

UNIVERSITY „AUREL VLAICU” ARAD  
INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL SCHOOL  
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY „ILARION V. FELEA”  
DOCTORAL STUDIES  
THEOLOGY

# DOCTORAL THESIS

## SUMMARY

**Scientific advisor:**  
**Fr. Prof. Univ. Dr. IOAN TULCAN**

**Student:**  
**BĂLEANU CRISTIAN-ILIE**

**Arad,**  
**2024**

UNIVERSITY „AUREL VLAICU” ARAD  
INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL SCHOOL  
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY „ILARION V. FELEA”  
DOCTORAL STUDIES  
THEOLOGY

**DOGMATIC FOUNDATIONS OF THE  
ORTHODOX CHURCH'S MISSION IN THE  
CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

**SUMMARY**

**Scientific advisor:  
Fr. Prof. Univ. Dr. IOAN TULCAN**

**Student:  
BĂLEANU CRISTIAN-ILIE**

**Arad,  
2024**

The dogmatic foundation of the Christian mission is a permanent necessity in the consciousness and life of the Orthodox Church. This theme unites two important disciplines of theology, dogmatics and missiology, facilitating the transition from the testimony of the word of truth of saving faith to its concrete practice. Since the 20th century, the development of society, and, unfortunately, its secularization, it welcomes the christian world with us and various challenges. The majority Orthodox territories are hard-pressed by wars, by atheist ideological currents and, finally, are assailed to be “evangelized” by the neo-Protestant breath. For the Orthodox Church it becomes necessary to preserve the treasure, tradition, but without omit the actualization of its teachings, their transmission and consolidation in the consciousness of contemporary man. Dogma and mission, foreign terms to secularized man, perhaps abstract to mere practicing Christians, must be deepened and understood in contemporary society.

The Christian mission, specific to the being of the Church, has a profound connection with the whole of theology. The dogmatic foundation of the mission is not

an innovation, but involves the deepening and study of several theological disciplines. Among the leading theologians of the last century, who have elaborated studies on the Christian mission, we can mention: Al. Schmemmann, G. Florovsky, O. Clement, V. Lossky, P. Florensky, S. Bulgakov, P. Nellas, I. Zizioulas, I. Roamanidis, and so on the subject of missionary dogmatics is also addressed in their works by several contemporary Romanian Orthodox theologians (I. Bria, V. Bel, C. Sonea, C. Taroczkai). All of them bring a reactualization of the Church's mission at the academic level. For the Orthodox, mission is a duty of everyone, but this must be fully understood in order to be properly applied. Framing the dogmatic foundations in the context of the contemporary mission remains an attractive subject, to which I have personally allocated attention, through certain studies that I have reassessed in the context of achieving the goal proposed within the doctoral project.

Orthodox missionary issues were insufficiently addressed in Orthodox theology until the second half of the last century. The lifting of anathemas and the strengthening of relations between the Patriarchate of

Constantinople and Rome, the meeting of the first Pan-Orthodox Councils and the accession of the local Orthodox Churches to the Ecumenical Council of Churches open new perspectives in addressing Orthodox theological themes. From this point of view, both Orthodox theologians from Eastern European countries and those from the diaspora constantly address the topic of Christian mission. A first step in the research of the Orthodox mission is represented by the Orthodox consultations between 1970 and 1980, organized at the initiative of the Ecumenical Council of Churches. These Orthodox consultations are important moments during the shaping of an Orthodox missionary theology, especially by addressing the topics of interest for the mission of the Church of Christ. In 1976, at the first Pre-Synodal Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambèsy, Switzerland, some of these topics were highlighted in the agenda of the Great Orthodox Council in Crete, in 2016, at which time the first pan-Orthodox point of view regarding the priorities of the Orthodox mission is formulated uniformly. Both foreign and Romanian Orthodox theologians become concerned with the missionary theme.

Framing the scientific research study in the current missionary paradigm, the first chapter presents the importance of the teaching of faith for the mission of the Orthodox Church. In view of the differences between past historical eras, I considered necessary an overview of the current missionary context. In this regard, we have analyzed the importance of the *Missio Dei missionary paradigm*, its impact on the 20th and 21st centuries and its importance for the Orthodox mission. The idea of God's mission, a sovereign mission in which man, through the Church, has his own duties, has never been foreign to the Orthodox Church, existing since the first Christian millennium. At the same time, in order to present the current missionary context, it was necessary to analyze the challenges of the contemporary world. Thus, the new currents of thought, the influences of science and technology on society, the new spiritual tendencies and the superficiality of contemporary man toward the right faith have been investigated and explained.

In order to clarify the Orthodox Church's vision of mission, subchapter two develops the essential features of the Christian mission. The Orthodox mission is based on

Trinitarian theology and derives from the mission of the Savior Jesus Christ. The mission of the Orthodox Church is Christocentric, being an integral part of the very nature of the Church. Not being able to discuss mission unless we consider divine Revelation, the last subchapter deals with the importance of Revelation for mission. In this part of the work it was necessary to study the biblical testimonies of the Old and New Testaments, to highlight the connection and dialog between man and God. At the same time, Revelation is expressed in the Church through the teaching of faith, through worship and prayer. It was therefore necessary to deepen them and how they facilitate the mission.

Knowing that the Orthodox mission has a complex and well-articulated doctrinal basis that has not changed in history, chapters II, III and IV are meant to present at length the dogmatic foundations of the mission. Chapter II presents the Trinitarian foundations, explaining from the very beginning that Trinitarian theology is the doctrinal basis of Christian mission. Looking more closely at the dogma of the Holy Trinity, we see a broad connection between the communion of the Triune persons and their

work. Therefore, the following subchapter presents the communion of love of the Holy Trinity and the work of the three persons as the beginning of the mission. After the completion of the act of creation and the fall of man into sin, the Triune God prepares the work of saving mankind for the incarnation of the Divine Logos. Subchapter three presents the work of the Logos in creation and in the Revelation of the Old Testament, the world being prepared for the moment of the Incarnation and the completion of the work of redemption. At the end of chapter two, the Trinitarian peculiarities of salvation are detailed, in a missionary context, highlighting the connection between the common work of the Triune God and the act of the Incarnation.

Chapter III presents the Christological and pneumatological foundations of the mission, beginning with the explanation of the act of sending the Son by the Father, and the importance of this continuous missionary act crowned with the moment of the Incarnation. The mission of the Savior begins after the Baptism received from the Holy Prophet John and has four stages or dimensions: Ascetic, kerygmatic, healing, and the last



dimension is, in fact, the culmination of his mission – sacrifice, Resurrection and Ascension. The Savior is the Missionary par excellence. He raises the human nature from sin and deifies it, followed by everyone who believes in Him. Asceticism, preaching (and ministry), miracles and sacrifice are direct implications for the Church’s mission, as they represent the essential elements of the mission. Subchapter three deals with the missionary effects of the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ, completing the analysis of the mission of the Son of God on earth.

The presence and work of the Holy Spirit was constantly present in the Messiah's messianic life and activity, though this did not stand out. The prominence of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world was brought to light on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended in the image of tongues of fire upon the holy apostles. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the world did not mean the replacement of Jesus Christ from the Church, but only brought to light the sanctifying and saving work of Him who was raised to heaven through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter IV focuses on the sacramental nature of the mission and its ecclesiological foundation. Starting from the conclusions set out in the previous chapter, the Church is by her nature missionary, having her important role in the economy of man's salvation and the transfiguration of creation. The first subchapter presents the Church being a foretaste for Christians of the fullness of creation united with God. The Church of Christ is the only way to perfection, designed to receive the whole world, to unite all in Christ, and to finally encompass the whole of creation.

The ecclesiological foundations of the mission of the Orthodox Church are indicated by the attributes of the Church, expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Through these qualities, by means of which we understand the place of the Church in creation and in divine economy, mission is also defined and framed institutionally. Subchapter three continues the analysis of the ecclesial dimension of the mission, highlighting the fact that the three dignities (ministries) of the Savior (Teacher, Archpriest and Royal) are important and essential in the life of the Church.

Chapter four is devoted to the sacramental foundations of mission. The emphasis here is on the liturgical character of the mission, and the importance of the Holy Eucharist in the missionary dynamic is also emphasized. In this regard, the importance of divine worship in the missionary activity of the Church, in which the Divine Liturgy occupies the central place, is presented. At the same time, we notice that the mission is carried out both inside and outside the Church. Church services and especially the Divine Liturgy are meant to solidify the bonds between Christians and unite them with Jesus Christ. The mission within the Church is part of the general mission, and the Divine Liturgy concretizes this complete mission addressed both to those within and to those outside the Church, which results from the catechetical and sanctifying structure of the Divine Liturgy. Referring to the second part of the Divine Liturgy, the Eucharistic one, that is, the moment when Christians receive Christ, we can mention that this is also a foretaste of the fullness of Union with the Savior, which we will enjoy at the end of the ages.

Chapter V returns to the actuality of our day and refers to the dogmatic demands of the Church's mission. The apostolic tradition represents a *sine qua non reality* in Orthodox mission and spirituality. The first subchapter defines and explains this term, highlighting its dynamic side through which Christian teaching has been spread and consolidated. Holy tradition is, of course, itself a form of mission, which has sanctifiably refreshed the life of the Church in the past, doing the same for the present period. Continuing on the same subject, subchapter two deepens the new theological tendencies concerning the return to missionary Patristic thought. It is important to mention the new neo-Orthodox current, highlighted by its leading representatives, Orthodox theologians of the 20th century, who bring the way of thinking of the Holy Fathers, specifically Orthodox, to the present day. Dogma or teaching cannot be known and understood more deeply than through spiritual experience. Through this ecclesial experience, the teaching is lived and assimilated by the faithful with their whole being.

The Orthodox mission, unlike other forms of mission outside the Church, has always had the role of

uniting believers in the body of Christ – the Church. Subchapter three presents the forms by which the Orthodox mission took place and is carried out in a social context. Eucharistic preaching and communion are the two main elements of the Orthodox mission in society. In this sense, the Divine Liturgy, which contains these two elements, dynamizes the mission through its very structure. The positive impact of Mass and the whole mission in society must be emphasized. As a dynamic act, the Divine Liturgy, like the entire Christian mission, does not end, but continues after leaving the church through the Christians who have shared with Christ. At the end of this subchapter, the concept of “Mass after Mass”, defined briefly previously, is approached from a historical and dogmatic perspective.

Unfortunately, the unity of Christians, through constant challenges throughout history, has suffered. Subchapter four discusses the less pleasant side of the Church’s past, the division of Christians, as a challenge to the Christian mission. In this subchapter, we analyze only the contemporary period of the relationship between the Orthodox Churches and the other Christian confessions,

explaining the uniqueness and diversity in the Church, the position and attitude of the Orthodox Church toward the Christian world outside the canonical boundaries, but also the relationship of Orthodoxy with modernity. The two extremes, well known today in the Orthodox world, radical anti-ecumenism and progressive modernization of the Church, are also highlighted. Today, the mission of the Orthodox Church has difficult obstacles to meet, even from Christians of other denominations, proving an open reluctance to tradition and spirituality in all modern societies.

Subchapter five concludes the area of dogmatic missionary requirements, presenting the phenomenon of the inculturation of the Gospel and its missionary significance. This process of sedimentation of the teaching of the Christian faith in a newly Christianized society has manifested itself differently depending on the geographical areas, representing an important and necessary stage in the Christian mission.

The Christian mission must be understood by Orthodox Christians, both clergy and laity, in its complexity. The dogmatic foundations of the mission help

us to understand the role of every Christian in God's saving economy, being intellectually and spiritually prepared to respond to the increasingly frequent and diverse challenges of a secularized society today. The clarification of this overall picture of the Christian mission, in the context of our day, renews in the Christian conscience the personal and collective task of manifesting our faith in a form of communion and fraternity, through a continuous sacrifice for our neighbor, following the example of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Understanding the mission in its essence has meaning and spiritual benefit for every Christian. The practice of the mission involves the special commitment of the members of the Church in part. It should also be stressed that the Church's mission conveys knowledge and information about the Christian faith, having a pronounced spiritual dimension. Mission needs to be passed through the filter of reason, besides the fact that in Orthodox spirituality, mission is lived, it is part of our spiritual life. At an academic and well-articulated level, the Orthodox Church's perspective on the mission was formed through the Orthodox Missionary consultations and was again

highlighted at the Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete. The analysis of the mission, in its complexity, highlights its importance in the Orthodox world, generating a new stage in theological research.

For the Orthodox Church, the mission suffers no change in time, for the foundations of the Orthodox world remain unchanged. What is changing is the social-cultural context in which the Church must update her mission according to the challenges of each historical age. In the post-modern period in which we are today, there is an openness of secularized man to spirituality, according to Protestant missiologist David Bosch. Modernity, by itself as a historical epoch, is opposed to tradition, and since tradition is defining Orthodoxy, it involves a missionary strategy of the Orthodox Church, which takes account of this reality, presenting with all its strength theological arguments the actuality and relevance of the mission of the Orthodox Church to the contemporary world.