

University „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” – Iași
Faculty of Orthodox Theology „Dumitru Stăniloae”
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Summary PhD Thesis

THE MISSIONARY-CONFESSING DIMENSION OF THE DIVINE LITURGY

Scientific Coordinator:
Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Gheorghe Petraru

Ph.D Candidate:
Pr. Bădiliță Ionuț

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CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION.....	4
1. The importance and actuality of the subject. Objectives.....	4
2. The actual state of research.....	9
3. Thesis structure.....	15
CHAPTER I: THE LITURGICAL-SACRAMENTAL LIFE AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.....	22
1. Worship – Liturgical experience of the ecclesial community.....	22
2. Psalmody and its value in the missionary activity of the Church.....	35
3. Doxological dimension of the theology of the Church.....	42
4. The sacramental expression of the mission of the Church.....	52
4.1. The Mystery of Baptism.....	55
4.2. The Mystery of Chrismation.....	57
4.3. The Eucharist.....	57
4.4. The Mystery of Confession.....	60
4.5. The Mystery of Ordination.....	61
4.6. The Mystery of Marriage.....	62
4.7. The Mystery of Holy Unction.....	63
5. The missionary and evangelizing signification of the Church’s holy works.....	66
6. Missionary implications of liturgical life.....	73
CHAPTER II: THE LITURGY OF THE WORD: CELEBRATION AND EVANGELIZATION.....	78
1. The creative power and revelatory function of the Word of God.....	78
2. <i>Praedicate evangelium omni creaturae</i> : The proclamation of the Word - fundamental missionary work of the Church.....	85
3. The Divine Liturgy - „The service of the word”.....	92
4. The Gospel – verbal icon of Christ.....	98
5. The centrality of the Liturgy in the dynamics of the evangelizing mission.....	105

6. Ambo and Table: The unity between Word and Sacrament in the Orthodox Liturgy.....	119
7. From the written text to the living word: Holy Scripture and its actualization in liturgical celebration.....	126
8. Liturgy, hermeneutical „space“. Liturgical and eclessial character of the Scripture exegesis.....	140
8.1. The importance of prayer and hymnography in the hermeneutical act.....	146
8.2. Liturgical gestures.....	148
8.3. Preaching: breaking the bread of the Word.....	151
9. Missionary sense and content of the prayer for catechumens.....	156
10. The Divine Liturgy – The matrix of an evangelical culture.....	157
CHAPTER III: LEX ORANDI, LEX CREDENDI, LEX AGENDI: CELEBRATING, CONFESSING AND LIVING THE ORTHODOX FAITH IN THE DIVINE LITURGY.....	
170	
1. <i>Fides adorans mysterium</i> : Faith as witness, certainty and mystagogical experience.....	171
2. <i>Martyria – homologia – apologia</i> : Confessing the faith in the live and mission of the Church.....	177
3. The Creed in the Holy Liturgy – Liturgical celebration of the revealed faith’s truth.....	184
4. „I believe, O Lord, and I confess“: The confessing dimension of the Orthodox Liturgy.....	194
4.1. „Thou, and Thine only-begotten Son, and Thy Holy Spirit“.....	197
4.2. „Brightness of Thy glory, and the express Image of Thy Person“.....	201
4.3. „Spirit of Truth, the Gift of Adoption“.....	204
4.4. „Glorious Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary“.....	206
4.5. „Who hast created man according to Thine image and likeness“.....	208
4.6. „We venerate Thy most pure icon, gracious Lord“.....	211
5. The Liturgy: Factor of unity and preservation of the orthodox faith.....	215
CHAPTER IV: „YE DO PROCLAIM MY DEATH, YE DO CONFESS MY RESURRECTION“:	
EUCHARISTIC LITURGY – THE WELLSPRING OF THE CHURCH MISSION.....	
221	
1. The Mystery of Eucharist: The center of liturgical-sacramental and missionary life of the Church.....	221
2. Eucharistic communion – principle and expression of the Church’s unity.....	227

3. Eucharistic Liturgy: missionary responsibility and ecclesial consciousness	231
4. An eucharistic ontology of the liturgical communion.....	237
5. Interpersonal unity and communion in the Eucharist – missionary paradigm in the actual context.....	241
6. „The precious food for missionaries, bread and wine for pilgrims” – Missionary implication of the communion with Holy Mysteries.....	251
7. Holy Eucharist – proclaiming the death and resurrection of the Lord.....	258
8. The Paschal Mystery of the Liturgy and Mission of the Church.....	264
9. „Direct our way, make steadfast our steps”: The Divine Liturgy – the starting point of the witness and the mission of the Church.....	274
CHAPTER V: „NOW EVERYTHING IS FILLED WITH LIGHT”: MISSION OF THE CHURCH – THE EXTENSION IN THE WORLD OF THE LITURGICAL EXPERIENCE.....	
285	
1. <i>Da pacem mundom Tuo</i> : The Peace – the gift of the Liturgy for the men and for the world.....	285
2. <i>Sursum corda!</i> The Divine Liturgy and the liturgical way of christian’s living in the world.....	289
3. <i>Ecclesia orans et militans</i> : The Church and its mission in the world, as „liturgy after the Liturgy”.....	298
4. Mission – epiphany of divine compassion: The inner connection between Liturgy and social-philanthropic mission of the Church.....	310
5. The Liturgy, center of parish’s life and of its missionary dynamics.....	321
6. The transforming and sanctifying power of the Liturgy in a secularized society.....	332
7. The apologetic importance of the Liturgy in the actual context of the sectarian proselytism	341
8. <i>Splendor Veritatis</i> : Philocalic dimension of the Orthodox Liturgy or the missionary impact of beauty.....	350
CONCLUSIONS: FOR A LITURGICAL DIMENSION OF THE CHURCH’S MISSION.....	
358	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	
367	

KEY WORDS: liturgy, mission, eucharist, communion, worship, sacraments, sacrifice, hermeneutics, Gospel, culture

The present thesis, *The Missionary-Confessing Dimension of the Divine Liturgy*, which we propose it as a doctoral thesis in Orthodox Theology, Missiology and Ecumenism field of research, have as motivational base the crucial importance of the Divine Liturgy in the life and in the mission of the Church. The Liturgy is the place where Christ, the eternal High Priest - He that offereth and is offered, that accepteth and is distributed – comes in the middle of His faithful, the people of God, for gathering them from the world for communion through His evangelic word and eucharistic banquet, and to send them „with peace” in mission to „preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), and to imprint the liturgical spirit like a seal in all dimensions of the life. Regarding the actuality, this doctoral thesis may be regarded as a try to emphasise the fact that Orthodox Church is not fixed in an „ivory tower” of liturgical worship, without any bond or connection with mission, with gordian knots of present time, with entire human life, with all aspects (cultural, political, technical) of the society where we live; on contrary, the whole missionary-confessing activity of the Christ’s Church in the world, flows and nourishes permanently from the Divine Liturgy. As a matter of fact, the Liturgy itself, as the „eucharistic presence in the world of the Resurrected Icon” (J.-L. Marion), represents the essential apostolate or mission of the Church, a mission expressed through constant mediation/intercession „for the life and for the salvation of the world”, and bringing it in the horizon of grace, of Kingdom of the Holy Trinity which is experienced in every liturgical celebration. In the participation on liturgical synaxis, the people of God, New Israel, nourished by the communion with eucharistic Christ, becomes itself a living Chalce, filled with divine presence, and capable for self-giving to the world. „When these things are done [eucharistic oblation], they shall be zealous to do good works, and to please God, living honorably, devoting themselves to the Church, doing the things which they were taught, and advancing in the service of God” (Hyppolitus, *Apostolic Tradition*, chapter XXIII).

In this doctoral thesis, as we shall see further, we will try to show that Divine Liturgy assume its extension/continuation in an *extra muros* – outside the walls – liturgy, a liturgy of

deeds and witness, which everyone has to celebrate as a „priest of his existence” (Paul Evdokimov), in accordance with St Peter’s words: „But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (2:9). The Orthodox Liturgy constitutes the essential medium in which the congregation gathers for confessing in unity the faith of the „Catholic/Universal Church from the very beginning, which the Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers preserved” (St Athanasius). The Divine Liturgy is the starting point and the foundation of Church witness, of its entire missionary and apostolic works. The mission of the Church springs without ceasing from the Liturgy and from the whole liturgical life as from a „river of life” (Revelation 22:1), and it is extended in the Gospel’s preaching and social-philanthropic mission of every day life. Using an image from musicology domain, we can say that the Liturgy represents the indispensable „diapason” with which we are able to discern and comprehend the missionary „score” of the Church in this world, as it were composed and issued by the Supreme Hymnographer. Despite the fact that this subject regarding the relation between Liturgy and Mission were emphasised in other studies from our country and from abroad, the present thesis distinguishes, regarding the originality aspect, through a more ample and integrative vision on the approached subject, analyzing the Liturgy both in its internal missionary aspect (evangelization, hermeneutics, confessing the dogmatic faith), and the external aspect (mission as the extension of liturgical experience in social life context). Doing so, in this doctoral thesis we will try, using the analytical method, to show that the very celebration of the Liturgy, by its inner structure, have a profound and evident missionary and confessing dimension, expressed by biblical readings and their exegesis, confessing the Creed, eucharistic communion, prayer for the whole world. In the same time, we will try to approach from the perspective of Missiology both orthodox liturgical life in general – as the liturgical experience of *plebs sancta Dei* (the holy people of God), and the holy works (*ierourgeia*) – as the Church’s mission to sanctify the world and human life in its complexity, and the Holy Sacraments – ecclesial events of communion with God, of participation in Christ’s life through the Spirit, each Mystery having a fundamental importance for the mission. In treating this topic, we are starting from the premise that for the Church’s mission, the liturgical-eucharistic community is essential and incumbent. “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19), constitute the most important command of the Gospel. The Eucharistic Liturgy it is not only a cultural and public manifestation of the Orthodox community,

but it represents also the structure of integration and growth of the Mystical Body of Christ. In the Liturgy, Christ is offering Himself to the people in different grades and ways, for uniting them with Himself in His Sacrifice, Resurrection and His mission.

About the Divine Liturgy has been written an immense quantity of books and studies, and there will be more to come from now on, for sure. Fascinated by its sublimity and splendor, Fathers and great thinkers of the Church, as Theodore of Mopsuestia, Dionysius Areopagita, Maximus the Confessor, Germanos of Constantiople, Nicolaus Cabasilas, Symeon of Thessalonika, and also renowned theologians like Dumitru Staniloae, Petre Vintilescu, Ene Braniste, Alexander Schmemmann, Robert Taft and many others -, all of them, like pearl seekers, had tried, by prayer and humility, to immerse themselves more and more in the ocean of spiritual meanings of the Orthodox Liturgy. Nevertheless, its mysteries and its depths shall never be known, grasped or described in a pleromatic way. For this reason, it has been called “Divine”. It was and will be to the end of ages an immortal wellspring of life, vivacity, hope, but also of theological reflections. This is the very reason for which we will strive in the following pages to get closer to the “burning bush” of the Liturgy, trying to analyze it from a missionary perspective, bringing thus a small contribution in the bibliography which is focused on highlighting the deep and inevitable relation between Missiology and Liturgical Theology.

For the entire of Orthodoxy, the Divine Liturgy represents the heart of the life and ministry of the Church, the matrix of christian experience of the life in Christ, being both the Mystery through which Christ Himself descends in the Church to shed on the praying community His word’s life-giving power of His Gospel and to nourish the community with His precious Gifts of His Body and Blood, but also the Mystery which transforms and rise the people from the earth to the Heaven, for experiencing the true light and to offer doxology to the Triune-God. Since the first centuries of the Church, the Divine Liturgy was in the center of the christian community life, the eucharistic celebration representing the keystone of the entire ecclesial life and of its missionary works (cf. Acts 2:42). For the believers, the Liturgy is the most profound and concrete realisation of Christ’s promise: “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). The coming and presence of the glorified Lord, the representation and mystical experience of His death and resurrection, the descending of the trinitarian divine realities in the human life context, the exaltation of man and entire creation by divine grace and, finally, the waiting filled with hope of the final and perfect revelation of the Kingdom of glory which is to come – all of

these are the experiences which are engraved or concentrated in the liturgical mystery. In other words, the eucharistic Liturgy is a recapitulation and an actualization of the entire creative, redemptive and sanctifying work of God in Jesus Christ. As the liturgist David Fagerberg wrote, the Divine Liturgy should not be comprehended from the perspective of a mere religious ritual: “Liturgical time is not merely religious festival, but it is celebration of the cosmic eighth day; liturgical space is not a history of sacred architecture, but it is standing on the ground of Mt. Tabor when we stand before the altar; liturgical assembly is only partially understood by a sociology of religion because it is the body of Christ; liturgical hymn is not music with a certain piety, but it is the angels’ Trisagion passed through human vocal chords. Liturgy is the paschal mystery sacramentalized in liturgical time, space, assembly and arts, like God was incarnated in the flesh”.

The Divine Liturgy, together with entire liturgical life of the Church, represents the most valuable thesaurus of the Orthodoxy, because it contains and preserves in a potential way our life and beliefs, our faith and the theonomic mode of existence of the saints. The worship and the Holy Liturgy are, above all, a synaxis of the Body of Church, a formation and a development of some relations beyond any biological necessity, in the parameters of love and sacrifice for the others. The Eucharistic community constitutes a constant tension towards awaited realisation of the eschatological existence. Therefore, in the frameworks of the Liturgy was formed historically the entire life of Church in any of its dimensions. Even the socio-political relations of the believers began to take their christian shape in the frames of the worship and local community. For the Orthodox Church, its liturgical life was never a matter of mere spiritualism and idealism or a simple religious gathering, as it is understood nowadays due to alienation of his character over the ages. The Liturgical life is connected in a profound and direct manner with the problems of life, to which the prayers of the Church is always referring. From this point of view, are very suggestive the remarks of the great anglican liturgist Dom Gregory Dix who, in the conclusions of his monumental work *The Shape of the Liturgy* said that to speak and write about the Liturgy means to speak about *life* itself: “We must understand that the Liturgy is not celebrated in an ecclesiastic Avalon, but to a large extent, it reflects the needs and the principles always changing of the faithful. The Eucharist have the power to embrace the human life not only in an abstract form but in the particular concrete realities of it, of reaching to anything in it, great impersonal things that rock whole nations and little tender human things of one man’s or one woman’s living and dying – laying hold of them and translating them into something beyond time”.

As Father Dumitru Staniloae rightly observed, every Liturgy, every mystery of the Church, any holy works and divine service, are a continuation of the Pentecost or the Descent of the Holy Spirit and His work on those who are gathered in the “Upper Room”, in a state of prayer. The whole liturgical life of the Orthodox Church has a content which is oriented not only toward man but the entire cosmical medium, seen and unseen, through which the grace of God operates. Liturgical worship, as a disclosure of a tripe mystery of life: the mystery of God, of men and of creation, as well as of relations between them – it’s the primary means which helps the human life to climb without cease the ladder which leads to the union with God and to the eternal joy “in the light of His Face” (Ps. 88:16). The poetic word of liturgical hymns offers impressive possibilities for being the most important medium for the mystagogy of the entire churchly Body which lives and witness the right faith, “blending melody with the Word from the holy words” (G. Metallinos). In the same time, liturgical worship is a medium of spiritual emergence of man and by that, a foretast of eschatological bliss. All that takes place within the Liturgy – the mystery of God’s dwelling among men – is accessible for people through faith, by objective-sacramental incorporation ant then actually-subjective, ethical and ascetical, in the life of Church, pursuing the reaching of understanding by experience of the sacramental mystery and extending this mystery in the world as “liturgy after the Liturgy”. “Voltaic arc” between earth and heaven, the Divine Liturgy is the most authentic medium of expressing the unity in Christ, but also the expression of personal dimension of liturgical space, the measure of personal and communional experience to be in the presence of God to celebrate His majesty, to thank Him, to call Him in prayer and to witness Him in all aspects of our life. In the eucharistic communion, to the degree that the eyes of faith are illuminated by the wisdom that only the Spirit can impart, we see the truth of our divinization in Christ, taste the deep mystery that underlies the creation of the world, discover the hidden depths of our own nature, anticipate in our flash the glory to which all the world has been called from eternity, and exeperience the infinite life of God. In this charismatic space, human beings experiences the loving unity of the world by its movement towards the One who is the “Fountain of Life” (Ps. 35:9) and the “Light of the World” (John 8:12).