

Missionary Consciousness in Romanian Orthodox Communities

Realities, Tendencies and Responsibilities

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to explore the understanding of missionary consciousness according to Orthodox Theology and to analyze and evaluate the way in which it is assumed and developed at the level of different Christian communities belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church. It discusses the connection between Christian identity and missionary consciousness, as well as the characteristics of missionary consciousness in various political and social contexts. It then identifies four fundamental characteristics of the missionary consciousness: it must be universal, Christological, dogmatic and prophetic. In the final sections, the paper deals with an evaluation of the extent to which these characteristics are present in different types of Romanian Orthodox communities, both in Romania and abroad, and the way in which the missionary consciousness has been assumed, whether consciously or unconsciously, in various (and difficult) historical contexts. Finally, the paper suggests several missionary responsibilities of the Church hierarchy and missionaries that could contribute to the development of a strong missionary consciousness in the Orthodox communities.

Introduction

The Bulgarian missiologist Valentin Kozhuharov has recently claimed concerning the Orthodox churches that “we can see that there is little understanding of what mission is, or better said—we can observe that there is no missionary awareness among the Orthodox.”¹ In Kozhuharov’s understanding, such awareness is not

¹ Valentin Kozhuharov, *Orthodox and Inter-Christian Perspectives in Mission* (Vesta Publishing House, 2015), 169.

static, but it is an awareness that should make people act.² While he considers that some Orthodox believers do have a general understanding of what mission is, nevertheless “they don’t act and they don’t do mission.”³ Kozhuharov’s remarks could be correct if we only considered the aspect of mission that involves making new disciples. But this article argues that mission is a much broader phenomenon than making disciples and that missionary consciousness is inextricably linked with broader human consciousness and so can exist even if believers do not explicitly or even implicitly assume their missionary vocation.

In any discussion of Orthodox mission we need to remember that the term *mission* has been disputed not only among the Orthodox but also in the Western churches, as it has been associated with the politics of Western colonization. Even talking about missionary consciousness has been undertaken with reluctance not only in the East, but in the West. For example, in 1917 William Adam Brown described missionary consciousness as a form of militant Christianity, but one that involved believing in the “value of man as man and acting accordingly,”⁴ a definition that was meant to correct the unethical behavior of Western missionary societies in various contexts, where those targeted by Christian mission were sometimes perceived as primitive human beings, and sometimes even as “subhuman.”⁵

While the Orthodox churches have sometimes been criticized for their lack of missionary awareness and praxis, their understanding of the Church as an extension of the Incarnation of God in history means that they accept that people cannot be saved by taking them out of the world, but must be saved together with the world. Christians are therefore called to enlighten the world with their faith and the light of the Divine Revelation, manifested in Jesus Christ and in the Tradition of the Church.⁶

Challenged by Kozhuharov’s remarks, this article aims to identify the characteristics of Orthodox missionary consciousness and praxis in postmodernity by exploring the forms that these have taken within the Romanian Orthodox Church in recent decades. The article begins by showing how Christian mission in the Orthodox countries of the Balkans has been strongly influenced by a historical context which has left a deep imprint on missionary consciousness and praxis. It continues

² Valentin Kozhuharov, 173–74.

³ Kozhuharov, 173–74.

⁴ William Adams Brown, “Developing the Missionary Consciousness in the Modern Man,” *International Review of Mission* 6, no. 4 (1917): 32.

⁵ Franke Wilmer, *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics: Since Time Immemorial* (SAGE Publications, 1993), 11.

⁶ Ioan Ică jr., “Modern and Contemporary Orthodox Theology: Key Moments, Key Figures, Developments, Assessment,” in *Orthodox Theology in the twentieth Century and Early 21st Century: A Romanian Orthodox Perspective* (Basilica: ed. Viorel Ioniță, 2013), 93.

with an examination of theological teachings which have undergirded the recent renewal in Orthodox missionary consciousness by focusing on two outstanding contributors to Orthodox thought in the twentieth century, Dumitru Staniloae and Sophrony Sakharov. It then analyzes how Orthodox communities in post-Communist Romania and in the Romanian diaspora have assumed and are cultivating missionary vocation.

How Historical Context has shaped Orthodox Missionary Consciousness and Praxis

In both East and West, missionary consciousness has been influenced by the historical, political, and social context in which the Christian communities were present. For this reason, it is natural to find different understandings of the life and mission of the Church in different contexts. An extensive analysis of the characteristics of Christian mission in various historical periods in the life of the Church would not be possible in the limited space of this study, but for a better understanding of the present dynamic of Orthodox mission, it is necessary to mention some key historical events that have marked the life of the Orthodox Church.

Orthodoxy regards itself as the successor of the apostolic tradition in a Byzantine form. According to Ioan Ică Jr., in Constantinople (the New Rome), a synthesis of Jerusalem, Athens and Rome was achieved, and this synthesis is a foundation of European culture and civilization.⁷ This is a good example of the universality of Christianity. According to the same Romanian theologian, what the Orthodox Church achieved through the Greek Fathers and the Ecumenical Councils, where it clarified the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and Christology, was a transfiguration of Hellenism. The Constantinian Roman Empire sought a transformation of the Roman Mediterranean State into a realization in history of the Kingdom of God. If the Byzantine theological synthesis proved durable, the political-theological synthesis was less successful.⁸

The numerous crises—the schism of the Oriental Churches, Europe's division into two hostile blocks (the rival French-German Empire hostile to the one led from Constantinople), the progressive alienation of Orthodoxy from the Christian West, the expansion of Islam in Asia Minor—determined the retreat of the Byzantine Empire, but an increase in its influence over the Slavic nations of the Balkans and Kievan Rus.

After the eleventh century Schism which divided the Church into East and

⁷ Ică jr., "Modern and Contemporary Orthodox Theology: Key Moments, Key Figures, Developments, Assessment," 22.

⁸ Ică jr., 22–23.

West, the trauma of the forced “unions” imposed to serve political objectives and as a form of protection against the threat of the Islamic world culminated in the Fourth Crusade in 1204, when the Latins sacked and colonized Constantinople. All these events brought an ever widening separation between the two Churches.⁹ In this divided context, the missionary ethos gradually lost the consciousness of universality, and the fall of Constantinople made things worse. Greek and Balkan Orthodoxy struggled to survive under Ottoman rule, separated as they were both from the Latin West, and also from Russian Orthodoxy.

From a political point of view, the countries of the Balkans were under Turkish occupation, so the Orthodox Church had to obey the Ecumenical Patriarch not only from the ecclesiastical point of view, but also from a cultural and economic point of view. The Ecumenical Patriarch became the leader (*ethnarch*) of the Christian community within the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ Thus, the historical context shaped the missionary understanding of the Church as *a mission of resistance*, and these contextual realities have influenced missionary consciousness until today.

In the nineteenth century, with help from the Russian Empire, the countries of the Balkans liberated themselves from Ottoman domination, but did not manage to achieve stable independence and national unity before finally accepting German Roman Catholic kings or rulers (1830, Otto of Bavaria, King of Greece; 1866, Carol of Hohenzollern, Principe, and later King of United Romania; 1879, Alexander Battenberg, Principe of Bulgaria). The newly-born nation-states fought for recognition at the ecclesiastical level by proclaiming the autocephaly of the local Orthodox Churches.¹¹ So, in this tense environment, the Orthodox Churches of the Balkans fought to define themselves in the pan-Orthodox world, and to receive recognition from the other Orthodox Churches and from the newly-established political regimes. We can call this a *mission of recognition*, which, again, shaped missionary consciousness.

The Case of the Romanian Orthodox Church

When a stronger sense of national identity appeared in Eastern Europe, the Orthodox Church naturally adopted a nationalistic discourse in Moldova, Wallachia and Transylvania. Obviously, the trend was in no way restricted to the Orthodox Church. The Greek Catholic Church of Transylvania, for example, adopted a nationalist type of discourse as well, emphasizing the Latin character of the Romanian

⁹ Ică jr., 23–24.

¹⁰ Ică jr., 21.

¹¹ Ică jr., 55–56.

language. By embracing this kind of discourse, the Church wanted to obtain moral and political legitimacy, as well as more recognition from the state.¹² Although it is true that the Church did indeed try to obtain a privileged position, it is also true that both the Orthodox and the Greek Catholic Church contributed essentially to the development of a Romanian identity and to the actual formation of the Romanian modern state. Even before 1859, when the unification of Moldova and Wallachia took place, Romanians felt they were one nation due because they shared one language, but also one faith. Their Orthodox consciousness contributed to the development of national consciousness. Also, when in 1918 Transylvania united with Romania, the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholics of Transylvania felt they belonged to the same nation as they shared the same language and an Eastern form of Christianity. After the unification, the struggle for national emancipation was mixed up with the effort to turn the Romanian Orthodox Church into a Patriarchate, which was achieved in 1925. In this context, missionary consciousness was associated with ethnic identity, Orthodox consciousness contributing essentially to the development of national consciousness.

After a brief period of freedom, when the Church started to develop a modern theology of mission, Romania became part of the Communist bloc after the Second World War. The missionary work of the Church was excluded from public life and only tolerated in ecclesiastical environments, whilst the official state program was that in five decades socialist society would become atheistic.¹³ Under these circumstances, the mission of the Church became almost impossible to carry out. We call this kind of mission a *mission for survival*.

Like other East European communist parties, the Romanian Communist Party "saw religion as a capitalist remnant expected to wither away as its social basis disappeared, but recognized that a Church respected by the bulk of the population could be useful for furthering the party's socioeconomic and political goals".¹⁴ The Church had strong roots in the popular consciousness, and belonging to the Orthodox Church was an important identity marker for Romanians. Romanians were generally speaking religious and a regime that claimed to be democratic could not issue a law banning all religious manifestations. It could, however, limit the life of the Church to the religious services that took place inside churches and make sure on the practical level that it was otherwise invisible in society. Thus, the Church had to find a *modus vivendi*, ingenious ways to survive. The Patriarch Justinian Marina, for example, built a strategy to involve the members of the Church in some

¹² Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, "The Romanian Orthodox Church and Post-Communist Democratisation," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, 8 (2000): 1468.

¹³ See: S. I. Kovalev, *Călăuza Ateistului* (București: Politică, 1962).

¹⁴ Stan and Turcescu, 1468.

social initiatives. The strategy is known as *The Social Apostolate*. The phrase represents the title given to a collection of sermons and pastoral letters published in 12 volumes between 1948–1975. This ideological-theological construct was considered normative in the theology and the pastoral practice of the Romanian Orthodox Church during Communist times.

According to George Enache, the sources of the Social Apostolate were biblical and patristic, with nuances and ideas that had survived from the inter-war period, but also with a visible Russian influence as the discourse seemed to concentrate on the social role of the Church and not much on the mystical and sacramental component. The influence was also evident in the relation between the priest and "the people," which was described as a total identification of the priest with the people's will.

Though these are considered to be the main aspects of the Communist influence on the doctrine of the Church [as Enache notes], they will be interpreted differently by the political power, on one hand, and by the Church, on the other hand. The first will try to identify Christian ideals with Communist ideals, while the Church will use them as a justification for her existence in an atheist state, without abandoning biblical principles.¹⁵

The situation of the Romanian Orthodox Church under the Communist regime must be evaluated objectively, with its positive and negative aspects. What cannot be denied, however, is that after the fall of Communism in 1989, there was a revival in the life of the Church. The revival was due to people's Christian consciousness that had survived despite the compromises made by some religious leaders,¹⁶ both Orthodox and from other confessions. In the words of Theodor Damian,

the failures of some Church representatives must have existed in the course of past centuries as well. But that does not mean that one can erase the credit due to the Church for always having identified itself with the struggle, suffering, longings and aspirations of its nation and faithful. In other words, the Church brought its direct and effective contribution to the foundational and structural events that marked the history of the Romanians.¹⁷

The strong connection between the people and the Church was used by the Communist regime to pursue its own interests. Since they were concerned with preserv-

¹⁵ George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană: studii și eseuri*, Biblioteca de istorie (București: Nemira, 2005), 42–43.

¹⁶ Stan and Turcescu, "The Romanian Orthodox Church and Post-Communist Democratisation," 1467–71.

¹⁷ Theodor Damian, "The Romanian Orthodox Church: Post Communist Transformation," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 30, 1 (2010), 21.

ing and strengthening Romanian identity, the Communists tolerated the Orthodox faith as it was regularly associated with ethnic and national identity. Obviously, to fuse Orthodox consciousness with ethnic identity means to abdicate from the universal dimension of the Church, but in that context all efforts were concentrated on simply finding a way to survive. The universal Christian consciousness survived, albeit imperfectly, in the national Orthodox consciousness.

1989 brought the fall of the Berlin wall, the fall of the Soviet empire and the end of an era. According to I. Ică Jr., 1989 is the contemporary equivalent of 1453. It marks the beginning of a new world, of a new “empire.” For the Eastern European countries, it was not just the end of the Communist regime or the return to 1917 or 1948, but the beginning of a new world, dominated by values and paradigms different from the traditional or modern paradigms that they had known before. Soon after being released from Communism, Eastern Europe was plunged into a postmodern civilization which it has not been able to understand and digest even after three decades. The global economy and scientific and technological development have caused profound change in society, culture and, implicitly, religion. For Eastern Europe, post-Communism identifies more and more with post-Christianity and post-humanism.¹⁸

In this context, the Orthodox Church has had to adapt and rapidly find a new mission. On the one hand, it has had to recover what had been lost during the Communist regime, while, on the other hand, it has had to offer answers to all the new contemporary challenges. The missionary consciousness cultivated in the last 30 years has been shaped by the understanding given by the Church to Christian mission during these past few decades. We shall turn in the next section to the teachings of some key Orthodox theologians and teachers whose writings have undergirded this recent renewal of missionary consciousness.

New Perspectives on Orthodox Missionary Consciousness in Recent Decades

*The Christological Character of Missionary Consciousness in the Writings
of Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993)*

One of the most significant and outstanding Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century, Dumitru Stăniloae, asserts that the Incarnation of Christ restores human nature corrupted by sin at every level of its existence, including its real

¹⁸ Ică jr., “Modern and Contemporary Orthodox Theology: Key Moments, Key Figures, Developments, Assessment,” 92–93.

identity and self-awareness. According to Saint Athanasius, the Incarnation was necessary because men “received the condemnation of death which had been previously threatened, and no longer remained as they had been created [...], they were deprived of the understanding of God and had turned to things which do not exist—for what does not exist is evil, but what does exist is good since it has been created by the existent God, then they were also deprived of eternal existence.¹⁹ That is why it was necessary that men should be refilled with eternal existence and this was possible only through God who “did not leave them destitute of knowledge of himself, lest even their own existence should be profitless for them.²⁰

When the Word became incarnate, not only did human beings turn from things earthly to things heavenly, but they were also transformed into a medium of transcendence. This may be the most important aspect of the restoration of the human being as a subject endowed with consciousness. The idea is emphasized by Stăniloae in his book *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu* (The Immortal Image of God). In his view, the Incarnation of God shows that the human being is the creature that is the most capable of becoming a medium for the revelation of God and that in the human being, the infinite depth of God is revealed.²¹

Commenting on Saint Athanasius, Stăniloae remarks that having an existence without being aware of it is useless and meaningless. Existence, even the existence of the material world, must also have a meaning. The world becomes meaningful through the fact that it is known by the human subject and it helps to preserve human beings as spiritual-material beings and to enrich their consciousness with the internal “reasons” of things, which are anchored in God’s infinity. If the world receives its meaning in the human consciousness, then the latter must last eternally. A human consciousness that lives eternally progresses in the knowledge of an infinite and eternal spiritual reality, but this can only happen in God.²² This continuous progress of the human consciousness which discovers the meaning of all things is, in fact, a missionary process, and the human consciousness which achieves this progress is a missionary consciousness.

According to the writings of D. Stăniloae, human consciousness is in a permanent and personal relation with Christ Who forms it and perfects it. The human

¹⁹ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 4, ed. Robert W. Thomson, New edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 144–45.

²⁰ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 11, 159.

²¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu* (Craiova: Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, 1987), 162.

²² Dumitru Stăniloae, “Notă explicativă la Tratat despre Întruparea Cuvântului și despre arătarea Lui nouă prin trup,” in *Scrieri. Partea 1*, by Sfântul Athanasius, trans. Dumitru Stăniloae, vol. 15, *Părinți și scriitori bisericești* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1987), 103.

being is a self that is aware of its own existence, of what makes it a human being, but who always asks *what am I?* The answer involves an antinomy: the process of discovering the self resembles a light that comes from within the human self, a light that is projected at the same time towards that self, trying to discover who or what he or she is or why he or she exists. The Romanian theologian describes this mysterious and paradoxical discovery of the self as follows:

He calls himself *I*, and the one he talks to he calls *you*, and the one whom he speaks or thinks about he calls *him*, that is he uses a pronoun, in his inability to find a proper name for himself or for the other.²³

Going down this path,

he knows that he depends on something that surpasses his understanding. He realizes that his being depends on an infinity separate from himself, an infinity he cannot contain, an infinity that also transmits incomprehensibility to human existence. For this reason, it can be said that the human person is a *mystery*, is apophatic or inexpressible in the proper sense, but a mystery that is aware of his existence as mystery and who can wonder about himself. In fact, the human being not only has the capacity to wonder about his place in the universe, but *must* do so. Being aware that he is a mystery, a human being is also aware that he can progress and that he must progress in the knowledge of his mystery. Still, he knows that he will never reach the end of his mystery, realizing that the roots of his being are supported by an Infinity, to which he is tied and on which he depends.²⁴

Thus, the greatness of the human being resides, on the one hand, in his ability to know the creating Reason, as he or she is created in His image, and on the other hand, in the way in which God reveals Himself to the creature. Following this logic, the human being can find himself only by knowing God. The human being is the knowing subject who looks within himself to discover alterity, to discover God, who is the Subject that reveals Himself to him. God, the Subject to be known, draws within Himself the knowing subject until the subject finds himself and says: *I* no longer live, but *Christ* lives in me. In this sense, the missionary consciousness is deeply rooted in Christ, who works through the Christian who humbly accepts the responsibility of the economy of the mystery of salvation and the transfiguration of the world.

The Consciousness of Universality and Unity

D. Stăniloae asserts that the human being is a mystery in a continuous process

²³ Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, 55.

²⁴ Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, 56.

of self-discovery. "In this process of self-discovery, he examines himself and his distinctive features that differentiate him from others, but he never comes to understand *what* he is".²⁵ The human being comes to a richer understanding of who he is not only through what others communicate to him, but also through the fact that he finds meaning even in the materiality of the surrounding things: what is their origin, how do they hold together, what is their purpose? And since he cannot help but ask these questions, the things of the world are in a sense dependent on him; he exists in relation with them, he must exercise his power to be *light for these things*, in order to enlighten himself. "The world depends on him, but not in its existence or in its structures; and he depends on the world, but not in his existence, but in the necessity of finding value in the world and within himself."²⁶ Thus, the human being has the consciousness of universality. If all things are connected in a divine harmony and they move towards an eschatological fulfillment, the human being has the mission to discover the meaning of each thing, in the light of its fulfillment. This aspect of the missionary consciousness implies that the entire created existence is the object of Christian mission. Nobody and nothing can be excluded: material, biological, or rational knowledge. The Christian with a missionary consciousness is called to think about humanity and the universe from the perspective of their protological and eschatological unity with the Holy Trinity.

The awareness of Christian unity is another feature of missionary consciousness associated with universality. Ion Bria identified three directions of Christian identity in which Christian testimony was necessary: 1. The identity and unity of the Church body; 2. The identity and holiness of life; 3. The identity as a follower of Christ, as a disciple "before people."²⁷ The identity and unity of Christians in one body (Eph 2:16) and in Christ (Gal 3:27) is achieved through *confessing the same faith*, through *receiving the same Baptism*, and through *communion in breaking one bread and sharing one chalice*, in the same Holy Sacraments. This is an affirmation of Christian identity, referring to the person who is baptized, but also to the community within which the Sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered (Rom 12:3-4). The issue of Christian identity is a relevant theme for the contemporary missionary context. Our common identity in Christ, the fact that we were made in His image, does not exclude diversity, but it underlines the fundamental argument of unity in Christ. The missionary consciousness of unity and universality in Christ must be reasserted today, especially in the context in which the Orthodox Churches organized ethnically seem to ignore the universal vocation of Orthodoxy and fo-

²⁵ Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, 57.

²⁶ Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, 57–58.

²⁷ Ion Bria, *Destinul Ortodoxiei* (Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1989), 344.

cus more on the ethnic element, even in contexts where the Orthodox Church is a minority, where she should form a strong pan-orthodox missionary consciousness.

Dogmatic Consciousness in the Teachings of St. Sophrony Sakharov (1896–1993)

The consciousness of universality in Orthodox mission cannot be assumed without a good grounding in the Church's dogmatic teaching. In St. Sophrony Sakharov's opinion, Orthodox Christianity cannot be conceived without a dogmatic, ecclesial and ascetic consciousness and without the awareness that every human person and member of the Church is called to bring to fulfillment a living and working unity of these elements and to achieve deification.²⁸ Understanding the way St. Sophrony defined dogmatic consciousness—the first element of this fundamental triad—could be especially beneficial for scholarly missiology²⁹ and for Orthodox Christian missionary praxis.

The Church's dogmatic teachings hold an important place in the theology of St. Sophrony. He explains that the manner in which man understands God has an impact upon all aspects of his life³⁰ and every change in his views about God produces a corresponding change in his thoughts, feelings, actions and human reactions, so that a life of prayer, however rigorous and ardent it might be, cannot be complete without a knowledge of God well-grounded in Church teaching.³¹ The Church's dogmas constitute "an extremely condensed synthesis", which contains antinomies.³² And precisely these antinomies teach the mind to renounce speculations, to hold back from stating or negating something, to stop looking for a higher conceptualization,³³ but to open itself humbly to the Light. The only path to such knowledge is to obey everything Christ has commanded us (cf. Matt 28:20).³⁴

For St. Sophrony, as well as for St. Gregory Palamas, God's commandments are not ethical norms, but "divine energies." They are the reflection of eternal life on earth: "By obeying these commandments we will come to resemble Christ in an

²⁸ Sofronie Saharov, *Nevoia cunoașterii lui Dumnezeu: Scrisori de la Athos către David Balfour*, trans. Rafail Noica (Alba-Iulia: Editura Reîntregirea, 2006), 298–310.

²⁹ Grigore Dinu Moș, "Conștiință dogmatică și mărturie creștină la arhimandritul Sofronie Saharov," in *Revelație, dogmă și spiritualitate în perspectiva misiunii bisericii: al III-lea Colocviu Național de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă Cluj-Napoca, 25-26 mai 2010*, ed. Valer Bel and Cristian Sonea (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2011), 383.

³⁰ Sofronie Saharov, *Nașterea întru împărăția cea neclătită*, trans. Rafail Noica (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2003), 19.

³¹ Saharov, 76.

³² Saharov, 80.

³³ Saharov, 79.

³⁴ Saharov, 78.

organic manner. His life becomes our life, His consciousness becomes ours and His mind becomes our mind".³⁵ Thus, for St. Sophrony, dogmatic consciousness means to have the "mind of Christ". And this constitutes a fundamental Christological perspective. From a pneumatological perspective, the dogmatic consciousness is the knowledge of God through the Spirit of Truth, confirmed by the presence of the Spirit in the witness of a new life. So we say that those who have a dogmatic consciousness have reached full maturity in their knowledge, they have assimilated in their minds and lives the divine Revelation as a consequence of the experience of Eternity in prayer.³⁶

From this perspective, ecumenical dialogue, which is pursued because of awareness of the universality of the Christian life, must be approached with a mature dogmatic consciousness so as to avoid relativism.

The Prophetic Consciousness

Missionary consciousness also involves the prophetic function of the Church. Instead of trying to find God's plan for the world, it is more natural to ask what the Christian's role in the world is. The world is no longer regarded as an obstacle, but as a challenge. Christ is risen and nothing is the same as before. It was the victory over evil that made people believe that the structures and the historical conditions of this world would change completely. However, we see that a social and political order that would be in accordance with God's will is almost a utopia. In fact, it belongs to the essence of Christian theology to doubt that the eschatological vision can be fully achieved in history. Nevertheless, history is subjected to the critical prophetic nature of the Gospel.

In this sense, returning to primary theological principles and applying them as the fundamental principles of the prophetic function of the Church is necessary. The first principle is that the word and the will of God are revealed through the Scriptures. The second one, the church canon, is the harmonization of the law and the prophets through the incarnation of the Lord, while the third is the Trinitarian principle, and the fourth, the Christological principle.³⁷

³⁵ Sofronie Saharov, *Vom vedea pe Dumnezeu precum Este*, trans. Rafail Noica (București: Sophia, 2005), 363.

³⁶ Saharov, 363.

³⁷ John Behr, "Returning to First Principles. Articulating Orthodox Theology in a Post-modern Context," in *Thinking Modernity. Towards a Reconfiguration of the Relationship between Orthodox Theology and Modern Culture*, ed. Assaad E. Kattan and Fadi A. Georgi, Balamand Theological Conferences 1 (St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology, University of Balamand, Westphalian Wilhelm's University, Centre for Religious Studies, 2010), 31–33.

The transformations within society that are initiated by God are different from those that result from human initiative. God surprises, He is always ahead of the human being. From this perspective, the future takes precedence. The final triumph is the gift of God for us, He is the One who is “making all things new” (Rev 21:5). Trying to project the future of humanity on our own is like turning off the lighthouse of eschatology, and then fumbling in darkness and despair searching for the shore.

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The message of the eschatological triumph of God allows us to distance ourselves from the world, but also to have the prophetic motivation to get involved in its transfiguration. This very perspective of the glory of God makes it impossible to look for personal perfection on earth without God or by withdrawing from the world and consequently from the field of mission. Perhaps we can rely on our own capacities and maybe we do trust the direction towards which history moves. Nevertheless, the development of a missionary consciousness which relates prophetically to historical reality will always be necessary.

The final sections of the article deal with the concept of missionary consciousness as understood in two different Orthodox communities: the Romanian Orthodox Church, a typical Orthodox community in a post-Communist country, and the Romanian Orthodox diaspora. By analyzing these specific types of communities, I hope to identify some features that could serve as patterns for other Orthodox communities. The focus here is on how missionary consciousness is formed and cultivated in each type of community and how it can be related to the characteristics of Orthodox missionary consciousness described in the previous part of the article.

Missionary Consciousness and Praxis in post-Communist Romania

After the fall of Communism, the first missionary task assumed by the Church was to fully regain its place in Romanian society, from which it had been excluded by the Communist regime. Thus, the Church today is present in hospitals and social assistance institutions; it has developed a network of philanthropic institutions,³⁸

³⁸ “Filantropia Bisericii,” *filantropia.patriarhia.ro*, 2020, <http://map.patriarhia.ro>.

it is present in the army, in schools (in Romania, religious education is taught in all state schools,)³⁹ in mass-media and the Internet.⁴⁰ If we regard the Church as an extension of the incarnation of Christ, the presence of the Church in all aspects of social life is a form of assuming the world in the same way Christ assumed the entirety of human nature in His incarnation. In this sense, the Christological aspect of missionary consciousness is present in the life of the Church.

On a more practical level, the missionary formation of the members of the Church is carried out through catechetical programs. For example, the catechetical program of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj that was initiated by Metropolitan Andrei in 2012 consists of catechetical courses that are taught in churches throughout the entire Archdiocese during three of the four major fasts (Lent, Dormition Fast and Nativity Fast). There are other catechetical programs too in Romania, but the one mentioned above is one of the most relevant as it takes place on a regular basis at the level of the archdiocese and it is organized according to a distinct and coherent program.

The catechetical program emphasizes certain aspects of missionary work that the Church hierarchy considers to be important. Some have an obvious, explicit, formative purpose, while the building up of a missionary consciousness for the laity represents only an implicit goal for the program. The lack of a missionary consciousness is rather obvious, in fact, for both clergy and the laity.

The catechetical courses cover such themes as the Divine Liturgy, the prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian, spiritual crucifixion, Christian virtues, the nine Church commandments, the importance of good deeds, the miraculous icons of the Theotokos, the seven major sins, the Creed, the saints, the Holy Sacraments. etc.⁴¹ On a general level, the catechetical courses aim at preserving and passing on the faith. In other words, their goal is to evangelize and re-evangelize Orthodox believers, which is of course necessary, especially for the large category of believers who were educated during Communism and who still need to understand better and learn more about their faith. The catechesis also offers answers to some of the challenging problems of the contemporary world, such as consumerism⁴² or postmodern thinking, to name just a couple. All these count as an *implicit* way of forming the missionary consciousness of the faithful.

³⁹ See: Cristian Sonea, "Confessional Religious Education or Ecumenical Religious Education? Case Study of the Orthodox Confessional School from Cluj-Napoca," *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, no. 2 (2013): 183–93.

⁴⁰ See: Liviu Vidican-Manci, *Propovăduirea Evangheliei în era digitală* (Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2020).

⁴¹ "Catehizare," Mitropolia Clujului, 2012, <https://www.mitropolia-clujului.ro/catehizare/>.

⁴² Liviu Vidican-Manci, *Firescul sfințeniei 29 de cateheze moral-duhovnicești* (Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2020), 23.

However, there are sections in the catechesis that *explicitly* try to raise awareness among believers regarding the importance of a missionary consciousness. For example, in the section of the catechetical course dedicated to the Holy Apostles, believers are encouraged to take up their missionary responsibilities, each of them according to his or her own gifts, just like the Holy Apostles.⁴³

The catechetical program of the Archdiocese of Cluj dedicates some space to the formation of a missionary consciousness among believers. However, we must admit that there is a tendency to prepare the believers more in defending their faith when subjected to proselytism coming from evangelical movements, rather than in confessing the Gospel in secularized or agnostic environments. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that we live in what seems to be a largely Orthodox environment. These issues are related to the *dogmatic consciousness* of the believers.

At the same time, we must note that in the above-mentioned program, there was no reference to a *universal missionary consciousness*. The goal seems to be the cultivation of a Romanian missionary consciousness, as suggested by the fact that a considerable portion of the catechesis is dedicated to Romanian saints.⁴⁴ This is not to say that there are any chauvinistic tendencies or any negative attitudes towards other national orthodoxies.

Also, there isn't any visible preoccupation with developing a *prophetic consciousness*. In fact, the lack of appropriate reactions and of a prophetic attitude on the part of Church leaders seems to be a consequence of the way the Communist regime affected the Church. According to Alexander Webster, the lack of a prophetic voice is the price paid by the Church in order to survive under Communism,⁴⁵ and it looks as if the Church leaders are unable to make believers aware of the importance of their prophetic voice in society.

In Romania, in October 2018, the prophetic missionary consciousness of the members of the Church was put to the test through their participation in the referendum for the definition of the family in the constitution. According to Article 48 of the Romanian Constitution, "the family is founded on the freely consented marriage of the spouses." The promoters of the initiative wanted to change the gender-neutral language and to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. The Church suffered an important defeat on this occasion. The result was considered a failure for a nation that claims to be 80% Orthodox. Moreover, the result was not different in the Archdiocese of Cluj where this catechetical program has been delivered, which shows that the impact of the program was limited. That

⁴³ Vidican-Manci, 92.

⁴⁴ Vidican-Manci, 117–65.

⁴⁵ Alexander F. C. Webster, *The Price of Prophecy* (Washington, DC: Ethics & Public Policy Center, 1995), 89–136.

is why I suggest that it is necessary to change the focus in future catechetical programs, from defending the Orthodox faith against proselytism to facing the challenges of postmodernity and militant secularism, which constitute a bigger threat today. Also, the Orthodox Church, along with other Christian confessions, needs to find a way to avoid the increasing tendency for practicing Christians to become a minority enclave.

Missionary Consciousness and Praxis in the Romanian Orthodox Diaspora

Cultivating a missionary consciousness in the communities of the diaspora is a completely different matter, as it is a missionary situation that came into being under dramatic circumstances. The Orthodox diaspora began to form in Western Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century with the settlement of the first migrants, fleeing their countries in Eastern Europe for economic and political reasons, in Western European countries.⁴⁶ The situation is quite similar in the case of the American diaspora.⁴⁷ The Bolshevik revolution and the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe contributed significantly to the increase in the number of migrants. After the fall of Communism at the end of the twentieth century, the number of Eastern European immigrants increased even further, although the type of migrants had changed.

Using the term *diaspora* to describe these Orthodox communities is considered by many⁴⁸ an obstacle in the effort to achieve jurisdictional unity in this area which has not yet been defined canonically. The word diaspora implies a grouping of Orthodox believers according to national criteria, to the disadvantage of Church unity as a criterion.

It is true that most of the Orthodox communities outside the borders of the canonical territories of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches formed as a consequence of migration, and it was only natural for them to want to have their own churches and priests where they settled. On the other hand, as these communities settled and Orthodoxy became better known, many Christians of other confessions or non-Christians embraced the Orthodox faith. They were integrated into the national churches, but the use of the term *diaspora* for them is inappropriate.

⁴⁶ Ivana Noble, "L'Avenir de la «diaspora» orthodoxe," *Contacts* 65, 243 (2013), 479.

⁴⁷ See: Gabriel Gârdan, *Românii ortodocși din America: documente*, Documenta Ecclesiastica (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2010).

⁴⁸ See: Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church: New Edition*, 2nd edition (London, England; New York, N.Y: Penguin Books, 1993), 184–85.

ate. Furthermore, as time went by, and given the mixed marriages performed in the church, many of the Christians coming from families of migrants also become “locals.” They belong both to their parents’ and grandparents’ culture, and to the culture of the host country. The term *diaspora* is also inappropriate in this case.

As the matter of the diaspora is extremely complex, the missionary consciousness that develops within these communities is also complex, fluctuating between preserving their ethnic consciousness and developing a universal, pan-orthodox consciousness. Even after the Orthodox churches have functioned for quite some time in diaspora, they are, in the words of Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev “still badly equipped to receive new believers.”⁴⁹ Their main focus has been to rebuild and consolidate their institutions and to educate their clergy or to offer answers to contemporary issues.

As far as a *universal missionary consciousness* is concerned, Berit Thorbjørnsrud notes that the members of the “Orthodox diaspora still know little about the basics of Orthodoxy, and they may consequently be badly equipped to relate the principles of Orthodox ecclesiology to their own needs in the diaspora.”⁵⁰ Because of this, Thorbjørnsrud continues, when they arrive and settle down in their adoptive countries, they either try to find their own (national) Orthodox church, or, if they cannot find one nearby, they will make efforts to establish one. In order to change this, an intra-Orthodox dialogue would be highly necessary today, but “rebuilding bridges across the divide caused by the dramatic events of the twentieth century has clearly not been an easy task.” There have been numerous tensions and conflicts amongst church leaders and a viable solution has not been found yet.⁵¹ Constantinople claims the diaspora as territories “beyond the boundaries,” which, according to the interpretation of Canon 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, belong to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The non-canonical situation of the diaspora and of the parallel jurisdictions was also discussed at the Council in Crete where the conclusion was that “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 [...] during the present phase is not possible, for historical and pastoral reasons.” Thus, the Episcopal Assemblies instituted by the Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference should be preserved until canonical

⁴⁹ Hilarion Alfeyev, *Orthodox Witness Today* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2006), 57–80.

⁵⁰ Berit Thorbjørnsrud, “The Problem of the Orthodox Diaspora: The Orthodox Church between Nationalism, Transnationalism, and Universality,” *Numen* 62, no. 5–6 (September 7, 2015): 648–49.

⁵¹ Thorbjørnsrud, 648–49.

exactness (*akribeia*) can be applied.⁵² The purpose of the Episcopal Assembly is to manifest the unity of the Orthodox Church, to promote collaboration between the churches in all areas of pastoral ministry, and to maintain, preserve and develop the interests of the communities that belong to the canonical Orthodox Bishops of the Region.⁵³

So, the question here is how a missionary consciousness can be cultivated in such a context. Formed in dramatic circumstances, the diaspora represents a special missionary situation as the needs of the more recent waves of immigrants differ from the needs of the second or third generation. Those belonging to the second and third generation can no longer be called immigrants, since they were born in the adoptive countries of their parents or grandparents. Those familiar with the Romanian diaspora have noticed, for example, that the children born in the adoptive country speak the language of that country among themselves, but they speak Romanian to their parents and grandparents.

In the case of Orthodox communities, these are usually mixed communities, consisting both of members belonging to the recent wave of immigration, and of older generations of immigrants who fled Romania during communist times or even before that. This can certainly be considered a pattern that will be found in other Orthodox communities.

Based on Charles Hirschman's three Rs system of defining immigrants' needs —*refuge, respect, resources*,⁵⁴ Berit Thorbjørnsrud offers an interesting analysis of the new wave of Orthodox immigrants in Norway.⁵⁵ Alienation, lack of recognition, stereotypes about some ethnic groups make immigrants feel vulnerable. Because of this, they tend to stay close to their national communities, as that is where they feel they belong, or they feel safe. Consequently, the consciousness that is being cultivated is the national consciousness, associated with the identity they are trying to preserve. The immigrants belonging to the recent wave have a stronger sense of national identity. They feel they are Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian or Russian and they often think of their situation as being temporary and they plan to return to their home countries sooner or later. According to Romanian Metropolitan Iosif Pop of Paris, since in countries such as Italy, Spain or Portugal there are a lot of Romanian migrants (in some cases over a million per country), the number of those attending Church services is high and attention is focused mainly on the

⁵² "The Orthodox Diaspora," 2016, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/diaspora>.

⁵³ "The Orthodox Diaspora," art 2.

⁵⁴ Charles Hirschman, "The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States1:," *International Migration Review*, July 24, 2018, 1228.

⁵⁵ Thorbjørnsrud, "The Problem of the Orthodox Diaspora," 642.

Romanians themselves.⁵⁶ They are trying to preserve their Orthodox identity, of which they only became aware when they entered a non-Orthodox environment.

The situation is evidently different in older communities, where Orthodox believers have gained a missionary consciousness and are more willing to become involved in the process of encouraging new members to join their communities. As an example, according to the statistics of a Romanian parish in Munich, over a period of 7 years (2010–2017), 49 new converts joined the Church: 30 Catholics, 12 Evangelicals, 5 unbaptized, 1 Muslim and 1 Copt.⁵⁷

After a period of adaptation to the new life and after being fully integrated into the country of adoption, Orthodox believers seem more interested in witnessing to their faith. In the older diaspora, the missionary programs of the parishes include topics such as the dialogue between theology and science. In Paris, for example, the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate has a department dedicated to the dialogue between science and theology within the “Dumitru Stăniloae” Research Center which is open both to priests and laity interested in this topic.⁵⁸

Thus, we witness here a process of glocalization⁵⁹ which contributes to the development of a universal missionary consciousness. The glocalization in this case involves the adaptation of a universal Orthodox theology to a local context and a typology of reflexivity. According to Marco Guglielmi, “a reflexive process is initiated when a religious institution engages in a dialogue with other religious, political, social, and cultural communities of the host country.”⁶⁰

Victor Roudometof identifies four forms of glocalization: *indigenization*, *vernacularization*, *nationalization* and *transnationalization*.⁶¹ Vernacularization refers to the use of vernacular languages in the Church’s liturgical and spiritual life, while indigenization connects different faiths to ethnic groups, to the point where religion and culture are merged. Nationalization, on the other hand, is more related to the consolidation of some nations with certain confessions and is specific to

⁵⁶ Arhiepiscop și Mitropolit Iosif Pop, “În Occident, românii caută integrarea prin Biserică, familie, cultură și spiritualitate, September 27, 2011, <https://www.totpal.ro/interviu-cu-arhiepiscop-si-mitropolit-inaltpreasfintitul-dr-iosif-pop-de-la-paris/>.

⁵⁷ Ioan Crișan, “Biserica trăită în diaspora. Parohia Bunavestire din München” (Cluj-Napoca, Babeș-Bolyai, 2017), 52.

⁵⁸ “Science and Religion,” Science and Religion, 2010, <http://www.science-et-religion.fr/en/>.

⁵⁹ Marco Guglielmi, “Orthodox Christianity in a Western Catholic Country,” in *Global Eastern Orthodoxy: Politics, Religion, and Human Rights*, ed. Giuseppe Giordan and Siniša Zrinščak (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 221.

⁶⁰ Guglielmi, 228–29.

⁶¹ Victor Roudometof, *Globalization and Orthodox Christianity: The Transformations of a Religious Tradition*, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 2013).

the European context. Transnationalization, explains V. Roudometof, “has complemented religious nationalization by forcing groups to identify with specific religious traditions of real or imagined national homelands or to adopt a universalist vision of religion.”⁶²

In the specific context of the Orthodox diaspora, we find all forms of glocalization. Vernacularization, through the translation of the liturgy and other religious services into the languages of the adoptive countries; indigenization, by adapting the religious life to the local culture, nationalization by preserving and cultivating a national consciousness within the Orthodox communities and transnationalization by going beyond the ethnic element of the Orthodox communities and by integrating it into a larger, multi-ethnic Orthodox community (as in the case of some of the Romanian communities in USA that belong to the Orthodox Church of America).

All these take place through something M. Guglielmi calls a process of hybridization. In Italy, “the reproduction of the Romanian identity is articulated through a path marked by its hybridization with the socio-cultural context.”⁶³

Returning to the criteria for missionary vocation described in the previous part of the article, the Orthodox diaspora seems to meet the Christological criterion. The Church, following the Incarnation of Christ, tries to be present in all aspects of social life and to meet the needs of the members of the Church or of those interested in Orthodoxy. The dogmatic consciousness is also present among the national communities of the diaspora, sometimes even at the level of the laity, who are well aware of what separates them from other Christian confessions.

The universal consciousness is clearly present, even though there is still a strong attachment to the national church. For some of the believers, even belonging to a national church is understood as belonging to the universal Church.⁶⁴ Although the Orthodox diaspora represents a challenge for Church leaders in terms of canonical organization, for the laity the universal consciousness and national loyalty⁶⁵ do not seem to contradict each other in any way.

However, in order to truly speak of a universal missionary consciousness, the Orthodox communities need to first move past their temporary status and then, perhaps the new generations born in the host countries could gain a sense of belonging to a universal Orthodoxy. What is urgent now is to find a solution for the canonical situation of the Orthodox diaspora and the episcopal assemblies are a first necessary step in this direction so that the Orthodox communities can func-

⁶² Victor Roudometof, “Glocal Religions: An Introduction,” *Religions* 9, 10 (October 2018), 5.

⁶³ Guglielmi, “Orthodox Christianity in a Western Catholic Country,” 234–35.

⁶⁴ Thorbjørnsrud, “The Problem of the Orthodox Diaspora,” 653.

⁶⁵ Thorbjørnsrud, 664.

tion properly and can develop their own Orthodox prophetic consciousness in diaspora.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the characteristics of the missionary consciousness of Romanian Orthodox Christians, both in Romania and in the diaspora. The reality shows that over the past 30 years the Church has gone through an obvious social and spiritual revival. Although there are serious (and justified) critical positions regarding the activity of the church, the Romanian Orthodox Church generally appears to be a Christian community that is aware of its own apostolic vocation and that has a relatively clear missionary program.

On closer inspection, we noticed that in Romania the tendency has been to concentrate on recovering the place in society that the Church had lost during the Communist regime, while in diaspora, the focus has been on building primarily a Romanian Orthodox consciousness. While the first tendency is legitimate, considering the historical context before 1989, the second tendency is more problematic from an ecclesiological and a canonical point of view, but certainly understandable, given the dramatic circumstances (political, economic and social), in which the Romanian diaspora appeared.

The pastoral responsibilities of the Church hierarchy and of the missionaries of the Church should contribute to the development of an authentic Orthodox missionary consciousness. Such an authentic Orthodox missionary consciousness involves following the missionary model given by Christ. He assumed human nature in its entirety, providing the means for the transfiguration and deification of the human being. A Christian mission that embraces the entirety of human existence should be built on this model. Perhaps an important thing to be noted here is that God is the One who works in history. We are witnesses and we participate in His work. The life of the church under the Communist regime is a good example of this. Although missionary and pastoral activity was drastically limited then, God worked through both the clergy and the laity, even though neither had a well-developed missionary consciousness.

Another responsibility is to cultivate the *dogmatic consciousness* of Orthodox Christians and this can be done in two ways: first, by experiencing the mysteries of faith, and then in a more external way, by literally learning about the faith or by theoretical knowledge. Even though abstract representations can correspond to or be indicative of reality, they do not constitute true knowledge of God. Nevertheless, they are valuable and can help in many aspects of the Christian life in general, including the spiritual life. Dogmatic consciousness is then formed through true

contact with the realities described by the Church's dogmatic teachings. Thus, experience is a source of authentic knowledge and of theology. Any change in the dogmatic consciousness (at any level, be it a very insignificant one) causes a corresponding change in the spiritual life. Similarly, any departure from the truth in the spiritual life causes a change in the dogmatic consciousness.⁶⁶

Another task is to cultivate an awareness of Orthodox universality and of Christian unity. Both in Romania and in the diaspora, the emphasis is more on the consolidation of national and ethnic identity. Universality is of course not denied, but it is considered to be of secondary importance. At the same time, in the encounter with Orthodox Christians belonging to other national churches, a local, national consciousness emerges, but one that is understood in a universal sense. Intuitively, the believers understand that by belonging to Romanian Orthodoxy, they belong to universal Orthodoxy as well. This universal consciousness is important, since it is on this basis that the churches from the diaspora can move past this provisional state while an appropriate solution for their canonical organization is sought.

Related to the universal missionary consciousness, we must admit that evangelization is not a particularly strong point for Orthodox missionary consciousness. Perhaps it should receive more attention, especially today, when the Orthodox churches are receiving an increasing number of converts from the evangelical communities where the missionary spirit is strong.

Finally, the development of a prophetic consciousness is also an important pastoral priority. In traditional orthodox communities, there is an interest in developing a prophetic missionary spirit to censure the errors of contemporary society, but such a prophetic spirit must be accompanied by a dogmatic and universal consciousness.

Keywords:

missionary consciousness, orthodox diaspora, nationalism, universal, identity, prophetic spirit

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⁶⁶ See: Nathanael Neacșu, *Conștiință dogmatică și viață duhovnicească în gândirea părintelui Sofronie Saharov* (Iași: Doxologia, 2015).