the gospel because the gospel is for all peoples and therefore, never will the mission of the church end unless all peoples (sheep) are brought into the fold (church) of the good shepherd (Christ) (John 10:1-17). This implies that diaspora Christians have a critical missiological role to play in the hosting countries.

Missiological Roles of the Diaspora Orthodox Christians in Africa

Over the years the diaspora orthodox Christians have been depending on the home country or canonical ecclesiastical jurisdiction for spiritual nurture and care during their stay in the host countries. For example, the ecumenical patriarchate has been in charge for non-traditional orthodox ecclesiastical jurisdictions like the Americas and Australia. It only in 1921 during the decline of the Greek communities in Egypt, the patriarchate of Alexandria extended its

¹⁰ Zizioulas John D, *Being As Communion; Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002) p 173.

¹¹ See Matthew 28:20:16-20, Mark 16: 14-20, Luke 24:44-49 and John 20: 19-30.

¹² Yainnoulatos Anastasios; "Orthodox Mission: Past, Present, Future." *In Your Will be Done: Orthodox in Mission*, ed. George Lemopoulos. Katerini, Greece: WCC Publications, Geneva 1989.

jurisdiction to the rest of Africa which was then under the Patriarchate of Constantinople¹³. Before the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, became missional active in 1947, after the acceptance of the native Africans orthodox communities by the synod, the Greek and Russian communities had their mission activities focus within their communities. Mission activities were organized in a way they meet their cultural, educational and spiritual needs. They had constructed schools, cultural centers and churches. These communities were receiving Clergy to minister to them either directly from their countries of origin or from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. For example in 1908 such a priest, Father Nicodemus Sarikas, was sent to a Greek community of immigrants in Johannesburg, South Africa¹⁴ as mentioned above.

For many years these communities exercised “*self-focused internal mission*”, without focusing to the external mission outreach to the native Africans. This has made the orthodox faith in Africa to look like it is only a faith of the immigrants. One can argue that, the time these communities have been Africa could have been sufficient enough to witness to the African native communities the orthodox faith. Today, there is a call for these communities to change their missional focus and propagate for integration of these communities and the rest of African society. The point of witness would be where individuals from some of these communities opens up and create interest to evangelize to the African native communities. In the African orthodox history, his has taken places in two ways: i) through intermarriages between Greeks and Africans as well as Russians and Africans. Through intermarriages some Africans have been introduced to the orthodox faith. ii). A Greek priest by the name Fr. Nikodemos Sarikas cooperated with Fr. Ruben Mukasa Spartas of Uganda and facilitated Ugandan students to join a Greek School belonging to a community of sisal farmers in Moshi Tanzania. Later, some of these students went to Greece to study theology either in the university of Athens or Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Their presence in Greek churches caused enthusiasm for Greek Church mission in Africa. In fact, their presence rekindled once the forgotten or inactive aspect of the orthodox missionary work¹⁵.

¹³ A. Tillyridis (Archbishop Makarios of Kenya) article, *Chronology* in the Yearbook and Review 2012 p 48. Also see Hayes Stephen article: A History of the Orthodox Mission in Tropical Africa; (originally published in *Missionalia*, the journal of the Southern African Missiological Society) available at: <http://www.orthodoxytz.com/OrthodoxMission.asp> lastly accessed on 20th January 2015.

¹⁴ See Hayes Stephen article: A History of the Orthodox Mission in Tropical Africa; (originally published in *Missionalia*, the journal of the Southern African Missiological Society) available at: <http://www.orthodoxytz.com/OrthodoxMission.asp> lastly accessed on 20th January 2015.

¹⁵ Kallistos Timothy Ware (Metropolitan of Diokleia), *The Orthodox Church*, (London: Penguin Books, 1997) p. 190.

Conclusion

In the modern times there is a paradigm shift where the “*mother church*” in the country of origin is looking upon the diaspora Christians for a missional identity abroad or in the world ecumenical forums. This has changed the missional focus and the role of the diaspora Christians to a more ecumenical, financial and geopolitical support for the “*mother church*” in the country of origin. Africa still needs an active missional engagement from the diaspora orthodox Christians. The point of engagement would be active cross-cultural integration of the orthodox faith. Cross-cultural integration creates a platform for communal relationship in terms of Eucharistic celebration, communal identity as orthodox Christians and learning from each other.

As Africa aspire for a more “*witness-oriented*” approach to mission engagement, it is critical for both the diaspora Christians and native Christians to collective focus to witnessing the orthodox faith in the continent. Africa as a continent and as a people, there is immersive denominational and religious competitions which are leading to misleading theologies which need’s response from the Orthodox Church. There is also inter-orthodox tensions among the Patriarchate of Alexandria, Russian Patriarchate and the native African clergymen who wishes to crossover to Moscow patriarchate because their missional grievances hasn’t been addressed by the local church bishops. This require educational training and formation for the orthodox clergy and laity. Currently, there is no theological training taking place in the orthodox seminary in Nairobi because of financial constraints. It is possible for both the diaspora and native Christians to own and support theological training in Africa.

Mission of the church is characterized by what Fr. Ion Bria calls “*liturgy after the liturgy*”¹⁶, a paradigm that combines Eucharistic celebration and philanthropic diakonia that promotes human dignity in mission. Diaspora Christians are called to play an active role in the philanthropic diakonia, where following the teachings of St. Basil the Great (330-379 AD) we fulfil our moral and missional obligations even outside the walls of the church buildings. In one of his homilies, Constantelos quotes:

“What are you going to tell the Judge [God] when He asks you about your selfish style of life? The bread you do not use is the bread of the hungry; the luxurious garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the person who is naked; the shoes you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot; the gold [money] you keep locked away is the money of

¹⁶ Bria Ion, Go Forth in Peace; *Orthodox Perspectives in Mission* (Geneva: WCC Mission Series, 1986) p 38.

the poor; the charities you do not distribute are injustices you commit, injustices for which you will be judged. Basil called upon all the faithful to feel embarrassed hearing about the philanthropic accounts of the Hellenes [pagans], and urged them to imitate the philanthropic work of the early Christians"¹⁷

This concludes that the roles of diaspora orthodox Christians in the mission of the church are divine, relational, equitable, communal and contextual just like African women using mortar and pestles collectively.

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¹⁷ Demetrios J. Constantelos, *Origins of Christian Orthodox Diakonia: Christian Orthodox Philanthropy in Church History in Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 52:1 -4 2007.

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III. HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE LATE 1940S AND 1950S, ACCORDING TO THE CIA ARCHIVES

DRAGOȘ BOICU¹

ABSTRACT. The history of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist regime is still far from being known and the historical circumstances are not yet fully understood. In addition to numerous historical sources that can shed light on this rather vast subject, an important resource proves to be the CIA archive. Recently declassified documents reflect a new set of information and describe circumstances that allow for a more nuanced interpretation of the position of Patriarch Justinian Marina in the 1940s and 1950s. This paper aims to explore the Information Reports and Staff notes prepared by the CIA analysts during this period.

Keywords: Romanian Orthodox Church, Justinian Marina, Communism in Romania, CIA Archives, Church and state relationship

The activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist regime has already been the subject of a vast and very interesting research that has approached either general topics, or, on the contrary, well-specified elements. However, the subject is not yet exhausted, the Security Archives still contain a lot of valuable information that helps us understand better a not-so-distant past, to contextualize certain theological directions, but especially to be grateful to those vertical clerics, who despite those conditions wore with dignity the banner of Christian faith.

A surprising source of information about the Romanian Orthodox Church during the communist regime can be found also in the CIA archives, recently declassified. What is even more interesting is the fact that the information contained in the syntheses made across the Atlantic reflects unique aspects and a very realistic perspective on several problems related to the ecclesial life in

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Romania. Starting from these documents we will try through a chronological and thematic synthesis to see the perception of the specialized commissions of the Central Agency for Information on church life during Patriarch Justinian Marina (1948-1977).

The CIA analysts have attached great importance to the religious phenomenon in Romania and the Soviet bloc in general. They were interested especially in the social and political implications and internationally effects of the religious entities. Of particular interest were the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Catholic Church, as well as Protestant denominations. But there is also valuable information about the Romanian Orthodox Church, especially from the 1950s. In the confidential reports compiled by the analysts we find a very documented record of the changes that have affected the religious life in Romania.

Some reports in late 1940s

Some of these summaries are made up of official documents (laws, documents published in *Monitorul Oficial* [the Official Gazette], statements and articles in the official periodicals of the communist regime). But the “spiciest” part, full of unique elements is based on information gathered through unofficial channels.

A first report – very well documented – is distributed by the CIA analysts on 17 November 1949 regarding the “Persecution of Religion in Romania”. This document provides a detailed summary of the Romanian Government’s actions against the Catholic Church, insisting on the Marxist propaganda, the direct actions, and the legislative means, especially the “Law for the Reform of Schools and Teaching”, the “Law on Cults and its Application”, and the “Law for the Nationalization of Private Health Institutions”.

The interest in the Roman Catholic Church is justified by the political ramifications of the Vatican's influence in the Soviet bloc through its dioceses and its clergy, which were considered agents and “weapons of the Anglo-Saxon Imperialism”.

Significant for this context is the quote from the declarations of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej before the National Assembly on the occasion of the enactment of the new Constitution (April 13, 1948):

“The Pope will undoubtedly find occasion to assail our constitution because it does not tally with the Vatican’s tendencies, which are to interfere in the internal concerns of various countries under the pretext of evangelizing the Catholic faithful [...] Who knows, whether the Vatican will not consider

anathematizing us on the pretext that our constitution does not provide for the submission of our fellow countrymen of Catholic persuasion to the political directives of the Vatican, or because we not allow ourselves to be tempted by America's golden calf, at the feet of which the Vatican would bring its faithful."²

The next chapter concerns "The Government's policy for the Suppression of the Uniate Church", from the appeal of Blaj made by Nicolae Bălan (May 15, 1948) to the Congress of Cluj (October 1, 1948), insisting on the direct effects of this *de facto* and *de jure* suppression of the Uniate Church of Romania.

Analysts' concern for the Greek Catholic Church must be understood through its importance because it played an essential role in the cultural, political, and religious development of Romanians in Transylvania. Its importance resides also in the great number of faithful, since they grew to exceed one and half million souls. In order to suppress "this important and venerated organism of the country's national life", the government undertook a vast program, which was criticized in a *Note of protest* handed by the Apostolic Nuncio on October 2, 1948 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Romanian People's Republic claiming that "the return" of the Greek-Catholics clerics "into the bosom of their mother, the Orthodox Church" was made under duress:

"The priests were in many instances brought by force to the local prefectures. In the offices of the Sigurantza (state security police) they were intimidated, threatened with imprisonment, with separation from their families, with deportation, and even with death. Those who resisted the initial acts of violence were thrown in underground cells, ill-treated, subject to exhausting questioning, and finally set free only when, broken down by the inhuman treatment of their jailors, they accepted to sign" the resolution of "re-entry to the bosom of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and the definitive severance of the ties with Papal Rome".³

The Romanian Government denounced this *Note of protest* as "an interference in the domestic affairs of the Romanian Popular Republic and an attempt to attack freedom of religion" and stated that "these defamatory assertions are a new proof of the antagonistic attitude systematically adopted by the Apostolic Nunciature toward the Popular Republic of Romania and

² *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, p. 12, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83-00415r003800080002-9>, accessed March 15, 2021. I opted to render the texts exactly as they were written in the official reports, transcribing them exactly as they were published by the Agency.

³ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 24-26.

toward its reforms and realizations in democracy.” The protest of the Nuncio has been catalogued as a typical provocation of “the campaign carried on by the imperialist circles and their agents against the democratic achievements of the Romanian People’s Republic”⁴.

Of course, this line of actions must be seen in the broader context of the policies dictated by Moscow, where it started a concerted campaign against all Greek-Catholic Churches from the entire soviet bloc. For example, the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church was suppressed after the Lvov synod (March 1946) which proclaimed the “voluntary and canonical dissolution” of the union with the Vatican. Likewise, the Greek-Catholics from Lithuania were forced to renounce their bonds with the Vatican⁵. In Slovakia 400.000 Greek-Catholics were united by force with Orthodox Church⁶. This is why the situation from Romania was following the pattern executed by all Communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

Considering these events and pressures endured by the Churches connected with the Vatican, one might easily conclude that the Romanian Orthodox Church was privileged and supported by the state. Therefore, the third part of this report emphasizes the harsh conditions in which the Romanian Patriarchy tried to survive.

“Because the Bucharest government saw fit to start its fight against the various denominations – against religion itself – by oppressing the Roman Catholic Church and by striking down the Uniate Church, this action should not be understood to imply a persecution of certain denominations with the purpose of protecting or of favoring others. The action – and this cannot be sufficiently stressed – is aimed against religion as such. Its actual development is merely a matter of opportune tactics.”⁷

Despite all reassuring appearances and its reiterated benevolent declarations, the Petru Groza⁸ regime never ceased

⁴ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 27.

⁵ Francesco La Rocca, “At the Crossroads: The History of the Greek-Catholic Church in Lithuania”, *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* Vol. 31: Iss. 1 (2012), Article 1, 15. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol31/iss1/1>, accessed February 2, 2021.

⁶ Nektarios Vafeiadis, „The presence of the Orthodox Church in the Czech Republic and Slovakia”, p. 3 https://www.academia.edu/8300748/The_presence_of_the_Orthodox_Church_in_the_Czech_Republic_and_Slovakia, accessed March 5, 2021.

⁷ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 30.

⁸ Petru Groza (1884-1958) was the first Prime Minister of the Communist Party-dominated government under Soviet occupation during the early stages of the Communist regime in Romania.

“its policy subjugating the Romanian Orthodox Church to its own ends. In this field as in others, is proceeded systematically, in accordance with a well-laid plan. An initial phase was marked by mass purges of the Orthodox hierarchy and clergy – similar to the purges carried out in other bodies (army, magistrature, education, etc.). In this manner, the administration secured control of leadership, by the installation of sure and devoted elements in all key positions. It was only the second phase that was marked by the introducing of a new legal regime, which gave the Romanian Orthodox Church the modified standing that tallied with Communist interests. This new standing and organization could, obviously, not stop short of reducing the religious and educational role of the Orthodox Church to an absolute minimum. This, in turn, could lead only to a gradual transformation of that Church into an instrument of propaganda, and finally, into a mere tool of the administration’s basic policy: the ultimate communization of Romania. It is obvious, too, that the third phase must necessarily follow: the rulers of the Romanian People’s Republic, following the example available in the Soviet Union itself, must seek to assign to the Orthodox Church a place similar to that which it has in the U.S.S.R.”⁹

The report insists on the tactics adopted by the Groza government, in its action aimed at the subjection of the Romanian Orthodox Church, using available evidence, identifying a pattern of this antireligious policy.

According to the analysts the first concern of the Communist regime was to secure the compliance of the entire Orthodox clergy, from the highest prelates to the last priest.

“It was hoped that the prestige of the Church might be used on behalf of the government’s aims without resorting to spectacular legislative measures that could not fail to dismay public opinion. A first step in this direction was an appeal addressed to the clergy, inviting them to adhere politically to the new regime. The so-called ‘Union of Democratic Priests,’ however, failed to gain much of a following in spite of all high-sounding promises, and in spite of the presence of one of the principal promoters of that ‘Union,’ the Reverend Burducea¹⁰, as Minister of Cults in the Groza government.”¹¹

Regarding the purges operated by the communist regime against any form of resistance, the report underlines that the clergy which did not conform to the new situation were forced to resign their communities in sheer desperation.

⁹ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 30.

¹⁰ Constantin Burducea was the Minister of Religions in the Government of Petru Groza between March 8, 1945 - November 1946.

¹¹ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 30.

Such was the case of Bishop Irineu Mihălcescu, Archbishop of Iași and Suceava (July 22, 1947). Another form of purge was the draft law of the pensioning of priests and the redistribution of episcopal sees and set up new rules for episcopal assemblies, submitted to Parliament in March 1947, by the then Minister of Cults, Radu Rosculeț.

The retirement of clergy was sanctioned by a new law (No. 166/1947) that provided an age limit of seventy years for all clergy. “Clearly, this provision gave the government a free hand to rid itself, with a show of legality, of any resistance in high quarters. And indeed, the Metropolitan of Oltenia, Nifon Criveanu and Bishops Lucian Triteanu of Roman, Cosma Petrovici of the Lower Danube, and Gheronte of Constantza, were ousted almost immediately”¹².

The changes operated to the procedure of Episcopal and Metropolitan elections included from now on members of parliament, ministers of state, and state secretaries belonging to the diocese. Thus, to include both members of parliament and of the government, the regime obtained a dominant position dictating which candidate should be elected. The effects of this interference were felt first in the elections that took place in November 1947, when three bishops entered the synod. Among these prelates the Report dwells a moment upon the personality of Justinian Marina, elected Metropolitan of Moldavia:

“A simple priest in the Ramnic eparchy, Justinian Marina had been closely connected with the dissident “peasant” formation headed by Anton Alexandrescu, who had dropped out of the National Peasant party. He succeeded in becoming at one stroke Metropolitan Bishop of Moldavia, without having shown the least prominence or especial merit as a churchman. On May 24, 1948, he was elected Patriarch of R.P.R. Orthodox Church, succeeding the late Patriarch Nicodemus. As Patriarch, Justinian Marina, who had by then asserted himself publicly as a devoted partisan of the regime, was certainly the right man in the right place, in the eyes of the Groza government. Already he had illustrated himself by the pastoral of March 14, 1948, in which he glorifies the draft constitution of the R.P.R. From his latest and most exalted throne, he has rendered yeoman services to the regime, both by his words and by his deeds. No more devoted tool could a Communist dispensation find anywhere.

Thus, on the occasion of his enthronement, on June 6, 1948, Patriarch Justinian not only appealed to the Uniate (Greek Catholic) faithful, urging them to pass to the Orthodox Church; but he thundered against the Concordat, denouncing loudly the alleged inequality set up among denominations by that accord with the Holy See. The new Patriarch, it should be noted, has also shown himself to be a fanatic partisan of the closest possible ties with the Orthodox Church of the Soviet Union”¹³.

¹² *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 31.

¹³ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 31-32.

A similar portrait is depicted by another staff note which reported that:

“The newly elected Patriarch of Romania, in spite of the opposition of Prime Minister Groza, was elected following powerful pressure by Pauker¹⁴ on instructions from Russia. He is a rude country priest. As a result, most Romanians have ceased going to church and performing their religious duties. They are demanding priests ordained by the previous regime. Many of the priests and theologians have sought to resign, but they were given to understand that they would be prosecuted as reactionaries and opponents of the regime, and consequently changed their minds.”¹⁵

These passages give us a not too flattering portrait of Patriarch Justinian Marina, and these impressions will soon be refuted by the actions of the so-called Red Patriarch who was not a so submissive servant to the Communist Regime as it looked at the first sight. He tried actually to postpone and hinder the application of the new legislative regulation that accompanied the purges.

One of the most important laws as the “New Regulation of Cults” – the decree regulating the denominations anew, published in the Official Monitor of August 4, 1948. “That decree formally established a privileged the jure situation for the Orthodox Church, by comparison with the other – minority – denominations. In practice, however, the Orthodox Church was to be subjected to the same drastic limitations and controls as the other cults, in its organization and functions.”¹⁶

The CIA analysts point out most important changes imposed by this decree like Article 22, which provided that

“for the creation and functioning of eparchies (dioceses, superintendencies, etc.), an average of 750,000 faithful shall be reckoned for each such eparchy, provided thereby also a legal basis for a new incorporation of Orthodox eparchies. And, indeed, this new measure was carried out by the decree No. 244, published in the Official Monitor No. 217, of September 18, 1948. This decree abolished the Metropolitan See of stead: the Archbishopric of Suceava and Maramuresh. A second decree, published in the Official Monitor of February 5, 1949, set forth the new bases for the ‘economic-administrative organization of the Orthodox Cult,’ and at the same time

¹⁴ Ana Pauker (1893-1960) was the unofficial leader of the Romanian Communist Party immediately after World War II and served as the country's foreign minister in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

¹⁵ *Information Report*, February 7, 1949, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r002300430012-0>, accessed March 10, 2021.

¹⁶ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 32.

once again redistributed the Orthodox eparchies. As a result of these two decrees, through a reshuffling of eparchies, the Bishoprics of Husi (established as early as 1958), and of Maramuresh were in fact abolished”.

The Article 53 abolished theological seminaries of secondary grade, as well as certain schools of university rank (theological academies), allowing to subsist only two university theological institutes (Sibiu and Bucharest).

“Reduced from the point of view of the actual means of religious manifestation, by the suppression of component eparchies (four out of eighteen) and by the heavy blow struck at theological education, with its prestige gravely diminished by mass arrests of the clergy of all ranks and by their replacement with men devoted to the regime, the Romanian Orthodox Church was left in a sorry state, following the abusive reforms to which it was subjected by the government.

It is clear, under the circumstances described above, that the apparently privileged position of the Church in comparison with the Roman Catholic and Uniate Churches is but a mask for a very dismal reality”¹⁷.

The Article 58 abrogated “the provisions of the law No. 68, of March 19, 1937, for the organization of the army chaplains corps,” and abolished at the same time (Articles 59 and 60) the Orthodox Military Episcopate whose seat was at Alba Iulia.

“Aside from these dispositions of a general “organizational” character, this law set up in great detail a thoroughgoing control over the entire activity of the hierarchy and clergy. Its provisions were to be put into effect either directly by the Ministry of Cults or by the local authorities”¹⁸.

The report also records the new attributions of the Ministry/Department of Cults according to the decree No. 37 (February 5, 1949). Thus, was regulated the Ministry’s right of surveillance and control, guaranteeing the use and exercise of freedom of conscience and religion. To this effect

“It supervises and controls all religious cults and their institutions – communities, associations, orders, congregations, and foundations of a religious nature, whatever their kind may be; it supervises and controls the special religious education of the personnel of all religious denominations; it approves the founding of new religious communities, parishes, and administrative units, the creation of new personnel posts,

¹⁷ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 33.

¹⁸ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 33.

and the appointments, whether they are paid by the state or not, in the services of the various denominations; it supervises and controls all funds and possessions, whatever their origin and nature may be, of the religious cults; it assures the task of watching over the relations and correspondence between the cults of the country and those abroad; it has various other tasks in connection with religious cults.”¹⁹

Another modality to control the Orthodox Church mentioned in the CIA report is the so-called “recycling of clergy”. This process was announced at the opening of the courses of the University Theological Institute of Bucharest, on January 30, 1949, when the Department’s official addresses indicated that one of the Institute’s main tasks was given attention to a new training and orientation, pastoral and social, for the clergy, to guide the latter “in the service of the people and of the peace.” In consequence, special courses of missionary guidance were inaugurated, which all priests were invited to attend.

According to the analysts the significance of these new courses was stressed by the Communist press and they point out an article from *Universul* of February 26, 1949: “The need for these courses has been felt lately, in the first place, because a new and proper orientation of the clergy had become necessary in all directions in which popular democracy seeks to raise the masses of the people.” The same paper further indicated what was expected of the new priests: “Today the social order is different, and the outcasts of yesterday are now at the head of public affairs. We must not expect their compassion... It is entirely dependent on ourselves to remain in the responsible jobs we have.”²⁰

Patriarch Justinian Marina tried to calm the clergy claiming that the regime assures full freedom of organization and action, without interfering in the least in religious concerns of the Church.

“But the state of uneasiness among the Orthodox clergy was not allayed. There was even talk of certain high prelates who had been placed under enforced domicile. As in all epochs of religious persecution, in Romania, too, about this time, rumours concerning certain supernatural phenomena began to circulate. People spoke of divine signs and even of instances of miracles. These things may very well be taken to correspond to that ‘religious thirst of the people,’ which Patriarch Justinian himself acknowledged in his pastoral of February 27, 1949. In any event, there can be no doubt that a very real spiritual force still inspires the resistance of the Orthodox clergy as a whole. It is reflected in the very pastoral that we have just mentioned, and which was intended precisely to quench it”²¹.

¹⁹ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 35.

²⁰ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 34.

²¹ *Information Report*, March 1, 1950, 34.

In some different degrees the same measures targeted the other denominations represented in Romania. At the end of this report the CIA analyst draw the following conclusions

“It cannot, of course, be denied that in Romania, as elsewhere behind the Iron Curtain, religion was an effective, organized obstacle to the communization of the country. Unfortunately, it is no less undeniable at the present time that the communist government of Bucharest, like the rest of the Kremlin’s puppet formations, has to a large extent succeeded in eliminating – or at least in crushing – that obstacle. This deliberate and ruthless action of a government, imposed from without and repudiated by the people of Romania, has had and has, as we have amply shown, the undeniable character of a systematic suppression of religious freedom. Like all other fundamental liberties and human rights, freedom of religion is thing of the past in the so-called Romanian People’s Republic. This is a state of affairs that cannot conceivably be countenanced by the conscience of the civilized world. It is a problem that cannot fail to be of the deepest concern to the United Nations.”²²

These conclusions where anticipated by a short note published in the *Department of State Bulletin* of October 24, 1949, which described de situation from Romania:

“Finally, in its determination to bring all aspects of Romanian life into the totalitarian pattern, the Romanian Government has been employing many forms of pressure to compel subservience by religious groups. Religious worship, guaranteed by the peace treaties, means, in our view, more than a formal participation in religious ritual. It requires freedom to teach and express views based on religious precepts, freedom to associate with those of like belief, freedom to worship with clergy chosen without arbitrary governmental interference. The decree concerning the activities of cults in Romania, of February 11, 1949, vests in the Government an unprecedented degree of control over all religious groups and activities, and the Government has not hesitated to exercise it.

The Romanian Government has purged large numbers of priests of the Orthodox Church and seen to it that persons devoted to the Communist Party are appointed to high church offices. Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church in Romania has been subjected to such persecution that, at present, none of its bishops is in a position to exercise his rightful religious functions. The Catholic Church in Romania today has been reduced to

²² *Information Report*, November 17, 1949, p. 37 <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83-00415r003800080001-0>, accessed March 12, 2021.

virtual inactivity by a variety of measures calculated to cripple its organization, such as the arrests of priests, dissolution of religious orders, and prohibition of normal activities in the field of welfare and education. The most glaring example of the Government's infringement of religious freedom has been the official dissolution and absorption by the Romanian Orthodox Church of the Greek Catholic or Uniate Church. This dissolution was accomplished by a governmental decree following a virulent campaign and a sham procedure designed to show a voluntary change of allegiance. What has become of the freedom of more than one million communicants of the Greek Catholic Church to worship God as they please?"²³

Some reports in the 1950s

Parallel with the disguised restrictions provided by the new legislative regulations, the Government encouraged the antireligious attitude of the "democratic people". For example, an Information Report of May 31, 1951 recorded that

"In January 1951 the Education Corps of Romania received the orders from the Ministry of Education to start a more intensive anti-religion campaign, and to put themselves at the disposal of the 'Company for spreading Culture and Science.' At the same time it was decided that so-called 'Centers of General Education' be opened in every village to counter the peasants' devotion to religion. Soviet propaganda material was sent to the schools and the teachers were ordered to use it. The 'Company for spreading Culture and Science' had playing cards printed with caricatures of priests of various religions. Anti-religious games were also manufactured for children and sold in children's stores".²⁴

Further antireligious behaviour is recorded in another Information Report of November 15, 1951. The incident appears to have been also encouraged by the Communist regime:

"At the beginning of June 1951, six or seven boys between the ages of eight and nineteen broke into seven churches in Bucharest. One of the churches was the Greek Orthodox church Saint Eleftherios, in which the images were destroyed, the vestments torn, and the baptismal font desecrated.

²³ *Department of State Bulletin*, October 24, 1949, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp57-00384r001300070003-0>, accessed March 20, 2021.

²⁴ *Information Report*, May 31, 1951, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r007700430002-5>, accessed April 2, 2021.

It is generally believed in Bucharest that these delinquents acted in Communist instructions. The boys were later arrested and detained at Militia headquarters at 25 Calea Victoriei. Most persons, however, believed that this was done merely to pacify public opinion".²⁵

A highly complex *Information Report* regarding the Resistance activities in Romania distributed in January 17, 1955, recorded an interesting event that shows the true dimensions of the antireligious measures took by the Communist regime and the reaction of the people that refused to comply to these dispositions:

"Church attendance had increased despite the Communist pressure to destroy the people's religious beliefs. During Easter 1951 a few soldiers were posted in front of many churches to keep the people from attending services. However, the people pushed their way past the soldiers to attend services. Since then, the Communist Party had not made any other attempt to discourage the people from attending religious services."²⁶

Despite those initiative and the risk of compromising their carriers even some of the military continued to show their allegiance to the Orthodox Church, as we find in the *Information Report* of June 7, 1955:

"Churches in Romania, especially during religious holidays, are crowded. People from all classes of society, including many young people and soldiers in uniforms, take an active part in the church services".²⁷

At the beginning of the 1950s it was already clear that the apparent benevolence shown to the Orthodox Church and its bishops came to an end. That is why the *Information Report* of May 28, 1952 presents the worrying news regarding the situation of the Patriarch Justinian Marina:

"It is reported in Bucharest that Patriarch Justinian, head of the Romanian Orthodox Church and hitherto an ardent supporter of the present regime, has fallen out of favour with the regime. His liquidation is expected from hour to hour. Teohari Gheorghescu²⁸, the Minister of the Interior, in charge

²⁵ *Information Report*, November 15, 1951, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r009200100010-2>, accessed March 12, 2021.

²⁶ *Information Report*, January 17, 1955, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00810a005700830005-6>, accessed April 10, 2021.

²⁷ *Information Report*, June 7, 1955, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00810a007100140004-7>, accessed April 10, 2021.

²⁸ Teohari Georgescu (1908-1976) was a Romanian statesman and a high-ranking member of the Romanian Communist Party, appointed Minister of Interior between 1945 and 1952.

of all religious affairs of the country, has sentenced and liquidated a large number of Romanian Orthodox clergymen. The present move of the Ministry is significant in view of the fact that Patriarch Justinian has been one of the strongest followers of the Soviet regime, having made several trips to Moscow, there he conferred with the heads of the Russian Orthodox Church.”²⁹

Similar news are reported by a CIA memo of September 11, 1952:

“Religious persecution, confined until now to the Catholic Church, is being extended into Romania’s state church, the Romanian Orthodox. Patriarch Justinian, the head of this Church in Romania, is now the subject of attack, and his adherents fear he may soon be arrested”.³⁰

These notes and reports do not shed light on the motive of this change of attitude regarding Patriarch Justinian, but we can find a clue in the measures dictated by the Communist regime in the year 1952. These included **de** suppression of the Monastic Seminaries, established by Justinian Marina to consolidate the spiritual and intellectual qualities of the monks and nuns. The Patriarch was aware that without a strong monastic element the Church could not withstand the interferences of the Communist authorities³¹. To compensate the restrictions imposed by the regime to decrease the number of monks and to obstruct the monastic life, Justinian Marina initiated his personal “recycling” of monastic staff and encouraged them to develop economic activities to ensure those monasteries a financial independence. The consequence was finally the closing of the Monastic Seminaries and the preparations for new regulations meant to destroy the monastic life and the “mysticism”, considered by the authorities as source of insubordination and device of the anti-communist resistance.

Among the recently disclosed CIA staff notes and weekly reviews, we can find some other measures took by the Communist regime against the Orthodox Church and the religious phenomena in Romania. A summary of the daily newspapers records the article from *Le Messager d’Athenes* of November 10, 1953 regarding the situation of Islam in Romania and the suppression of almost all parochial schools in Romania:

²⁹ *Information from foreign documents or radio broadcasts*, May 28, 1952, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00809a000700060519-8>, accessed April 10, 2021.

³⁰ *Information Report*, September 11, 1952, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r013900030010-8>, accessed April 10, 2021.

³¹ Adrian Gabor, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română și regimul comunist (1945-1964). O imagine a relațiilor Stat-Biserică*, (București, 2006-2007) 61.

“The Romanian government has issued orders to close all mosques. [...] Up to the present, 2.300 parochial primary schools of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 24 Orthodox secondary schools, 13 Orthodox seminaries, 3 Orthodox theological faculties, 8 Orthodox cantors’ schools, and an academy of religious music have been suppressed in Romania.”³²

Although the presence of religion in the public space is theoretically allowed, in fact the clergy is excluded from the public life and their presence is not tolerated by the enthusiastic supporters of Marxism, as the *Information Report* of February 10, 1955 records:

“Religious teaching in the schools has been suppressed, although priests still, theoretically, have the right to go to hospitals to see the sick who express the desire to see them. At an emergency hospital in Bucharest, however, a scene was witnessed in which a Communist hospital attendant ordered a priest to leave because he was called to the bedside of a patient. On the other hand, a requiem mass was celebrated for Stalin in a Bucharest church”.³³

The clergy learned to survive in these conditions and limited their activity to the ecclesiastic space, coping with the hostile environment imposed by the Communist administration and with the provocations and the antireligious manifestations:

“The churches in Romania are open and anyone may worship in them, however, members of the Workers Party are forbidden to enter any church. The religious celebrations are usually interfered with by any means available, such as organizing popular manifestations, open-air dances and meetings, near the churches. The priests are not annoyed in any manner provided that they do not interfere with the policies of the Government. Their religious activities must take place within the confines of the churches. Any outdoor procession or manifestation is forbidden unless prior authorization has been obtained. These authorizations are very rarely granted”.³⁴

³² *Information from foreign documents or radio broadcasts*, April 2, 1954, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00809a000700170161-3>, accessed April 10, 2021.

³³ *Information Report*, February 10, 1955, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00810a005900710003-9>, accessed April 10, 2021.

³⁴ *Information Report*, June 28, 1955 <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80-00810a007200620013-3>, accessed April 10, 2021.

The conditions became even harsher at the end of 1950s when the presence of the inspectors or representatives of the Ministry of Cults was felt like a continuous pressure. These special delegates were not just any functionaries; they were directly subordinated to the Central Comity of Communist Party and their role was to inform the party of every situation present in churches and to obstruct the religious manifestations. They were the link that connected the Communist regime and the religious cults. But their presence was not easy to bear as it results from a synthesis put together by the CIA analysts in the *Periodic Requirements List for Eastern Europe* (1 September – 31 December 1959)

“Romanian Orthodox Patriarch Justinian Marina is reportedly pessimistic over the future of the church in Romania. The Patriarch reportedly has an ‘assistant’ assigned to him by the regime as his ‘boss’ on many church matters as is said merely to sign church decrees issued by his aide. Justinian has voiced concern over property belonging to the monasteries, which he claimed the regime has been working to nationalize since 1958. There have been reports that a large number of clergymen of all denominations were arrested in the latter half of 1958 and that the head of the Lutheran Church in Oraşul Stalin (Braşov) was allegedly executed at that time for treason. Other reports stated that Justinian himself was under house arrest and that his personal secretary and physician were apprehended. A show trial of two Catholic priests was held around the end of 1958 and rabbis have been reportedly arrested in Bucharest during the past spring”³⁵.

This report underlines the danger that lurked in the activity of these inspectors. The interferences of the Communist regime at the end of 1950s were burdening and to make the situation even worse, they pressed continuously Patriarch Justinian to accept all the new dispositions decided by the Party. His reluctance to sign the new series of obstructions lead to his “mysterious disappearing for 3 weeks” in autumn 1958³⁶. When that measure did not have the expected result, began the arrest of the prominent figures of clerics and laymen, the elite professors, and intellectuals – members of the ‘Burning Bush’ group from the Antim Monastery in Bucharest (June-July 1958). Affected by this blow to Orthodox Church in Romania, Justinian Marina had to

³⁵ *Periodic Requirements List*, September-December 1959, 64, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp62-00328a000200200002-1>, accessed April 10, 2021.

³⁶ George Enache, “Arestul’ patriarhului Justinian la Dragoslavele, în 1958. Legendă și adevăr”, *Ziarul Lumina*, September 29, 2009, <https://ziarullumina.ro/actualitate-religioasa/documentar/arestul-patriarhului-justinian-la-dragoslavele-in-1958-legendasi-adevar-39063.html>, accessed April 20, 2021.

reconsider and to accept the lesser evil and stopped to resist the regime's campaign against the monastic life, which was made official through the Decree 410 of November 28, 1959.

Instead of conclusions

The disclosure of these CIA documents allows us to see how the religious phenomena in Romania was perceived and sheds light on the situation of mostly all religious denominations, offering new details and nuances. From the information presented above it is clear that in the case of the Romanian Orthodox Church was made no particular concession. Its existence was tolerated mainly to simulate before the western countries the freedom of conscience and religious freedom in general, and to coerce its clergy and faithful to remain in a state of fear and misery until they will totally renounce their religious convictions.

IV. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

CARE FOR THE DEPARTED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE LIVING

MARIJA GIREVSKA¹

ABSTRACT. This article explores the care for the departed in the liturgical practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Divine Liturgy and the memorial services show how the Church prays for both the departed and the mourners, thus creating a cycle of ecclesiastical communion. We are reminded of the greatness of the benefit of praying for and to the departed and of the mode of our salvation.

Keywords: care, departed, Eastern Orthodox Church, Divine Liturgy, funeral.

Introduction

We rarely think of death. Almost never. Even our language tries to make death less visible and less frightening. We often turn to euphemistic phrases and linguistic cosmetics by saying “they departed from this life”, “they passed away”, “they are no longer with us”, or “they were taken to God” instead of “they died.” We have exiled death to the outskirts of our existence. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought the truth about death so brutally into our everyday lives that our psychic landscape is now forever transformed. But our hopes are not forlorn. If we turn to the Bible and Christ’s teaching, we realize how our language has been whispering the truth: “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die” (Jn 11:25-26).

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Death has a life-affirming function. In 1993, bishop Kallistos Ware, after concluding a public lecture on November 7, when asked what were his thoughts on the meaning of life, replied, “Yes, well, in order to understand the meaning of life, one must first understand the meaning of death”.²

It is on this reply which is both provocative and profound that we will try to explore the care for the departed in the liturgical practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church and show how “the attention is shifted from the deceased to the mourners, for whom comfort and consolation are asked”³ in order to obtain real healing of the spirit.

Tramping Down Death by Death

What does the Holy Scripture tell us about death?

In the Old Testament we find that death is not from God (“God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living.” Wis. 1:13), and human beings were created so that they should live, and not die (“Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?” Ezek. 33:11). The New Testament further explains that death enters the world through humanity’s sin (“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned” Rom. 5:12), and that the New Jerusalem is characterized by the absence of death (“he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away” Rev. 21.4).

Death is understood in a very complex way in Orthodox Christianity. Florovsky describes it as “the enemy,” “a painful metaphysical catastrophe,” “a deep tragedy,” and “a failure of human destiny”⁴. Schmemmann understands it as something “foreign,” “unnatural,” “fearsome,” and “perverted”⁵. Death is “profoundly

² Perry T. Hamalis, “The Meaning and Place of Death in an Orthodox Ethical Framework.” In *Thinking Through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars*, edited by A. Papanikolaou and E. Prodromou (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 183.

³ Elena Velkovska, “Funeral Rites According to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 44.

⁴ Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption: Collected Works*, vol. 3. (MA: Norland, Belmont, 1976).

⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *O Death Where Is Thy Sting?* trans. A. Vinogradov (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003).

abnormal,” “monstrous,” and “distorted,” according to Ware⁶. “Death is not a release,” writes Florovsky, “it is a catastrophe. [...] Death is hopeless.”⁷ Likewise, in *For the Life of the World*, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann observes that:

Christianity is not reconciliation with death. It is the revelation of death, and it reveals death because it is the revelation of Life. Christ is this Life. [...] The horror of death is, therefore, not in its being the “end” and not in physical destruction. By being separation from the world and life, it is *separation from God*. The dead cannot glorify God. It is, in other words, when Christ reveals Life to us that we can hear the Christian message about death as the enemy of God. It is when Life weeps at the grave of the friend, when it contemplates the horror of death, that the victory over death begins⁸.

For the Orthodox Christians, God’s saving action through Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection is, first and foremost, victory over death⁹ remains adamant that: “There can be no doubt, on the one hand, that the ‘problem of death’ is central and essential in its message, which announces Christ’s victory over death, and that Christianity has its source in that victory”.

In the death of Christ, death itself is given a new meaning and significance¹⁰. The gospel message that “by death He destroyed death” on Easter and throughout the paschal season is proclaimed joyously and repeatedly, “Christ is risen from the dead! And death by his death is trampled. And to those in the tombs he is granting life”¹¹.

“We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come” is read in the final verse of the Nicene Creed, expressing our common hope. Sergei Bulgakov suggests that:

⁶ Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom: Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000).

⁷ Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption: Collected Works*, vol. 3. (MA: Norland, Belmont, 1976).

⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 99-100.

⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 95; Paul Jonathan Fedwick, “Death and Dying in Byzantine Liturgical Traditions.” *Eastern Christian Review* 8 (1976): 152–61; Perry T. Hamalis, “Death (and Funeral),” In *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Church*, edited by John Anthony McGuckin (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 180-82.

¹⁰ Perry T. Hamalis, “Death (and Funeral),” 180-82.

¹¹ Perry T. Hamalis, “Death (and Funeral),” 180-82.

Непосредственность ожидания конца с радостной его напряженностью в дальнейшей истории, естественно, утратились. Оно заменилось чувством конечности личной жизни в смерти [...] и особенно в православии, развилось особое почитание смерти [...] Мертвое тело здесь погребается с почтением, как семя будущего тела воскресения, и самый чин погребения у некоторых древних писателей почитается таинством¹².

[The immediate anticipation of the end, with its joyful tension, was naturally lost in the later history. It was replaced by a sense of the finiteness of personal life in death [which among Christians], especially among the Orthodox, developed into a special veneration of death. [...] The dead body is buried here with reverence, like the seed of the future body of the resurrection, and the very act of burial is revered by some ancient writers as a mystery (sacrament).] (*my translation)

In *Byzantine Theology*, John Meyendorff suggests that the funeral service was also considered a “sacrament” by some Byzantine writers. For instance, Theodore the Studite in the ninth century gives a list of six sacraments: the holy “illumination” (baptism), the “synaxis” (Eucharist), the holy chrism, ordination, monastic tonsure, and the service of burial¹³. Meyendorff also suggests that the burial had the same significance as the sacrament of holy unction:

Even in death the Christian remains a member of the living and resurrected Body of Christ, into which he has been incorporated through baptism and the Eucharist. Through the funeral service, the Church gathers to bear witness to this fact, visible only to the eyes of faith, but already experienced by every Christian who possesses the awesome privilege of living, by anticipation, in the future Kingdom¹⁴.

Liturgical practice

During the Divine Liturgy in the Orthodox Church the clergy pray both for and to the departed¹⁵. Through the mediation of the Eucharistic *anaphora*, the *epiclesis*, and the transformation of the Eucharistic elements, i.e., the holy Gifts, the priest also prays for those who have departed in the faith:

¹² Булгаков, *Православие. Очерки учения Православной Церкви* (Orthodoxy. Essays on the teachings of the Orthodox Church), (Paris : YMCA-Press, 1989), 380-391.

¹³ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (Fordham University Press, 1987), 191.

¹⁴ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 199.

¹⁵ Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom: Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000).

And again we offer unto thee this our reasonable service, for all thy servants departed this life before us in the faith; for our ancestors, fathers, the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Ascetics; and for every righteous soul who hath died in the faith.¹⁶

In line with the liturgical rites, the priest takes care of the believer on deathbed to confess and receive communion before his or her death, and after the onset of death. The hymnographic material speaks mainly about the transience of this world, that the Lord God puts to rest the deceased in a place “where there is no pain, no sorrow, no grieving, but life everlasting”, ending with the “farewell prayer” for resolving sins. The body is then escorted to the grave with a solemn procession. Memorial services are also held for the departed Orthodox, most frequently seven days from the first morning, then forty days and one year after death, as well as during occasional “Saturday of Souls” liturgies.¹⁷

In the Trisagion Service we pray: “Give rest to the souls of Thy departed servants, *NN.*, in a place of brightness, a place of verdure, a place of repose, whence all sickness, sorrow and sighing have fled away”.¹⁸ The Trisagion Prayers of Mercy for the Departed are prayed by the priest as soon as possible after one of the faithful has died. They may also be said as a memorial service at the end of the Divine Liturgy, after “Blessed be the name of the Lord...” or at the end of any daily services, before the Dismissal. In this case the service begins immediately with the Troparia for the Departed. After the Prayer for the Departed the Dismissal of this service is omitted and the priest immediately says, “Eternal be thy memory, O our brother [sister], who art worthy to be deemed happy and ever-memorable”, and the people sing “Memory eternal”¹⁹. The clergy then enter the sanctuary and conclude the Divine Liturgy as usual.

These prayers “complement each other, creating a perfect cycle of ecclesiastical communion: the mourners and the church both pray for the dead, while the church prays for both the mourners and the deceased. In this context [...] the funeral [is seen] more as a celebration of life for the benefit of the living than a celebration for the departed”²⁰.

¹⁶ Isabel Florence Hapgood, *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, 1922), 107.

¹⁷ Perry T. Hamalis, “The Meaning and Place of Death in an Orthodox Ethical Framework,” 183.

¹⁸ Isabel Florence Hapgood, *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, 91.

¹⁹ Isabel Florence Hapgood, *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, 391.

²⁰ Elena Velkovska, “Funeral Rites According to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources,” 44.

Individual care

If you go to your local cemeteries, you will notice a woman at the grave, and if there is a group of mourners, the majority would again be women. In a way this reminds us of the myrrh-bearing women from the Gospel, who arrived first at the tomb after the resurrection of Christ, bearing the myrrh-oils they had prepared to anoint His body (Matt 27:55–61, Matt 28:1–10, Mk 15:40–16:11, Lk 23:50–24:10, Jn 19:38–20:18). You usually see men only when the crosses and monuments for the departed are to be ordered and made. Oftentimes it is the women who are wearing dark clothes of mourning out of respect for the departed for a week, a month, a year, and sometimes until the day of their own departure. One might think this is so because women are usually more expressive in their emotions. And it's part of the tradition. It's fascinating how within the diversity of the Balkan countries, within the rural communities, there is a common tread still prevailing when it comes to the traditional funeral service – the engaging of professional female mourners. Dressed in black, from tip to toe, they weep and wail at the thought of death beholding the body lying in the tomb.

Conclusion

St John of Chrysostom in his homily on First Corinthians²¹ reminds us that:

it is possible from every source to gather pardon for them [the departed], from our prayers, from our gifts in their behalf, from those whose names are named with theirs. Why therefore do you grieve? Why mourn, when it is in your power to gather so much pardon for the departed? (1 Cor. Hom. 41, par. 8)

In his homily *On the Cemetery and the Cross* during a Good Friday service Chrysostom consoled his hearers by likening death to sleep and reflecting on the cemetery as a “sleeping place”. And, again, in his homily on the First Corinthians he adds:

²¹ Chrysostom, St. John. *The Homilies on the First Corinthians*.
http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0345-0407,_Iohannes_Chrysostomus,_Homilies_on_First_Corinthians,_EN.pdf

Not in vain was this rule ordained by the Apostles, that in the dread Mysteries²² remembrance should be made of the departed: for they knew that it is a great gain to them, and a great benefit. (1 Cor. Hom. 41, p. 457 A)

Chrysostom recommended praying for the dead to celebrate their memory and bring some consolation to both the mourners and the departed since God is willing to grant petitions to those who ask for others (1 Cor. Hom. 42 par. 8). Let us remember that if we remember the end of our life, we will never sin (Wis. Sir. 7:36).

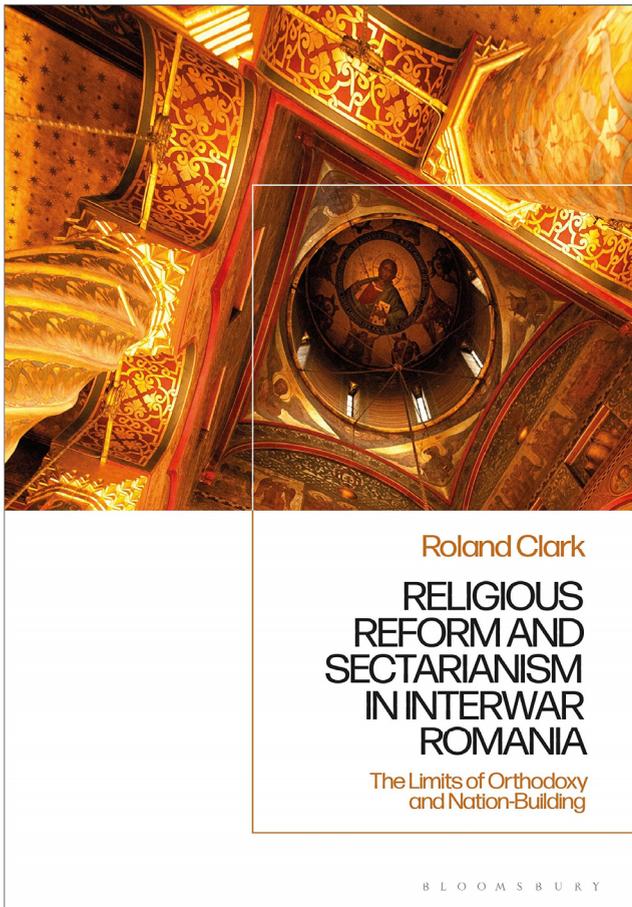
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²² Vassiliades, Nikolaos P. *The Mystery of Death*, trans. Peter A. Chamberas (Athens: Orthodox Brotherhood of Theologians, 1993).

Book Review:

Roland Clark, *Religious Reform and Sectarianism in Interwar Romania. The Limits of Orthodoxy and Nation Building*, Bloomsbury Publishing, UK, 2021, 232 p.



Dr Roland Clark is senior lecturer in Modern European History at the University of Liverpool. Roland Clark specialises in the history of East-Central Europe and of interwar Romania, in particular his research include fascism, social movements, violence, theology and lived religion.

“Religious reform and sectarianism in interwar Romania. The limits of Orthodoxy and nation building” published at Bloomsbury Publishing, UK in 2021 has three parts preceded by an Introduction followed by Conclusions chapter.

In the Introduction chapter the author presents what noted down as observations a former Anglican missionary in her eight-day trip to Bucharest. Ruth Rose notes that the Romanians attitudes, back in 1911, about the religion is hard to explain by criteria of British Protestantism.

First, the educated Romanians are not interested in religion. The orthodox priests are low-class men, often uneducated and preoccupied to received money for their religious services. Also, the Romanians are very suspicious of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism and that makes almost impossible the missionary work among them. Even some prominent writers such Nicolae Iorga, claims that the Orthodox Church is incapable of doing its job as a social and spiritual institution. Some haw that was the reality of the period and the author work is founded upon the interest in reform movement and the position of Romania at the intersection between Orthodoxy and Western Christianity.

Then, the revival movements can explain themselves by the tensions between regional Romanian orthodoxy which dominated the 1920’s. This tension gives birth to the movements which they tried “to rejuvenate” Romanian Orthodox Church.

Further on the author presents a percentual presence analyse of repenters denominations and Protestantism in 1930’s on Romanian territory, also with historical information about their spreading and evolution.

Chapter 1 of Part I-*Romanian Orthodox Christianity* presents how lived the religion looked in Romanian villages by tracing changes in preaching and catechol practices. The author introduces us into what means orthodoxy back in 1920’s in rural areas of Romania and how priests begun to preach and write their sermons in order to try to cover all the aspects of life of the believers in an attempt to ensure social progress for all. He notices that a successful preaching requires to know the Bible well and to have a new generation of biblical scholars able to deliver to the people the message of the Gospel.

Chapter 2-*Renewall*-looks at the influence of western Christianity on renewal movements, especially in the cities. It was the period in which the students were involved in so called “social Christianity” and they were invited to take an important role in different associations, most of them, with foreign influences. The author underlines that the Church leaders recognized politically potential of social engaged Christianity and were interested that these efforts to serve the political goal of the institution. All this associations were attempts to combine lay orthodoxy with political nationalism of the 1920’s.

Chapter 3-*A contested Patriarchate*-looks at the tensions and the struggle produced by unification of separate orthodox churches into a single Romanian Orthodox Church in the after First World War period. The author analyses the situation of the orthodoxy in The Old Kingdom Romania as the Romanians have to come to live in a standardized state with one church after great efforts to Romanianization from the part of the Church leaders. The situation in Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina is presented from the historical point of view emphasizing on the attempts to free themselves from foreign control and to survive as Orthodox Church in a hostile environment in order to cultivate Romanian national identity through the Romanians within those provinces. These provinces became targets of concerted romanizations campaigns as part of nation-building project of Greater Romania. The Church took part happily at this project during the process of creating an autocephalous Romanian Patriarchate.

Chapter 4-*Inochentism and Old Calendarism* presents what great disappointment came along with the new established patriarchate. This new religious movements illustrates dissatisfaction with spirituality provided by Orthodox Church and also the fact that the state and the Church manifest themselves as abusive, authoritarian institutions towards this movements. The author points that both these two movements flourished in region where disappointment from Great Romania state were the highest and, for example for the followers of Old Calendarism to accept the new calendar was synonymous with the acceptance of the national church and the Romanian state, especially in Bessarabia. These two cases are the proof of the choice of the Church to stay close with the government from that period, fact that explain the movements success too.

Chapter 5-*Romanian Orthodox Church and the Others*. Part two focuses on the relationship of the Orthodox Church with the others: Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Repenters.

The relationship with Catholics was defined by three ideas. Catholicism was identified with ethnic and regional minorities, then, any reconciliation with the Catholicism is too difficult for the orthodox leaders and, in the end, to be Romanian was to be orthodox. Orthodox hostility towards Greek Catholics was great despite of the fact that they established the intellectual and literacy foundation of Romanian nationalism due to their higher education of their leaders. Also, points the author, their contribution as tireless advocates for the rights of Romanians in Transylvania and for building Greater Romania was ignored.

The relationship with Roman Catholics is defined by the author by the need of Roman Catholic Church to sign a deal in order to survive, deal which will express the type of connections with the state Vatican promotes to ensure

the save presence of Catholics on Romanian territory. To understand the situation the author gives as the example of catholic hierarchy which was replaced by Romanian ethnics and that the state closed confessional schools. Lutheran, Reformed Church, on the other side, were classified as “minority religions”. In 1927 Vatican sign the Concordat that recognize catholic churches as churches not as denominations despite the orthodox point of view that Catholicism is and remains a dangerous force against national state and Orthodoxy. The author shows that by accusations of the orthodoxists, in the end, they put religion at the heart of Romanian-ness by defining ethnicity in religious terms. This resonates with the state idea to unite population of Romania around the idea of ethnic dominance. This position was accepted by orthodox leaders which were more willing to work with the state in order to guarantee orthodox hegemony in post First World War Romania.

Chapter 6-*Repenters*- explore the origins of major repenters denominations, discusses how believers and critics understand their practices and beliefs. The author discusses Baptists, Brethrens, Pentecostals, Nazarenes, Seventh- day Adventists, Bible students and Jehovah’s witness from historical point of view, defining their particularities, their beliefs and the relationship with the authorities and the Orthodox Church. The authorities were worried about the impact of repenters on society so, beginning with the Constitution of 1923, they denied recognize any repenters domination as churches. Author explains that the fact that they have foreign origins reinforced in the policeman’s mind the idea that repenters are traitors to the nation even if they try so much to obey the law in the interwar period. Despite that, in conflict with repenters, the authorities constantly persecuted them taking the side of the orthodox.

In chapter 7-*Missionaries*- we can find analyses about in which way anti-sectarianism missionaries articulated their strategy in their attempts to combat repenters. The Church leaders understand that the Orthodox services did not engage lay people enough, solution is to discus and read the Bible, charity work and Sunday schools. Others keep saying that the repenters did not recognize the important contribution of Orthodox Church to build Romanian nation, so repenters are the result of excessive liberty and they are a big treat for the spiritual union of the Romanians. Also, was comfortably for the Church to call authorities to shut down repenters groups helped by the constant changes in their legal status which give to the policeman’s the opportunity to persecuted them and, by this, to have an important role in preventing to spread repenters all over the country. In the end, the author emphasizes the importance of repenters problem within Orthodox Church who has the chance to put aside the regional animosity in an attempt to unite as a national church in the new nation-state.

Part three explores parachurch movements. The author is trying to explain how the Lord's Army in Transylvania and Stork's Nest in Bucharest became liminal orthodoxy and how the new approaches to the Bible, interest in holy living, doctrinal and practical disagreements influence the Orthodox Church and which way orthodox leaders instrumentalized this movement in order to gain more influence.

The renewal movements are presented from their origins, how they grew up and develop, which types of relationships they have with orthodox leaders and how this movements survive in different period as parachurch movements affiliated with the Romanian Orthodox Church, which is the case of Lord's Army. The movements are presented as attempts to revive Romanian spirituality in the interwar period of moral decadence and as a reaction at repenters work among Romanians but also as attempts to deepen Orthodox Christianity.

The two movements engaged a lot of society energy, leaders of the Church, important personalities get involved accusing them of protestant propaganda, of being part of World Judaism and heresy. The debate was about the authority of the Church, the role of tradition, the meaning of salvation, the regeneration of the people by preaching the Gospel of Christ, the altering of liturgy and the national identity of the Romanian people.

The Conclusion chapter the author underlines the fact that in 1920 the Church was placed in the central of Romanian nation-building, the state recognizes the demands for a dominant status for the Orthodox Church. The repenters and revival movements were the backdrop of all changes in Orthodoxy in the period. In this way, repenters and parachurch movements did not established themselves outside orthodoxy and, in the same time, orthodox initiatives became a response to repenters and foreign threat. The author explains way the Church response was sometimes inappropriate towards these attempts to change people spirituality, how and way orthodoxy in the imperial period became a nationalistic, xenophobic religion and in which way the frustration of some orthodox leaders about the new-born state drives them to embrace antisemitic and fascist politics.

Overall, the book is trying to explain how the conflict were resolved, is trying to understand the fears about foreign western influence and repenters disappointment about the new institutional church, the regional power battles all of this happening in a new-born nation-state. It looks at the effort of the state and the Church to established themselves as national institutions within the new borders. The book is trying to reveal how diverse religious communities reacted at the rapid changes of the period offering a imagine of different approaches of reading Bible, developing doctrine among Christians and how they practice their faith and beliefs beyond the policy of State-Church and different obstacles they encountered.

BOOK REVIEW

In the end, the book is also about the new religious practices, the new way of engaging with the Scripture, the parachurch movements or the repenters Christianity as contributors for developing a new Orthodoxy and a new civil society, especially after 1918, the birth of Greater Romania.

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