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Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos' Contribution to the Development of Orthodox Missionary Theology

Abstract

This study aims to highlight the contribution to the development of Orthodox missionary theology of one of the most important contemporary Orthodox theologians, Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos. Are exposed both his work as a missionary in Africa and Albania, as well as the main themes of his published work. Thus are outlined the frameworks and directions by which the Orthodox Church would be able to intensify its pastoral-missionary work, a fundamental attribute which derives from its universal dimension.



Keywords

Orthodox Church today, Orthodox mission, Anastasios Yannoulatos, interreligious dialogue, Gospel and culture.

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1 Introduction

Referring to Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos' contribution to the development of the Orthodox mission, we must consider two levels: primarily the personal experience in the field of missionary service and secondly, the intense journalistic activity designed to stretch the lethargy of the Orthodox missiology in the first half of the twentieth century, both "internally" and "externally".

Anastasios Yannoulatos' missionary activity includes several key elements including: as lay theologian (1954-1960), he worked as a preacher and catechist at St. Constantine of Omonia Catechetical High School; was responsible for the leading student circles, Bible study groups, the seminars concerning the education "young churches" leaders. As a presbyter, during post-doctoral studies in Germany (1965-1969), he dealt with the Greek students and immigrants from here. He worked as General Secretary of the Executive Committee for Mission Abroad within Syndesmos (1958-1961) and was founder and president of *Porefthendes* Inter-Orthodox Missionary Centre (since 1961).

As Archbishop of Albania (since 1992), under extremely difficult conditions, had a decisive contribution to the reconstruction and revival of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, which was disbanded more than 23 years earlier. After the Communists took power in 1944, and the state leader became the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha, the Orthodox Church in Albania has become a target for repression. Church buildings were closed by the communist authorities, and worship services and the opportunity to celebrate the sacraments, restricted; the priests were imprisoned. It all culminated with the the declaration of Albania as an atheist state in 1967 (church institutions had already been destroyed by the communist persecution).

The Albanian Orthodox Church revival began with the arrival of Anastasios Yannoulatos, the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Nairobi,

in July 1991. Among his achievements we mention: over 400 parishes organized, establishment of the “Resurrection of Christ” Orthodox Theological Academy, education and ordination of over 150 clerics, establishment of an orphanage, a center for helping adolescents, 3 elementary schools and 17 schools of medical assistants. To these are added two church high schools, a technical high school, two institutes for training and Logos University, as well as 50 youth centers in different cities. He encouraged the publication of newspapers and books; he organized a printing company, a candle factory, a iconography studio for painting and restoration icons. Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos published an impressive number of papers in the field of missiology – his books, studies and articles were translated into different languages. The studies and articles written by Archbishop A. Yannoulatos are combined into two volumes – one was even translated into Romanian: *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*¹ and *Mission in Christ's Way. An Orthodox Understanding of Mission*².

In what follows we intend to expose the main theological themes, some of great interest, which were approached by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos (especially using his two collective books that we have cited just above): the relationship between Christianity and the other religions (especially with Islam), globalization and ecclesial-communautaire universality, Orthodoxy and Human Rights, Gospel and culture, respectively the characteristics of the Orthodox mission.

¹ A. Yannoulatos, *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane (Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World Issues)*, translated by Gabriel Mândrilă and Constantin Coman, (Bucharest: Bizantină Publishing House, 2003).

² *Idem, Mission in Christ's Way. An Orthodox Understanding of Mission* (see note above). In here, at page 293, it is announced as presently being translated and published, at the Bizantină Publishing from Bucharest, the book on *Islam*.

2 The Relationship between Christianity and the Other Religions (especially with Islam)

Archbishop Yannoulatos acknowledges that the missionary work of the Orthodox Church in non-Christian areas remains very limited. The main cause of this fact is constituted by the low awareness of the Catholic and apostolic dimension of the Church at the expense of local churches excessive nationalism. In order to regularize the situation, it is appropriate “to stop generalize, to simplify and beautify facts. It is necessary the sobriety and a balanced study of the past. Certainly not in order to judge or condemn anyone, but with the desire to find the right way of planning the future, with a sense of responsibility, seriously in defining the purpose and according to our possibilities”³. The mission aims mainly the unification “of the non-believers” with the Church; then it takes on our part of an effort to understand the language, issues, reservations, temptations, doubts, their sins and even hostility. All these barriers can be finally overcome by the power of truth, prayer and love⁴.

Anastasios Yannoulatos points out, however, the difficulty of the encounter between Christianity and other religions. He denounces the excessive optimism that “religions themselves should now convert to Christ”, but also the perspective that these religions would be closed systems, established in certain permanent frames. The great religions of the world are complex systems with structures and conditions that make the hope of “discovering” Christ in themselves very difficult. Hence the need for Orthodox Christians to do everything possible to reveal the liturgical and ascetic ethos, which in some ways, fits the experience of Eastern Asian world⁵. “The dialogue belongs

³ *Ibidem*, p. 209.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 210.

⁵ *Idem, Mission in Christ's Way*, pp. 109-110. Anastasios Yannoulatos states that: “When I traveled to Thailand, Ceylon, Korea and Japan, I

to the tradition of the Church and served as a motivating factor in the development of Christian theology. Much of the patristic theology is the fruit of direct or indirect dialogue with the ancient Hellenistic world, with its religious currents..."⁶. Even in today's world, increasingly more apparent non-Christian, it is absolutely necessary the Christian understanding of the human rights and his achievements on scientific, economic and cultural levels. In their direct testimony to the world, Christians must have the model on St. Ap. Paul who held a dialogue with the Athenians in the Areopagus (Acts 17). In the center of his preaching was the Gospel, the special significance of the person and work of Christ. Clearly, the Christian worldview represented a radical overhaul and a scandal for the Hellenic philosophy, and it is likely that the Christian witness is regarded the same by Christians today.

From the perspective of the history of religions, the Christian missionary must always bear in mind the following three aspects: 1) avoiding the temptation to generalize and of the extremisms. To better understand other religions, it is necessary first of all to know them better⁷, 2) the double evolution of religions, downward and upward, 3) the proper perspective of religions as organic units, constantly evolving. Cooperation between the Orthodox Christianity with other Christian denominations and other religions is an urgent necessity today, especially by overcoming prejudices and

felt that many of the external elements of popular Buddhism were very close to our own devotional expression, even if their theoretical basis was totally different". Even more complex is the case of China, where atheistic communism destroyed the sacred patriarchal structure of family and society. Here, the message "Kingdom of Heaven" would be vital for this huge population that has always lived with the vision of a cosmic harmony where man is the mediator between heaven and earth.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 225.

⁷ *Idem, Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane (Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World Issues)*, p. 166.

tensions. A specific case of dialogue with other religions had in mind Archbishop Yannoulatos with Islam – a very difficult relationship, which requires a nuanced attitude. The difficulty of this dialogue occurs also due to a paradoxical fact: Islam together with the communism are two systems radically “heretical” of Eastern Orthodoxy: “Islam adopted, fragmentarily, elements of the Orthodox Christianity, altering and distorting them, while the socialist ideology of Lenin took over other characteristics of the Russian Orthodox mentality like the heroic ideal of struggle and the eschatological vision of human brotherhood”⁸.

In the report of the Byzantine world with the Islam are identified three distinct phases: 1) the first phase (middle eighth – middle ninth centuries) is a “taunting and underestimated” one, Islam being viewed exclusively as a “Christian heresy” (see St. John of Damascus); 2) the second phase (middle ninth – middle fourteenth centuries) is one more offensive, various texts relating to Islam trying to demonstrate its “incoherence” (see Samona of Gaza, Efthimie Zigaben, Nicetas Choniates, Bartholomew of Edessa and especially Nicetas the Byzantine); 3) the third phase (middle fourteenth – middle fifteenth centuries) is distinguished by its “calm and objectivity”. Now, personalities such as Gregory Palamas, Joseph Vriennios, John VI Kantakouzenos or Manuel II Palaeologus take part in a dialogue increasingly more open⁹. This is the phase that could be considered an exemplary one even for today’s relationship of Christians with Muslims: for example, St. Gregory Palamas contradict some teachings that are in opposition to Christian dogmas, but, throughout the dialogue, he makes an effort “not to injure his interlocutors’ religious sensibility”. Thus, “although it is not reached an

⁸ See Idem, *Mission in Christ’s Way*, p. 200.

⁹ See idem, *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane (Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World Issues)*, pp. 127-129.

agreement, is preserved an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation"¹⁰.

Especially taking into account the fourth phase (middle fifteenth – middle nineteenth centuries), that of Islamic monologue and of silence and resistance from Christians – a phase not only marked by isolation and non-opening, but even by harsh experiences¹¹ – in today's world should be rediscovered and promoted this atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation, promoter of an objective and honest dialogue. "It is obvious that the tradition and the cultural heritage of the Eastern Christians bring them closer to the Muslim world, with whom they had coexisted throughout the centuries. Despite the profound theological differences and of the dramatic clashes of the past, we're moving in many respects on a common cultural ground"¹².

Perhaps the most important legacy that can be harnessed by the Orthodox in dialogue with the Muslims is overcoming the spirit of the Crusades, of the violent demonstrations, by highlighting the martyric testimony offered in the common historical past¹³. This is a "dialogue of life" to which gives Archbishop A. Yannoulatos rightly, great value, as it experientially expresses certain Christian beliefs and values: the embracing love of the heavenly Father, a very wide space left for the work of the Holy Spirit, the importance and validity of other "testaments" than that established by God with His Son, the appreciation of every human being, the global love that involves respect for the freedom of the other¹⁴.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 144.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 149-150.

3 Globalization and Ecclesial-Communitaire Universality

The relationship between universality and particularity is an issue to which Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos gave a great deal of attention. From the urgent need for real union between people to be achieved, “an indiscriminate acceptance of the leveling movement of all in an uniform internationalism, or, more accurately, amorphous, only because it is fashionable, ignoring heritage and national character, would be equally unacceptable”¹⁵.

There are two interrelated ideas: 1) equality does not mean identity and 2) equality implies authenticity: “Emphasizing the universal, we ought to emphasize equally the importance of the particular”¹⁶. By sending to the theme of “communion” of free and equal in love persons, following the example of the Holy Trinity, Archbishop Yannoulatos emphasizes the value of the Christian vision of the person and human nature; this vision has as characteristic the balance of the relationship between these two elements: just as Jesus Christ gave a “therapeutic interest” to the tangible people, so the Church saw in every believer a living cell of its body, not a particle in a mass. The Church stressed the organic unity of believers, and the supreme model is the Holy Trinity: “The central dogma of the Holy Trinity reflects the harmonious coexistence between the unitary and the individual, the relationship between one and many”¹⁷.

The cornerstone of Christian anthropology is the belief that “when God created man (Adam), made him in His own image”. Any subsequent biblical view of mankind is built on this foundation. The New Testament insists that human beings are God’s creation (Matthew 19:4; Acts 17:28), made in His image (Colossians 3:10) and likeness (James 3:9). Humankind, in its entirety, descends from the human couple created by God and,

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 44-45.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 45, note 22.

draws attention Yannoulatos, while Western thought emphasized the mind, intelligence and will, as the most prominent features of the divinity, the Eastern theology has placed greater emphasis on freedom and love, using as a reference point the love and communion in freedom and harmony of the Persons of the Holy Trinity¹⁸.

A second fundamental principle of Christian anthropology, closely related to the first, is the belief that God is not only Creator, but the Father of all mankind¹⁹. This idea is frequently emphasized in the New Testament (for example, Matthew 6:9, 23:9, or Romans 1:7) and is directly linked to the belief that all people without exception are children of God, and therefore they are siblings.

Not only the fact of a common origin binds human beings in a family, but also their mission. The purpose of their existence – according to orthodox faith and conscience – is to activate, by God's grace, the endowment given by God and progress towards achieving likeness with God, an authentic communion of persons, in harmony with all creatures and all creation in selfless love, on the model of the Holy Trinity, which is the supreme *koinonia agapes*²⁰.

As a complement to the origin and common purpose, there is a third element common to all humanity: all people share the same adventure and same fault. The human being, instead moving towards the Triune God and fulfill its purpose of existence through participation in *koinonia agapes* of the divine Persons, chose to retain the individual self, rejecting God's love and starting the search of "deification" by its own criteria and in

¹⁸ *Idem, Ortodoxia Răsăriteană și drepturile omului (Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights)*, in: Nicolae Răzvan Stan (ed.), *Biserica Ortodoxă și drepturile omului: Paradigme, fundamente, implicații (The Orthodox Church and the Human Rights: Paradigms, Foundations, Implications)*, Univers Juridic Publishing, Bucharest, 2010, pp. 69-70.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

accordance with the instigations of the devil (“and you will be like God”, Genesis 3:5).

This adventure is related to the essential human freedom. We were free to refuse even the selfless love; we refused it, only to accept the chains of the selfish love to ourselves²¹. But despite this exile, humanity retains its identity and the inheritance of the divine origin and also the nostalgia of the divine beginnings²². Moreover, after the Incarnation, the presence of Logos in history and among humanity brings a new power to purify the image of God and restore the *koinonia agapes*, for the ascension of homogeneous human nature to the blessed existence in love of the Triune God²³.

The Christian mission in the world can therefore be understood only starting from the reality of the presence and work of the Persons of the Trinity in the world, and this necessarily involves the Church. The much coveted human unity, opposed to, as we shall see, the outer globalization prevailing today's world, can only be achieved at an inner level, in the depths of human nature. Here Christ works through the Holy Spirit, here the unit becomes truly alive in a “communion of love”. This is the meaning of catholicity – a quality of the Church that emphasizes the quality of each member of the Church as being a “living cell” of the Body of Christ. Each individual, as the whole assembly is called to realize his own ego, to develop its powers in harmony with others, in a love that constitutes the fundamental feature of the “divine image”²⁴. The liturgical celebration and the ministry are connected like the two phases of respiration: inspiration and exhalation. They are turning to the world in the sense of Holy Liturgy: “After the Divine Liturgy in the church, a new liturgy begins on the altar of stone of everyday reality, a liturgy that must preoccupy every believer

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 70-71.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 71.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 33-34.

individually”²⁵. This is the meaning of the phrase with such relevance in the ecumenical movement “Liturgy after the Liturgy”²⁶.

4 Orthodoxy and Human Rights

Regarding the Orthodox perspective on “human rights”, we are shown the intrinsic ambiguity of this phrase that prevails in modern and postmodern world. The declarations of human rights in general and the Universal Declaration, in particular, refers to the “human personality” (preamble), the “free and full development of personality” (art. 29). The recognition of the idea of personality as a fundamental principle in the creation of political institutions and social manifestations of individual life required a long and complicated process to become stable in human consciousness. The starting point was the statement of the French Revolution – a tool by which the radical individualism of the bourgeoisie sought to determine the form of all sectors of social life. “However, the result was not the expected liberation of the individual, but the increase to nightmarish proportions of the police state apparatus and the suppression of people’s demands and claims. This kind of radical individualism was encouraged by the philosophical liberalism, which resulted in a borderless formalism, separating

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

²⁶ Anastasios Yannoulatos brings some clarifications regarding the “definition-code” – “Liturgy after the Liturgy”. This statement knew a wide circulation in the ecumenical circle, being related mostly to the name of the Romanian theologian Ion Bria. However, Anastasios Yannoulatos points out that the idea was originally launched by him in 1963 in Athens, in a sermon to the members of the Christian Union of Scientists, where among other things said: “This event (the Divine Liturgy, *our note*) does not have to become an instantaneous emotion, but the Liturgy must be extended to everyday life. And all our life should be transfigured into a liturgy”. See *Ibidem*, pp. 94-96.

law from morality and the society from the state. The moral principle of autonomy seemed to ignore the depths of human beings and the essential problems of human existence”²⁷.

Humankind found itself in the first half of the twentieth century “harassed and dominated by two forms of social organization: the capitalist mentality of the West, which has cultivated egocentric individualism, and the different types of totalitarian regimes which involve the risk of leveling of the masses as a kind of dictatorship, either visible or hidden under the guise of various slogans or naive Messianism”²⁸. The effort made by the Western European humanism to develop a theory of humanity that would disperse and replace the Christian idea led to the linking of the concept of person to the autonomous morality or simply to a humanistic philosophy. But the person, as concept and experience of life, was born and took shape through Christian theological thought, especially that of the Greek Fathers²⁹.

²⁷ *Idem, Ortodoxia Răsăriteană și drepturile omului (Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights)*, in Nicolae Răzvan Stan (ed.), *Biserica Ortodoxă și drepturile omului: Paradigme, fundamente, implicații (The Orthodox Church and the Human Rights: Paradigms, Foundations, Implications)*, Univers Juridic Publishing, Bucharest, 2010, p. 79.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

²⁹ See the reviewing, along several historical segments, from *Ibidem*, pp. 74-79. Are identified four distinct periods: the early period, marked by persecution, when even with their lives Christians stressed the value of human persons and the inalienable rights to equality, liberty, fraternity and dignity; fourth century – of second half of the fifteenth century, when Christianity became state religion and, sometimes, some Byzantine emperors had forgotten to respect religious freedom and the rights of all subjects in the empire; 1453-middle of the middle of the nineteenth century, when under Ottoman occupation, the Orthodox Christians have experienced abuse and their rights was synonymous with physical and spiritual integrity; Finally, the nineteenth century resulted in the liberation from the Turkish yoke and the establishment of independent states governed through national constitutions that have as model the proclamation of 1821,

The concept of person is a key concept in Eastern Orthodoxy regarding any anthropological matter and it is directly linked to the orthodox Trinitarian theology. According to the orthodox interpretation, the text of Genesis 1:26 refers to human beings as persons, not as individuals. This anthropology differs radically from the concept of humanity from other religious systems. Generally speaking, many religious and philosophical systems stop at the achievement of human beings, while Christianity brings the novelty of God's action in history, an action continued in the life of the world and in the life of every human being through the Holy Spirit³⁰.

The idea of "communion" underlines that the rights of every man and of every woman are inextricably linked to those of others. The interdependence of rights and obligations is obvious and harmony should be established between individual and socio-political rights. Especially in a period of social pluralism, the respect for human dignity involves much more than simply recognizing the rights of other people. Only love is able to transform society from a lot of threads of sand, where each is introverted and indifferent to the other, into an organic group of cells, where each contributes to the development of the other³¹.

Various human rights declarations are certainly very important in the organization of society, as it is also the regulatory role of the state. But in our complex society, draws attention A.

which guaranteed respect for human rights and proclaimed the adherence to the principles of equality and freedom.

³⁰ Here can be made one of the greatest contributions of Christianity to the mentality of modern man: his rediscovery of a genuine community of love, the image of the Trinity intercommunion. *Idem, Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane (Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World Issues)*, p. 24.

³¹ *Idem, Ortodoxia Răsăriteană și drepturile omului (Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights)*, in: Nicolae Răzvan Stan (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 81.

Yannoulatos, there are too many loopholes, too many possibilities to violate human rights – with guile or cynicism³². The root of evil is in human selfishness. Selfishness will always find a way to break the law in favor of its own interests. This is why personal integrity and conscience are of paramount importance in ensuring respect for the rights of others. To ensure that reason and will are used properly, it is necessary the purity of heart. In the Orthodox tradition, the desire of freedom of the human person is therefore oriented towards a higher level: gaining inner freedom, which is a prerequisite for gaining fulfillment and peace and enabling human personality to develop to its full extent³³.

Abstinence and asceticism are associated to the consciousness that each person is an organic part of a great whole, that of the animal and vegetable world, and that it has no right to waste natural resources for its exclusive comfort. When we talk about human rights, we often think only to the people living in the same piece of time as us. But this is a mistake: we should also remember that history is still ongoing and that our generation will be followed by others. Generations to come must also have rights to nature, health, life; urgent problems of air, food, sea, pollution, lack of energy, and many more must be seen in light of the human rights of future generations.

Predominantly, in the orthodox thinking and belief exists the unwavering certainty that everyone has the right to become that someone for which he/she was created: the ultimate right of each is to complete his/her true nature, become a child of God by grace. The most important human right is the right to overcome the tyranny of death, the cruelest of masters who ever dominated human existence. Any partial given which ignores these existential rights, may result in disorientation of the human being and can make it indifferent to what is essential – the divine origin and trajectory of each. Christian faith will

³² *Ibidem*, p. 82.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

never cease to emphasize the fact that everyone has the right and duty to use the possibilities offered by the grace of God to overcome the sinful nature, to defeat death and approach deification³⁴.

In addition to the wide horizons of existential rights, which it opens, the Orthodox Christian vision protects humanity from extreme pessimism and mindless optimism. The Christian always remains skeptical to the historical achievements; he enjoys some achievements but continues to seek more, knowing that “no statement of human rights can ever be complete or final. The declarations will always reflect the state of moral and cultural insight from a time in history” (J. Maritain)³⁵. Therefore, the Christian must be vigilant, to reform and to review and, consequently, improve the legal and political framework of the society. Regarding Christian churches they should try to be what they were appointed to be: moral and spiritual inspiration centers, established and sanctified nurseries of personalities, “laboratories of selfless love”.

5 Gospel and Culture

Perhaps the hardest fight for the contemporary Orthodox theology is constituted precisely by the phenomenon of secularization, by the human absorption in the contingency of the “world” and of “this world”. We are dealing with a new type of “heresy” with the egocentric anthropocentrism as central point, which leads to ignoring all transcendental values. The fight must be pursued continually having in consciousness the Christian duties, their testimony “to all nations” that: mission is an essential part of the nature of the Church, the Gospel is addressed to all people, the mission is a duty for the Christians

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 84-85.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

of all times, not just for a certain generation (such as the apostolic period), marking the vitality and capacity for renewal of the Church, that the missionary work is not just a charismatic category of the Church, but remains a duty to fulfill by all its members, that the purpose of the mission is not to conquer the world and impose a Christian state which would exercise control over all, but spreading the word and grace of God, the revelation of His glory which in Christ, “is and is to come”, that the mission constitutes the basic function of the historical evidence and simultaneously the manifestation of the eschatological dimension of the the Gospel³⁶. Orthodoxy must have a dynamic presence and witness in the world. The Christian message (*kerygma*) should be a joyous proclamation, “a good news” for each person in the circumstances of his life, a message that meets immediate experiences and existential needs.

Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos precisely defines culture based on its positive aspect in human life: “Culture – we are told – is the victory of man over dark parts of the self and society, a transcending of his mere biological existence”. Through culture man traces his own destiny alone – of course, within his creatural limits – and fulfills his existential vocation. This results in the so-called “intercultural constants”: the formation of a communication system, a code of understanding, ie a language; solutions given to the basic needs of survival (see the house), leading to the development of techniques and a initially rudimentary economy; regulations on coexistence man-woman to perpetuate the species; the social organization of human existence: community, tribe, nation; the establishment of social norms that determine what is good from what is evil; different artistic expressions; finally, living “the Sacred” as religiosity³⁷.

³⁶ *Idem, Mission in Christ's Way*, pp. 72-73.

³⁷ *Idem, Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane (Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World Issues)*, p. 97 a.s.o. Yannoulatos rejects the distinction between civilization and culture - the first concerning the

Between culture and the Gospel there is no total separation or antagonism. The Gospel means the receipt by the human being of a new “logos”, of a new reasons of existence and, at the same time, a new vital center of cultural creation. The main difference from the culture it is that we are no longer dealing with something strictly human, with a creation of the human spirit; the reality of the Gospel is a double one, taking to the revelation of the theandric, divine-human person of Jesus Christ. He is the “the core of the Gospel”, which causes from the Incarnation until the Eschaton “a new secret code of evolution”: from man to God-Man, from reason to Reason. We are talking about the transfiguration of the entire human nature, and the perception of the Gospel requires, in turn, not only a certain part of man (in this case the mind or heart). “God’s Glory gospel perception is achieved only with the help of the mind, a system of ideas, but by opening all of the human receptors. Therefore, the most representative space of the perception is the liturgical space, the doxological invocation of the Holy Spirit for the turning of the seen realities and of the final union with the Living Christ; in order to cater the entire life to the rhythm of the Holy Spirit to transform the universe through the irradiation of the divine energies of the Holy Trinity”³⁸.

technical, material culture, while the second, the spiritual one – whereas in the Orthodox conception, the substance and the spirit are not separate but inseparable in man, being mutually influenced. See *Ibidem*, p. 99. In this sense they are “two sides of the same human creative spirit”. *Ibidem*, p. 100.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 101-102. From here comes the importance of culture in the proclamation of the Gospel. Even preaching the Christian message was done in parallel with the transmission of new creations and cultural structures: “Spreading the Gospel, the Byzantines were interested to immediately transmit along with it the creations and cultural structures they have developed by then due to evangelical inspiration. They gave all their best in art, painting, music, architecture. They sent over all the best artists, they helped to the construction of churches unsurpassed in beauty, as symbols of God’s glory. They cultivated artistic sensitivity, the sense of beauty, which transfigures the world”.

6 Characteristic Features of Orthodox Mission

The Orthodox theological thinking about mission has never been developed in a systematic way, recognizes boldly A. Yannoulatos. This is different from the Western thinking, more preoccupied by the purpose and the reason of the mission. To speak in terms of Orthodox mission entails a double danger: either limiting ourselves to repeating the ideas of others, after studying the Catholic and Protestant conceptions, or complementing these two, in the sense of creating something totally distinct from them. A third way, more serious, more modest, is correct: to avoid the tactics of controversy and to meditate on Orthodox soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology from a missionary perspective³⁹.

The eschatological perspective makes it easy to understand which is the ultimate goal of mission. It's exactly the fulfillment of the divine will that all creation to take part in the glory of God (Isaiah 66:18, Romans 8:17, 9:23, I Peter 5:10, I Corinthians 2:7), to grow "from glory to glory" (II Corinthians 3:18). To note is that this process of sanctification begins in this life – we live between "already" and "not yet". In other words, the eschatological dimension defines all creation, for God must be "all in all" (I Corinthians 15:28).

The final goal of the mission necessarily implies the existence of immediate purposes, forerunner, but which are not in contradiction with the ultimate goal. Taking into account the fact that the participation in the divine glory is taking place now, the following steps are due to be fulfilled: 1) preaching the

However, there has not been a substitution of one culture to another, supposed superior. When Church missionaries met a new culture, they not only offered their own culture, but also made a selection: they accepted the elements that were in harmony with the message of the Gospel, they rejected those that were incompatible with it and, finally, only after that they made "the transfusion with a new blood, a new spirit, making it bring forth all that is positive". *Ibidem*, pp. 108-112.

³⁹ *Idem, Mission in Christ's Way*, p. 41.

gospel, as beginning of the transfiguration inaugurated by the "light of Christ' glory gospel" (II Corinthians 4:4). It is a synergetic work between the grace of the Holy Spirit and the personal participation in this rescue⁴⁰. 2) Establishing "local Churches". According to Orthodox tradition and theology, the Church is called to glorify God in every country with its own voice: "In the unity of the Church is diversity in the Holy Spirit. This is the ecclesiological meaning of the Pentecost"⁴¹. 3) Incorporation into Christ must be understood as a starting point of an active participation in the work of God: "the doxology of the redeemed must echo beyond our own community and fill the whole universe"⁴². Living in the transition period of "not yet" (I John 3:2) means to anticipate the eschatological times (I Peter 4:13 and 5:4); is an anticipation that has nothing to do with social passivity that characterizes certain Pietist trends; on the contrary, it is a dynamic foresight, for the eschatological fullness of time requires our participation: "Our anticipation is thus full of courage and peace before any actual problem"⁴³. It is the same cooperation "in the Holy Spirit" for the sanctification of all creatures, for their recapitulation in Christ and "the access" to the Father (Ephesians 2:18). We are "co-workers" of God in the development of unity, peace and love that characterizes His plan. All our work in the world is the development of virtuality planted in the divine plan; they must become visible in education, in the work of civilization and social progress. In the text in Acts 17:30 the adverb "now" suggests the stringency of

⁴⁰ If you have access to this new reality by Baptism (see Mark 16:16), The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist remains the center, the peak of union in Christ "until His coming" (I Corinthians 11:26), which creates the visible unity of the Church. This is why the ecclesial reality is a divine-human reality (theandric). *Ibidem*, p. 52.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 54.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

the missionary work, the need to open to the world, because it is a “mission field”⁴⁴.

For every Christian attending mission is an existential command that extends over the entire ecclesial community, for the Church is the “Body of Christ” (Ephesians 1:23). A Church without mission is a contradiction in terms. Church was sent, as Christ (Luke 4:18, John 17:18), to continue His work. The manifestation of the missionary dimension is linked to the catholic dimension of the Church, as the attribute of apostolicity rejects any definition of a static Church. All sacramental life of the Church aims to constantly extend the doxology of God. The ecclesial community shares in the rays of the Resurrection, therefore the liturgical life of the Church seeks the transmission to the world of the word and divine grace⁴⁵.

In an interview published under the title *Understanding Orthodoxy: How to Distinguish True Mission from Proselytism*⁴⁶, Anastasios Yannoulatos attempts to answer from an Orthodox perspective to this difficult but extremely current issue. He shows that proselytizing uses all possible means (gifts, food, money and other privileges) to achieve its purpose, ie to recruit members for a certain community. This is contrary to human dignity and the Gospel, not being something sincere. “And what is not honest, both in purpose and means used, can not be Orthodox”. Making proselytism is to use means other than the Gospel to win followers. The Orthodox *Martyria* must be a free

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 58-59. And between present and future there is no antagonism, but complementarity: “When the missionary contemplates the end, the goal of history, the recapitulation of all things in Christ, to the glory of God the Father, he feels an internal necessity, spontaneous, to coincide the plan of his life with the divine plan, to turn to Him, praising the Lord and being a living doxology to Him. With the eyes fixed on the eschaton, Orthodoxy maintains its vigor and demonstrates its particular power to mission”. *Ibidem*, p. 61.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 61-64.

⁴⁶ *Idem*, *Understanding Orthodoxy: How to distinguish true mission from proselytism*, in *Syndesmos News* 15 (Winter 2001-Spring 2002), no. 2, pp. 11-13.

testimony of what we are and have. We share the gift we possess: if others accept it, it's great, if not, it's their responsibility.

Then another question arises: Is our mission to convert anyone to Orthodoxy? Archbishop A. Yannoulatos responds that the Orthodox mission is to give the treasure that we have, while leaving the other to decide whether receives it or not. If the other decides to come to Orthodoxy, we must never say: "No". Our goal is to transmit the evangelical tradition in all its fullness. On the other hand, we can not impose on anyone over his/her freedom. "We are here, giving our testimony; we are the candle, illuminating with the happiness of Easter, and if another wants to take light from us, then of course we will not deny this".

After showing that the difficulty of the mission is not about the wealth or poverty status of the country in which operates the missionary, as well as the fact that the mission in Africa seemed easier than the one held in Albania, the interviewee also emphasizes two aspects: firstly, he rejects the opinion that the missionary work would be reserved exclusively for the clergy or monks – in his own way, each member of the Church is responsible for the whole community and the whole church work, and therefore each member must not evade the missionary effort. Then he mentions who is our "enemy" and "neighbor". For the mission to be successful the missionary has to have respect for the culture and traditions of those to whom he addresses the Gospel. Example Africa is suggestive: there are no "primitives" and Orthodoxy is not just about what we mean by that, it is not limited to how we, the Europeans, received the Christian message. Being open to others means to respect and love them – and then another difficult question arises: "Loving the enemy" refers to love the one who is the enemy of the other's faith?

Again the answer provided by A. Yannoulatos is disarming: when Christ speaks of enemies, He talks about people. This does not mean of course that we must accept the theory or the

lifestyle of our enemies – and that does not mean we do not love them. We respect the person; we respect all ideas or beliefs. When we talk about love, we talk about love for people, not for other religious systems. Therefore we must respect our enemy, as he or she is, but we must not accept or copy his/ her ideas or behavior.

Finally, in the interview recalled a final delicate issue is addressed: those who did not know Christ, but they are true believers of their own beliefs, can be saved, (like pious Muslims)? Or, in other words, are these “believers” in authentic relationship with God? The answer takes to the divine providential work that takes into account the whole world and all people. To what degree is present, however, we do not know, just as we do not know who is going to be redeemed on the Last Judgement. In any case, Christians should abstain from judging themselves before the Second Coming; this is not the purpose of their presence in the world. Their responsibility aims the prayer and witness of the true God that can be authentic only if they are committed in a state of humility. The Orthodox vision must be thus ubiquitous⁴⁷, not “partial” or sectarian. Christians have the mission to give testimony to other religions; human history shows that religions, in their capacity as socio-spiritual realities, were the factors of unity for humanity, but also of separation.

⁴⁷ In the prologue of the book *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane (Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World Issues)*, pp. 11 and 13: A. Yannoulatos stresses that the problems we are facing today aim the entire humanity. The importance of the Church in today's world comes from the fact that “the universality of our Church is the diachronic response towards the new global circumstances that are in progress”.

7 Conclusions

Summarizing the main contributions made by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos to relaunching the missionary theology today, we find a vigorous vision on pastoral and missionary work of the Orthodox Church with the main following points:

In relation to other religions, Orthodoxy must promote the dialogue and not fanaticism or isolation. This opening does not mean syncretism or relativism – abandoning fundamental teachings of faith or mixing them with other.

The tendency of today's world is a global one. Apparently the unity of humanity is greater than ever, but we are dealing with a temptation: this unit is more an external one. That is why Orthodoxy's mission is to promote its universal, ecclesial-communautaire dimension, as Body of Christ and icon of the Holy Trinity.

From the same perspective should be seen the extremely topical issue of human rights. A fundamental question for everyone is how to not be restricted only to the development and perfection of his/ her personality, but to create a communion with other human beings and with the supreme Reality. Only within this movement, it is conceivable the real fulfillment of human personality (fulfillment that requires personal asceticism and appropriate action to the outside, to God, others and the environment).

The Gospel and culture are not presented in a relationship of opposition. The main task of theology is how to express eternity in the new conditions of existence, how to create a dialogue between the message of revelation and the new modern sciences: medicine, anthropology, sociology, psychology and psychotherapy.

The characteristic features of the Orthodox mission are exposed taking into account two aspects: 1) the Orthodox mission is not proselytism and 2) It extracts the attributes from the very ethos of the Church. The external mission is as necessary as the internal mission. Its goals remain valid for the Church today as

well as for the apostolic and patristic era: preaching the gospel, as beginning of the transfiguration inaugurated by “the light of Christ’s glory Gospel” (II Corinthians 4:4); establishing “local churches” with sincere respect for the identity of each people: language and habits; finally incorporation into Christ as the starting point for active participation in the work of God.

As we mentioned in our review published in *Theological Magazine* XXI (2011), no. 3, pp. 208-211, to the book *Mission in Christ’s Way*, in the case of Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos we deal, in our opinion, with the most representative missionary Orthodox theologian of the second half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. The value of his work can not be understood apart from what Yannoulatos even himself emphasized: that “the mission is inseparable from the true nature of the Church” – and all its practical and didactic achievements were made in the service of this goal, to promote unceasingly mission as witness (*martyria*) of the Church (see Acts 1:8) “until the end of the world” – and that there is an inextricable link between witness-liturgical service-theology as a triptych of true Orthodox mission to the world. The characterization made by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I is therefore entirely accurate; he talks about the vital role that Anastasios Yannoulatos had and has in “reviving and regenerating, during our times, of the missionary service and practice, as the most essential act and the most obligatory expression of the self-awareness of the Church towards those created by God, brothers and sisters outside faith, living on all continents of our planet”⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ *Introductory Letter of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomew*, in: A. Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ’s Way*, p. xiii.