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The missionary ethos and its valences in the Orthodox diaspora Romanian

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Abstract. The missionary ethos of the Orthodox Church reflects the character and message of Christ and, broadly speaking, remains constant in all Local Orthodox Churches. However, there can be subtle nuances of differentiation between the various Local Churches and in different time periods, depending on the current context and challenges, as well as the priorities they address.

Keywords. Priest, Diaspora, Spain, Mission

1. The characteristic elements of the missionary ethos from the perspective of the analysis carried out in the Romanian diaspora

In the Romanian community abroad, the Church travels for the third time the path of the early Church, that is, the apostolic missionary journey. In doing so, it starts again without visible resources – buildings, centers or teams – as it was 2,000 years ago. However, the church has Christ as its foundation and is the sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God. At the same time, it has an extremely rich spiritual treasure, ready to be inherited and shared. Within the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Spain and Portugal, which is young both in mission and seniority, missionary work begins to take shape and becomes a priority. Without a missionary orientation, no matter how rich the resources or community of a Local Church, it will slowly but surely end up in stagnation and failure. In order to achieve a comprehensive, successful and sustainable mission, it is essential to address this challenge in multiple aspects. Even if this process takes time and investment, gradually, it can be done. In the Diocese of Spain and Portugal, this process of missionary development has begun, and I would like to highlight a few aspects:

A. The educational part of mission derives directly from the missionary commandment itself: "Go, teach all nations ..." (Matthew 28:19). After starting the mission area, the first crucial aspect is "learn", which implies the responsibility to share valuable teaching with all ethnic groups, so that, following this training, people can discern and choose the path to salvation. However, in order to be able to teach, it is necessary to take an active initiative and follow this path in a missionary way. I would like to dwell on the first word of the missionary command: "walking" (πορευθέντες). Priests from Romanian communities abroad embrace this idea of going and preaching in an authentic apostolic way. Many times, they have to explore unexpected places, such as parks, bars, pubs, associations or markets, to find interested
Romanians or Christians. In many cases, missionary work begins in such environments, which at first glance do not seem suitable for preaching activity. However, even the apostles sometimes adopted such an approach: for example, the Apostle Paul "questioned Jews and believers in the synagogue, and daily in the square with those who happened to be present" (Acts 17:17). The educational dimension of the mission comprises several aspects, which I would like to highlight:

- Among the most essential aspects are preaching and catechesis, elements that are not lacking in any parish within the Diocese. However, with regard to catechesis, greater coordination and intensification is needed at parish level, also involving the need for specialised catechists. In addition, parenesis (occasional preaching) during holidays, unscheduled meetings in various contexts, discussions with young people and collaborations with various associations or institutions are added to these. In the diaspora environment, parenesis plays a particularly important role.

- Another aspect of particular importance in the missionary context in the diaspora is the one related to language, because translations are absolutely necessary. Currently, there are many translated parts of the liturgy, and in all Orthodox parishes in the Iberian Peninsula it is celebrated in two languages. Translating prayers, spirituality books and other materials into the most common, accessible and spoken language of parish members is of prime importance. This initiative significantly expands the horizons of pastoral mission and beyond.

- The Orthodox Center for Studies and Research Dumitru Stănilea (COSCDS) is an institution with cultural and spiritual valences, having a strong missionary character. It was established in 2008 by a decision of the Metropolitan Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolis of Western and Southern Europe and was inaugurated in July 2009. The "Dumitru Stănilea" Center has a multifunctional purpose, serving as an environment for research, training and reflection, with an emphasis on the continuous training of clergy within the Metropolia/Diocese, but also for the training of catechists and laity interested in supporting the activity of the Church in its mission. At the same time, the Center aims to lead editorial projects, including translations from the works of Romanian authors, and to promote the theological work of Father Dumitru Stănilea, considered a special spiritual experience for Romanian Orthodoxy. The Center also engages in Orthodox theological and anthropological research and provides insight into contemporary issues in the moral, missionary, ethical, bioethical, and ecological fields. Within this Centre, priests and laity from the Diocese of Spain and Portugal, as well as from other dioceses in the diaspora, undergo studies and training. A notable aspect is the significant number of lay people who enroll in the Catechist Training Program and the Introduction to Orthodox Theology Program.

- An example of this is the Church Singer Course, organized periodically at St. Pious Parascheva Orthodox Monastery in Vilaller, Spain. This course is included among the missionary teaching activities carried out in the Diocese and aims to inspire a missionary spirit among the less experienced clergy (singers, teachers, readers) in Spain.

- In-service training courses for youth coordinators are a distinct training for those involved in youth mission.


2 Examination sessions are held annually at different locations across MOREOM dioceses. In 2016, the September evaluation session took place in Madrid within the Benedictine monastic complex Valle de los Caídos, gathering over 120 clergy and laity, participants in the courses of C.D.S. Paris (Fr. Drd. Vasile POP, "CDS Paris evaluation session, September 27-29, 2016 Madrid", in: Apostolia, October 2016, 103, pp. 52-53).
In addition, the Church also engages in the online environment and the media, which is becoming increasingly important nowadays. Therefore, the Church's online presence is essential, and this aspect is elaborated in more detail in Chapter IV. The Diocese of Spain and Portugal operates online through its official website: www.obispadoortodoxo.es, and through its Facebook page. At the parish level, about 70 parishes have their own websites, and many more are active on various social media platforms.

B. The sacramental/spiritual part of mission can be considered the most essential part of all missionary activity. This dimension is of crucial importance, given that the missionary efforts of the Church cannot be considered complete unless they are accompanied by the other side of the commandment in Matthew 28:19, which says, "baptizing all nations." The effort to preach and teach the Gentiles has as its main objective authentic spiritual living, which materializes through direct experimentation or orthopraxis. The apostles did not train the Gentiles only in a theoretical sense, but taught them to assume and live concretely the divine Mysteries. The theory or discourse itself is meaningless if it is not accompanied by the experience of spiritual life. Therefore, Gentile learning has always been accompanied by the grace of the Holy Spirit, which was given to those who received Baptism, Holy Matrimony, Ordination, etc. The sacramental life nourishes the power of preaching and makes it authentic and profound. Without the sacramental or spiritual dimension in missionary activity, it turns into a form of activism, propaganda or even sectarian proselytizing. The strength of the Church does not lie in the large number of members, but in those who receive and offer the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Today, rediscovering or intensifying spiritual living is of crucial and necessary importance, especially if it already exists. The sacramental life of the Church is the foundation of mission, being that divine power offered by the Holy Spirit, according to the words of Christ the Saviour: "I will pray to the Father and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever" (John 14:16). Without this power, the mission cannot be successful or convinced. In the context of the diaspora, emphasis is placed on worship and liturgical service as frequently as possible. Even though there are many obstacles that limit the frequency of service outside Sundays, efforts are being made to overcome them, precisely to cultivate the communion of love (koinonia agape) in the world. In the Diocese of Spain and Portugal, sacramental life is prioritized above all other aspects, because without prayer and Holy Liturgy, the message becomes only discourse, and mission becomes journey without destination.

A first and crucial concern in this regard is to serve the Divine Liturgy as frequently as possible, even daily. For missionary reasons, the sacrament of Holy Baptism and the sacrament of marriage are performed weekly in tens or hundreds of cases. Every week, between 120-130 baptisms and transitions to Orthodoxy are performed in the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Spain and Portugal. In the diaspora, the Baptist liturgy plays a particularly important role, representing not an innovation, as can sometimes be misperceived, but a return to the practice of the Church from the first centuries to the fourteenth century. This reaffirms and recenters the Divine Liturgy at the heart of the sacramental life of the Church.

Also, the Sacrament of Holy Unction is celebrated in all parishes four times a year, during fasts and outside them, with a well-established schedule. From the above, it can be understood that the two dimensions of mission (didactic and sacramental) cannot be separated. They are included in the great missionary mandate of Matthew 28:19 and complement each other, constituting crucial elements for the missionary climate of any Local Church or Church structure.

- The Ensemble of the Romanians’ Cathedral in Madrid – missionary motivation

The desire to have a visible and lasting presence that will remain a witness for future generations was evident from the very beginning of the existence of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese in the Iberian Peninsula. Although there are several reasons and arguments for the construction of the Romanian Orthodox Cathedral in Madrid, I would like to highlight the missionary motivation. The Cathedral ensemble, which is 98% built, will become the core of Romanian church activities in Spain, fueled by unceasing prayers. From a mission perspective, the Cathedral supports the sacramental dimension through its daily ministry program, special projects and planned activities, which will strengthen all aspects of the pastoral care of Romanians in Madrid and its surroundings, having an impact at regional and diocesan level. Since 2017, regular services have been introduced within the Cathedral, which has contributed to strengthening the cathedral’s community and a considerable group of young people actively involved in its projects. Many of the diocesan projects begin as pilot projects at the cathedral of Madrid, which becomes the reference point and rhythm of pastoral and missionary life in the Community of Madrid, with extensive impact throughout the diocese.

In addition to the function of the cathedral, the ensemble also includes the administrative headquarters, which will house offices, a publishing house, the headquarters of the Nepsis Youth Association, conference rooms, a parish school, a library and other facilities. All these components of the ensemble under construction (some of which are already completed) support and will continue to support the missionary work of the Diocese of Spain and Portugal and will play a decisive role in the future mission. The cathedral and its ensemble, as well as other places of worship under construction, do not compete with other institutions, but have an essential complementary role. It cannot be replaced by temporary or rented spaces, but requires a sustainable structure that becomes a factor of unity, mission and resilience in the Iberian Peninsula.

2. Ways to cultivate missionary ethos

2.1 Cultivating the missionary ethos within the diocesan

The mission manifested at the diocesan level must be consistent with the fundamental mission of the Church and her missionary vision. It starts from the teachings of Christ through the great missionary commandment, continues with the model given by the Holy Apostles and Holy Fathers, and must persist over time, maintaining the same dedication and dedication to preaching the Word and to carrying out an authentic sacramental and missionary work.

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8 Currently, 90% of parishes do not own spaces, but a part of 25% serve in Catholic places of worship, and 70% serve in different spaces (ground floors, conference rooms, industrial halls) rented, and 10% have their own spaces: Roquetas de Mar, Barcelona, Albacete, Calahora, Castellon, Elche, Torrent, Villareal, Zaragoza, Lerida etc.
Although mission at the diocesan level is not limited by the territorial boundaries of a diocese or church structure, it must reflect the content and commitment of a missionary conscience. However, it is important to note that the way mission and pastoral care manifest itself at the diocesan level can be specifically influenced and shaped by the local context, the particularities of the Diocese, the priorities of the faithful, and so on.

The manifestation of the missionary ethos at diocesan level plays an essential role, because here the guiding principles of missionary activity are established, which are subsequently implemented at regional level, in deanery and, above all, at parish level. Harmony in terms of mission between the Patriarchate, diocese and parishes is crucial, as this forms interconnected missionary networks that support a more realistic approach and can provide interventions where needed. Contemporary mission can be supported and pastoral care improved through collaboration between dioceses and parishes, with direct involvement in the families of the faithful. At the diocesan level, the missionary ethos must be evident, and above all it must be reflected in the unfolding of the Holy Mysteries and the Divine Liturgy. It must incorporate a missionary spirituality, convey an appropriate response to the needs of contemporary believers, and provide understanding and guidance for living a life in harmony with evangelical teachings:

Through the Holy Mysteries and Eucharist "the Church becomes what she is, the Body of Christ, the divine parousia – the presence and communication of Christ and His Kingdom [...] through the Eucharist, the Church makes the passage from this world to the world to come, in eschaton; participate in the Ascension of the Lord and His messianic banquet, taste the peace and joy of the Kingdom [...] Thus, the whole life of the Church has its origin in the Eucharist, it is the fruition of this Eucharistic fullness during this passing world. This is indeed the mission of the Church."9

The missionary projection of the Church must be perceived as a mission that takes place in the world, but with the final destination in the Kingdom of God. In this regard, it is crucial that at the diocesan level it is understood that the objectives of the mission are man and the world. Mission is oriented towards man to guide him towards sanctification and salvation, and towards the world to be a temporary ground of mission, but also to experience transformation into a new and regenerated state. Thus, it becomes clear that, at the diocesan level or at any other level, the Church manifests the ethos of Christ and the apostolic ethos:

"The Church was left in the world, time, space, and history with a specific purpose and mission: to walk in the same way He walked. The fulness and dwelling place of the Church is in heaven. But this fulness is given to the world [...] The eschatological nature of the Church is not the denial of the world, but, on the contrary, its affirmation and acceptance as an object of divine love."10

The manifestation of mission and missionary ethos at the diocesan level has a significant impact on the development of the missionary ethos at the parish and family level. It is therefore particularly important that at the diocesan level there is missionary coherence, a set of missionary values and commitments that instill an apostolic and missionary spirit. This ethos must be reflected in a balance and clarity in the pastoral and missionary approach. The absence of such coherence and commitment at the diocesan level can lead to a separation or division between the diocese and other church structures, which could ultimately lead to mission failure, confusion and an inability to develop productive and long-term missionary projects.

10 Ibid
2.2 Cultivating the missionary ethos within the parish

The parish, as a fundamental unit in the life of the Church, plays an essential role in the mission of the Church at the level of the Diocese. Within the parish are concentrated the organized activities of the Church, including the presence of the priest and the parish assembly. At the same time, the parish is the starting point for the Church's interventions and involvement in the lives of believers. Therefore, the development and manifestation of mission at parish level constitutes the solid basis for the missionary activity of the whole Church. If the mission is not sustained within parishes, there is a risk that it will be absent or may exist in an incomplete or occasional form throughout the Church. Within the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Spain and Portugal, the establishment of a new parish is in itself a concrete proof of mission and a living manifestation of missionary consciousness. This missionary awareness is cultivated in parishes through the active involvement of all segments of the community: youth, believers and clergy. Young people are involved in activities such as the Nepsis Association and parish youth groups, the faithful are involved in both the didactic and social part of the mission, and the priest has the responsibility to coordinate the liturgical and catechetical dimension of the mission, although it remains his duty to approach the mission in its entirety. A particularly important aspect of parish mission is the careful involvement of the bishop. Its involvement is not limited to transmitting directives or circulars from the central level, but materializes through its participation in activities and services in various parishes. The bishop may spend time in parishes during canonical visits or in official meetings with authorities or representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. For example, His Grace Bishop Timothy conducts services and meetings in different parishes weekly, thus setting an example of involvement and commitment to mission at parish level.

In the Diocese of Spain and Portugal, as well as in most Orthodox communities in the diaspora, the mission process always begins with people involved (faithful, bishop, priests) and goes to places with a significant population of Romanians. Subsequently, the mission evolves and develops within local and parish communities, this stage being essential to achieve missionary objectives and maintain a significant impact. Without this step, the mission would be terminated prematurely, without reaching the proposed final target. The missionary objective within a diocese is to develop mission on multiple levels of parish life: liturgical, moral, social-philanthropic and even diplomatic. The diplomatic element of the mission is of particular importance, because diplomacy and collaboration can expand missionary horizons. Parishes that have been able to build positive diplomatic relations with the authorities and the Roman Catholic Church have been able to obtain adequate spaces for carrying out missionary activity, as well as facilities that significantly support missionary efforts. This approach requires patience, openness and caution in diplomatic relations, but in the long run it can lead to remarkable results in terms of mission development and expansion.

2.3 Cultivating the Missionary Ethos in the Family

The family, as the fundamental and essential cell of the Church and society, plays a crucial role in the mission and work of the Church. It is imperative that a sense of missionary activity is promoted within the family from the very beginning of its formation. The family has a significant role in parish and ecclesiastical mission, because it not only receives the mission of the Church, but also supports it. Family members can become authentic missionaries of Christ in their parish community. The results of faith and spiritual guidance correspond directly to the state of their spiritual, moral, educational, and cultural health. Just as healthy cells are the foundation of an organism’s health, so the spiritual health of the Church depends on the health
of the family cell. Therefore, each parish, made up of diverse families, should focus on cultivating a sense of missionary activity within its families. This sense of missionary teaches family members to consider themselves part of the work of the Church and to be involved in its inner and later external mission. Through this participation, family members can bring others unto Christ. Since the family is a person’s first medium of communion, developing the missionary ethos within it is essential. This facilitates understanding and participation in ecclesiastical communion, where family members form the liturgical communal synaxis. If one does not experience communion within the family, it will be difficult for him to understand it in the context of church services:

"When we say family, we say communion and by this we mean perfect communion. This means that the family is not just any communion (the basic social cell), but a perfect form—the best and most organic—of communion that exists on earth and in the universe. God Himself, the supreme reality, first and last, is family; family is everything, the Alpha and Omega of existence."11

Authentic mission is revealed through Christ's work through the Church, and Christ and the Church are a model and icon for the human family. In the Pauline sense, the family becomes a profound mystery (cf. I Corinthians 7:7), but this mystery has significance in the context of the relationship with Christ. Indeed, the family acquires significance in terms of its relationship with Christ and communion in its mystery, and at the same time it is considered important only insofar as it is a component of the Church. In order to cultivate a sense of missionary and an awareness of mission within the family, it is essential that development directions come from the parish to family members, as well as from parents to children. This ensures that the sense of mission is transmitted from one generation to another. The mission is not limited to clergy or parish priests, but should ideally involve or involve all members of the parish, that is, all families that make up the community.

References

11 Ibid.


