

# **"ALEXANDRU- IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY- IAȘI**

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## **SUMMARY**

PhD thesis

### **ORTHODOX PARISH-HORIZON OF THE GOSPEL COMMISSION, CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY AND CULTURAL, AND PHILANTHROPY**

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## ABSTRACT

My work constitutes a pleading for the revitalization of Church's way of life at local level by trying to develop a community ecclesiological vision which must face the reality nowadays. Based on the recent research in the field of missionary theology, another purpose of my approach was trying to highlight the true meaning of mission, evangelism, cultural pluralism, philanthropy, starting with the core of the universal Church, the parish. There is still a misunderstanding, both in the local church and in the civil society, of the missionary service as an exclusive attribute of the clergy and hierarchical structures. Therefore, as a novelty, this exposure tries to cover a practical necessity, namely, the need to know the perception of the believers about the local church and especially the one about the pastor of the community. Finally, we consider unjustified the current anxiety concerning the experience of the local church in a globalized society, such as the European one, because the resistance point for the life of all parishes is the tradition of the holy Church.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **The ecclesial dimension of the parish**

Parish, the smallest unit of the ecclesiological reality, appears as the Universal Church, in a certain time and place. There are two basic dimensions of the Church, namely the Eucharistic assembly of God's people and the community aspect of it (Ekklesia = assembly), the participation in the divine nature, through the work of St. Spirit. The universality of the local church does not define only the congregation of members, but also the missionary character because parish is manifested as a new creation that can transform and announce the kingdom of God. In this paper we insisted on these dogmatic issues, because there is a tendency of Church at parish level, to be perceived as an institution, bounded by some very strict rules and less as the Mystical Body of Christ (Eph 1: 22-23 ). In fact, the precept of the Body-Church is supported by the Church Fathers not as an object of theoretical speculation, but as the subject of theology, for deification. In the definition of the parish, as historical and eschatological reality, it is very important to point the bond between local and universal in the organization of the Church. From this point of view, the Church has its foundation into the life of St. Trinity, which had inspired the structure of the universal Church. In Christ creatures act as a community centered in Him, and through St. Spirit there are distinct persons whose diversity is fully respected.

Regarding the historicity of the parish, the birth of the universal Church is similar to the birth of local religious community, the first community of Jerusalem being considered the first bishopric followed by a process of multiplication of it. The main element of parish's

occurrence in practice can be identified with the strengthening of priest's liturgical function, as a delegate of the bishop of a particular diocese and parish's institutional appearance can be placed in sec. IV d.Hr. Since its foundation, the parish was an organizational model for the whole society of that time, because it was grouped around Christ and the gospel of salvation, with a profoundly human message, different from world's. The responsibility for the missionary service, however, is both of the society and of the Church, the former providing multiple opportunities to serve the parishioners and the power of the Holy Spirit claims opening to the world.

Both human components parish structure, as mysterious body of Christ, clergy and laity (the laity) have the character of necessity, in the sense that the Church can not exist and can not fulfill its mission without them, and in this respect, we are witnessing today a deep crisis vocational concerning the full commitment to serving the Church.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **EVANGELISM AS MINISTRY OF THE WORD WITHIN THE PARISH**

Nevertheless, the basis of evangelism as proclamation of the word of God, is the parish, which proclaims the gospel in all the circumstances of daily life from the inside of the sanctuary of the church. In the center of the mission is located the shaping of human in order to reach the similarity to God through communion with the St. Trinity because the voice of the Church can not be defined only as a fulfillment of spiritual and material needs of man, but as also as an action of Christ, who seeks, serves and suffers for people. In order for the word "mission" not to introduce any confusion, within its definition it is necessary to be based on intertrinitare relations in which the Father sends His Son to the world in order to restore the true life. The theology of evangelism put at the service of humans is however faced, at parish level, by the cultural values that can be ennobled by Christianity. The Orthodox parish mainly respects and promotes the culture of each ecclesiological community by seeing each of it as a means of preaching the gospel, through the diversity of certain manifestations of the sacramental life (wedding rites, funeral, carols etc.). The Romanian Orthodoxy emphasizes on the overlap between culture and the Gospel, which gave birth to an unrepeatabe ethnographic characteristic throughout the Europe. Nevertheless, we are contemporary with a profound change in cultural paradigms, characterized by an attempt to overcome any previous spiritual tradition. How the shepherd of souls could make Him, Christ, The One who can not be expressed using words, accessible to all people in Postmodernism? Priest's words in preaching the Gospel thus aims to translate the text to a concrete situation of everyday life. Preaching the words becomes thereby a liturgical act of crucial importance and seeks to lengthen the efectiveness of the message of Christ who is the true,, Preacher " in the parish. To the activities of teaching priest must be added the presence of Religion in schools which has to

share the imperishable values of faith to the younger generation. Therefore the exposure of the Religion teacher becomes the confession of faith of the truth found in St. Scripture and St. Tradition. The understanding of Church's doctrine must be made through individual reading of St. Scriptures in a family atmosphere at home. In the context of contemporary society, while examining the spiritual and cultural life of man, we can see that reading is one of the latest concerns of many parishioners.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The sacramental incorporation in the body of Christ**

The need to be in a permanent relationship with God and to regain the communion with Him can be accomplished both by confession of faith and by celebrating it through acts of worship (church services). Without them, the work of salvation and sanctification of the world is not possible. All prayers, formulas and external documents accompanying the external manifestations of the parish church, reproduce the act of descent, through Incarnation, of God's love among people. Existential and historical, the cult present in the life of the parish has a Christological and Community character being basically identical to that established by the Savior Christ. The discovery of a new vocation which is also a debt, to attend the St. Mysteries of the Church and to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in order to reach the true life, helps remove any type of formalism, which only emphasizes the moral aspect of the Christian life, and from this point of view, evangelization cannot be conceived without the Eucharist. This meeting of our world with the heavenly kingdom compels every believer from the parish to change his vision of his existence. The place where the performing acts of worship takes place, the parish or the church, becomes an organ of divine wisdom so that the dogma is incorporated into all sanctifying acts accomplished. No other institution or faction separated from the Church does have its authority in the knowledge and testimony of the saving word because here lives the Spirit of Truth.

St. Sacraments of the Church represent Church's callings of people to become the children of God and members of community. If Baptism is the gateway into the local church and Confirmation- the call to universal priesthood and the reference to preaching of the Gospel, the Eucharist transmits to human beings the saving divine energy towards the birth of that complete transparency for spiritual life. Through His Body, Christ shares with believers love, humility, purity of mind and body, as some talents which must be made to bear fruits and this love is stronger than the multitude of sins committed by people.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **The inner mission of the parish**

The climactic condition of the spiritual life is the believer raised beyond the level of his own powers, not by itself, but through the work of St. Spirit. Though, the mysterious union with God is reached only with great efforts and labors. Therefore, the spiritual life within the parish must be perceived as an unceasing struggle to acquire the holiness. From this perspective, the family appears in every parish as an icon of God's love on earth, even if, due to the moral and spiritual crisis of the world nowadays, the theological model of traditional Christian family is often considered outdated by the everyday reality. Thus, pastor's messages should emphasize both the Church's solidarity toward the Christian family and the necessity of a permanent willpower and effort of the spouses to protect their marriage. Among the factors that disrupt the orthodox families from the parish is the sectarian phenomenon which is seen as a counter-Christian testimony. The presence of sects becomes very dangerous for any local church because it produces disorder and disobedience, and, in most cases, it also creates false gods, being the result of certain people's visions inspired by wandering spirits. Therefore, the reactivation of the social apostolate of the laity in the fight against sectarian proselytism through the care towards the place of worship, the maintenance of cemeteries and of other religious monuments of culture and art, as well as the advanced knowledge of the doctrine of the Orthodox faith are indicated. The social apostolate or the philanthropy represents for the priest from the parish another way to get into the kingdom of God by using various forms and methods inspired by love for others. This side of his pastoral-ship is inspired from God's universal philanthropy which disregards any social affiliation. God is The One who gives the most appropriate definition of the concept of "neighbor", showing that it can be any man, love not having boundaries or barriers when you should help someone. In its dynamics, the divine philanthropy is not just a "first aid" of the moment, but a concrete action through the person is definitively out of the impasse crossed at a time, undergoing a total restoration.

Instead of conclusions, we chose to realize a statistical survey, a questionnaire containing 15 questions given to a number of 60 people from my parish. Through it, I wanted to evaluate the contemporary issues and the importance of the religious message at the parish level.