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“Believing without belonging” – The Drama of the Human Condition in the Post-modern Secular World, as generated by the current Liturgical Crisis

Abstract

The Orthodox Church is first and foremost a liturgical Church. The Eucharistic Liturgy sits at the centre of the Church life, and all the endeavours of the ecclesiastical pleroma stem from the Eucharistic celebration. The Holy Liturgy, the heartbeat of the Orthodox Christian spirituality, dynamizes the Church within its inner and outer mission in the modern secular world. To overcome the temptations of the modern secularized society, the Christians of the 21st century are called to rediscover their liturgical



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vocation and the true meaning and power of the Orthodox Worship with all its eschatological, ecclesiological, ascetical and cosmic dimensions and content.

Keywords

Church, Mission, Liturgy, Worship, Secularism

1 Introduction

As the modern world oscillates between powerful contrasts and profound discords, while promoting an individualistic relativism and placing excessive value on the biological life, seen as the only means towards fulfilment for a human existence reduced almost exclusively to the material plane, as the modern secularist views dispute Christian spiritual values more and more, the Church is called to adopt a new type of ministry. Its missionary discourse should be alive, dynamic and relevant to the contemporary man, focused on the man's initiation in the mysteries of the life to come and in his sampling of the grace of the Heavenly Kingdom.

In this respect, a key role is taken on by the pastoral missionary activity of the Church, which is summoned to break free from the "Babylonian captivity" of stereotypes, empty wordings, routine and of the lack of relevance for the realities of the contemporary world.

The modern consumerist world is demanding more and more attention and allegiance from the consciousness of each person, by pushing a new world and life view that questions all the traditional Christian values and pervades the society with new self-created opinion trends that are completely opposite to the Romanian Christian ethos. The new industrialized and excessively urbanized world is quite vocal about its creed,

‘believing without belonging’¹, i.e. unleashing from any religious affiliation and refusing any form of regulated religion in favour of creating a personal religion. This is the definition of the 21st century man's religiosity.

Those who adhere to this “non-denominational” denomination are the ones who were transformed by the big corporations' bureaucracy and by the stress of an entirely materialistic existence into anonymous individuals who have forgotten how and lack the will-power to relate to God and to their fellow humans in a personal way.

Being a Christian implies this very personal relationship, and that is why Christianity is more and more pushed aside and replaced by a pseudo-religion, and by a “mutant Christian”. “Religious life - like so many other features of post-industrial or postmodern society - is not so much disappearing as mutating, as Grace Davie states, for the sacred undoubtedly persists and will continue to do so, but in forms that may be very different from those which have gone before”.²

Modern studies in sociology show that what is going on from a religious point of view in the post-modern societies is a completely new and unique phenomenon. There are more and more talks about redefining the condition of human existence which must be removed from under the hegemony of traditional values. The secularized post-modern societies have since become home for a cultural Marxism, whose objective is to question and criticize all the institutions that offer stability to a society by anchoring it to history and tradition.

¹ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1994, p. 226.

² *Ibidem*, p. 198. The author of the book cites a statistic analysis from Great Britain, which shows that in the UK only 60% of the population is nominally Christian, but only 14% have declared their affiliation to a specific Christian denomination. (p. 143)

In this same context, the expression “the exit from religion” was born, denoting not an exit from a religious faith, but the exit from a world in which faith has a structuring fate, a world that is connected to traditions and based on hierarchies and interpersonal relationships.

“The exit from religion represents the passage from a universe wherein religions continue to exist, albeit inside a political form and collective order that they cannot determine anymore (...). The exit from religion is, at its core, the transformation of the old religious element in something else than religion (...) an overall recomposition of the human world through re-absorption, re-melting and re-elaboration of everything it ever carried in it for thousands of years, of the very image of its religious alterity”³.

In such a situation and context, the Orthodox Church is called to assert its missionary vocation. In order to be relevant and survive in a secularist and pluralist society, the Church must first and foremost concentrate on its internal mission, namely on the problems the Christians face in their ecclesial and social lives, which is an absolutely necessary premise for the external mission of the Church. Therefore, the first stage in the involvement of Christians in missionary activities must start from an awareness of the problems that challenge the post-modern society and those that the Church has to face in the context of the current globalisation and secularisation. To this end, the article proceeds to examine two major themes, i.e. secularism and the liturgical crisis of the modern world. The guidelines for such an internal mission of the Church can be found in the writings of father Alexander Schmemmann, who was a valuable liturgical researcher and historian, as well as a remarkable missionary and exegete of the Orthodox cult and

³ Marcel Gauchet, *Ieșirea din religie. Parcursul laicității/The Exit from Religion. The path of laity.*, translation from French into Romanian by Mona Antohi, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p.9.

spirituality. Throughout his life, this great theologian experienced life within various cultural and religious patterns and environments, and that allowed him to identify and offer solutions to the major problems the Orthodoxy was confronted with in the contemporary modern societies. The results of his analyses apply to the present European context, and his proposed solutions are always current. The secularism of society and the liturgical crisis of the Church are, in his opinion, the two main hindrances standing in the way of the missionary impact of Orthodoxy in the contemporary world.

2 Secularism, a new contemporary heresy

Trained and established as a theologian of exile, father Schmemmann was directly confronted with the modern European culture, secularized and characterized by the ascent of positivism and the dawn of existentialism, and with the Western Christianity that was going through a deep identity crisis due to its departure from the tradition of the Early Church.

As a result, the great Russian liturgist wrote a series of theological essays or personal-subjective meditations and reflections, by which he meant to draw attention to issues of a theological, dogmatic, liturgical and spiritual nature that caused problems to the Church during his lifetime. His reflections are extremely pertinent and actual. To father Schmemmann, the core issue was the identification of a “path” of Orthodoxy in a world so deeply touched by ever expanding spiritual crises that acquire in time universal dimensions.⁴

⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, *Biserică, lume, misiune/Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy and the West*, translated from English by Elena Vințeler, Reîntregirea Press, Alba Iulia, 2006, p. 16.

How should then Orthodoxy be and act in such a world of modernist views? The first missionary requirement is, in father Schmemmann's view, to understand and become aware of the problems that secularism generates first in the society, and afterwards in the Church. The great theologian uses the notion of "secularism" as a critical category, in order to describe the Western culture. A secular culture is a culture that has compartmentalized and trivialized religion, and has stopped taking the Church seriously.

While the Churches may still prosper on an institutional or worldly plane in a secular age, the criteria for their advancement are not those of the Christian faith, but derived from somewhere else. This gives birth to a Christianity that is purely nominal or formal, or worse yet, to a Christianity that is altogether new and divergent. The life that the Christians lead within the Church is no longer a life focused on growth and preparation for the Eschaton, but one of material and spiritual comfort. Therefore, father Schmemmann considers that the "profound and menacing" problem the Orthodox Church is faced with at present is that of a progressive surrender to secularism - the great Western heresy and gloomy disease that devours the post-modern society.⁵

For Fr. Schmemmann, secularism is "a world-view and consequently a way of life in which the basic aspects of human existence such as family, education, science, pro-lesson, art, etc., not only are not rooted in or related to, religious faith, but the very necessity or possibility of such connection is denied. The secular sphere of life is thought of as *autonomous*, i.e. governed by its own values, principles and motivations—different by nature from the religious ones."⁶

The great liturgist proves that this "social cancer" emerged, evolved and is now drawing its life force by grafting itself upon

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

⁶ *Idem, Problems of Orthodoxy in America, III. The Spiritual Problem*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly, 1965, Vol. 9 , #4, p. 173.

the society's Christian values, thus giving birth to a kind of “mutant Christianity”: “Secularism (...) is *not* anti-religious or atheistic, but on the contrary implies as its almost necessary element a definite view of religion, is in fact ‘religious’. It is, in other terms, a ‘philosophy of religion’ as much as a ‘philosophy of life’.”⁷

That is why he states that “Secularism —we must again and again stress this - is a ‘stepchild’ of Christianity, as are, in the last analysis, all secular ideologies which today dominate the world-not, as it is claimed by the Western apostles of a Christian acceptance of secularism, a legitimate child, but a heresy. Heresy, however, is always the distortion, the exaggeration, and therefore the mutilation of something true, the affirmation of one choice (airesis means choice in Greek), one element at the expense of the others, the breaking up of the catholicity of Truth.”⁸

“Acceptance of secularism means, of course, a total transformation of religion itself. It may keep all its traditional forms but inside it is simply a different religion. In secularism, when it ‘approves’ of religion and even declares it necessary, it does so only inasmuch as religion is ready to become a part of the secularistic world-view, a sanction of its values and a *help* in the process of attaining them”.⁹

It is exceptionally difficult to confront this modern heresy, as secularism is a disease grafted of the very life of the Church:

“The uniqueness of secularism, its difference from the great heresies of the patristic age, is that the latter were provoked by the encounter of Christianity with Hellenism,

⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, New York, 1973, p. 127.

⁹ Idem, *Problems of Orthodoxy in America. II. The Liturgical Problem*, in: “St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly”, vol. 8, no. 4, 1964, p. 165.

whereas the former is the result of a 'breakdown' within Christianity itself, of its own deep metamorphosis".¹⁰

Consequently, father Schmemmann believes that this "ontological deformation" of Christian life, this great heresy of post modernity "requires from the Church not mere anathemas, and certainly not compromises, but above all an effort of understanding so it may ultimately be overcome by truth."¹¹

Once the remedy for this disease is identified, father Schmemmann engages in an "effort to understand" secularism, therefore postulating the fact that secularism implies the autonomy of the world. In other words, starting from the sacred/secular dichotomy, the secularism exiles the sacred to a single sphere, thus denying the sacramental character of the whole world.

Secularism is not anti-religious, as it has a well-defined "place" to fit religion in, but it refuses religion the power to transform the man, to sanctify his life and prepare him for the Eschaton. Religion occupies a relatively innocent space, because its impact on all the aspects of life is downright neutralized.

"A 'secularist' is usually a very religious man, attached to his church, regular in attending services, generous in his contributions, acknowledging the necessity of prayer, etc. He will have his marriage 'solemnized' in church, his home blessed, his religious 'obligations' fulfilled, all this in perfect good faith. But all this will not in the least alter the plain fact that his understanding of all these spheres: marriage, family, home, profession, leisure, and, ultimately, his religious 'obligations' themselves, will be derived not from the creed he confesses in church, not from the Incarnation, Death, Resurrection and Glorification of Christ, the Son of God become Son of man, but from 'philosophies of life', i.e. ideas and convictions having

¹⁰ *Idem, For the Life of the World*, p. 128

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

nothing to do with that creed, if not directly opposed to it".¹²

Father Schmemmann exemplifies by showing how it is hard to see that many of the key values endorsed by society - success, safety, competition, social standing, wealth, profit, prestige, ambition (in the form of success as equivalent to money) - are directly opposed to the entire ethos of the Gospel.

This new modern religion provides ethical standards and a sense of comfort that the contemporary man needs, but the power to transform lives is not within its reach. The secularism accepts and is familiar with the existence of God, but that does not hinder it from asserting the autonomy of human existence.

"A modern secularist quite often accepts the idea of God. What, however, he emphatically negates is precisely the sacramentality of man and world. A secularist views the world as containing within itself its meaning and the principles of knowledge and action. He may deduce meaning from God and ascribe to God the origin of the world and the laws which govern it. He may even admit without difficulty the possibility of God's intervention in the world's existence (...). In other words, he may 'refer' his secularism to God and make it 'religious' - the object of ecclesiastical programs and ecumenical projects, the theme of Church assemblies and the subject matter of 'theology'. All this changes nothing in the fundamental 'secularity' of his vision of man and world, in the world being understood, experienced, and acted upon in its own immanent terms and for its own immanent sake. All this changes nothing in his fundamental rejection of 'epiphany': the primordial intuition that everything in this world and the world itself not only have elsewhere the cause and

¹² Idem, *Problems of Orthodoxy in America. III. The Spiritual Problem*, in *"St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly"*, vol. 9, no. 4, 1965, p. 173.

principle of their existence, but are themselves the manifestation and presence of that elsewhere, and that this is indeed the life of their life, so that disconnected from that 'epiphany' all is only darkness, absurdity, and death".¹³

The modern society sees the entirety of human existence and the world in its entirety as autonomous realities with an inherent meaning and purpose. The divine epiphany has neither sense, nor room in such a world. Religion is given only a small "place" in life, for it is considered a mere annex to it. As a result, "the world remains profane, i.e., precisely secular, in the deepest sense of this term: as totally incapable of any real communication, with the Divine, of any real transformation and transfiguration."¹⁴

Secularism is for Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, above all this negation of religion and worship as the true God's Epiphany. "It is the negation of man as a worshiping being, as homo adorans: the one for whom worship is the essential act which both "posits" his humanity and fulfils it. It is the rejection as ontologically and epistemologically "decisive," of the words which "always, everywhere and for all" were the true "epiphany" of man's relation to God, to the world and to himself¹⁵

In the great liturgist's opinion, worship is the medicine and cure for a society affected by secularism, and that is why he devoted many pages to this fight against the contemporary liturgical crisis.

¹³ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World...*, p. 124.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

3 The effects of secularism on the Church: the liturgical crisis

As a modern world heresy, secularism poses a great challenge for the life of the Church. To Father Schmemmann, one of the most painful “*signs of the times*” is the fact that Orthodoxy shows an increasing tendency towards losing its own vision and identity in the current society, and that it is overwhelmed by the materialism of the modern world, and thus it barely manages to be the “little yeast the leavens the whole batch of dough”.

The newly created situation is coined by the great theologian with the generic term of “liturgical crisis”¹⁶, and is characterized by a series of disfunctions or anomalies that can be systematized as follows:

- a. Under the influence of secularism, the worship of the Church is reduced to a set of rituals and ceremonies carrying a double function: to be an adoration object in itself and to fulfil certain practical needs of the faithful. The Church has thus turned into a religious service provider¹⁷, i.e. it has become a function of the cult.
- b. The services are severed from the Liturgy and shrunk and schematized in order to offer the requested “spiritual aid” in as easy a way as possible. The faithful no longer see the worship as a revelation and fulfilment of the Church, and as a place where they commune with Christ at the Supper of the Heavenly Kingdom, and oftentimes regard it from a pietist and individualist standpoint. In the contemporary age, the liturgical crisis based on the opposition between the public and private

¹⁶ Idem, *Theology and Eucharist*, in: “St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly” 4 (1963), pp. 20-23.

¹⁷ Idem, *Theology and Liturgical Tradition*, in Massey Shepherd (ed.), “Worship in Scripture and Tradition”, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 172.

cult has reached its peak in an acute and serious crisis of the ecclesial life. Therefore, father Schmemmann notices that, in the consciousness of the believers, the distinction between the public and the private cult responds only to certain individual needs. For instance, the Mysteries of Baptism, Chrismation and Marriage, not to mention the other ceremonials (requiems) and funeral services, have not fallen under the category of private ceremonies. This distinction between the collective and the private cult is generated by a contradiction regarding the old and fundamental notion of “Christian worship”, as a public act of the Church that can never have anything private in or about it.

c. In the contemporary interpretation of the cult in general and the Liturgy in particular, Father Alexander Schmemmann recommends the overcoming of the analogical-historical symbolism that is reduced to a descriptive function of the events connected to the life of our Saviour Jesus Christ, by the return to the vision that the early Christianity had on the Liturgy as a Mystery of the world to be, as the Supper at the table of the Kingdom.¹⁸ In his opinion, the liturgical crisis is also due to a faulty hermeneutics on the role of the symbol in cult, which is seen as a sacred representation or illustration¹⁹ whose only value is descriptive-historical. The symbol is, however, God's way of making His presence and activity tangible in and through the visible matter and the acts of worship, and that is why it has the revelatory and epiphanic value of uniting God with men. To this end, the Liturgy is interpreted as a series of sacramental works, termed as Mysteries, by which the man is united with God and participates in the divine life.

¹⁸ Idem, *Euharistia, Taina Impărăției/The Eucharist*, translation by Fr. Boris Răducanu, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest 1992, pp. 73-74.

¹⁹ David W. Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima. What is Liturgical Theology?*, Hillenbrand Books, Chicago/Mundelein, Illinois, 2004, p. 88.

d. The loss of the personal dimension in the relationship between the members of the Church that has led to the disappearance of the parish as the believers' inter-communion in Christ. The parish has become a well-organized and efficient secular institution, although “a-liturgical”, and is not any more centred on the communion with Christ and the early Christian philanthropy. Besides not having the Liturgy suffusing the wholeness of the believers' lives and asserting its purpose of preparing the man for the life to come, the Church has also lost the ability to communicate its own vision statement on life, and is now facing the danger of becoming irrelevant and incapable of changing the world, as well as unable to defend itself from the heresy of secularism.

Nonetheless, all these symptoms are masked by a “*compulsory official optimism*” that is mostly visible in the pharaonic frenzy of building new places of worship. Consequently, father Schmemmann speaks about a secular Orthodoxy, in which, in order to be ecclesially successful, one must “Build “bigger and better” churches and all kinds of “facilities,” keep your congregation busy and happy, serve the prescribed services, constantly affirm that Orthodoxy is the true faith.”²⁰ Just like the society, the Church suffers a mutation that turns it into a religious service provider, without being compelled to state firmly the imperative of changing the life or that of preparing for the Eschaton. All of these bring about a tragic nominalism that pervades the entire life of the Church and prevents it from accomplishing its essential mission, i.e. the task of judging, evaluating, inspiring, changing and transforming man's whole life, and of generating that creative tension that exists between ecclesia and the world and which transforms the Church into “the salt of the earth”.²¹

²⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, *Problems of Orthodoxy in America: III. The Spiritual Problem....*, p. 171.

²¹ Idem, *Biserică, lume, misiune/Church, World, Mission....*, p. 25.

The great Russian liturgist points out that the clergy is far from being immune to the pervasive cultural secularism, and that it can be the first to propagate the secularist philosophy of religion. The light tendency to emphasize the external criticism triggers a reduction of the Orthodoxy “to a formal “canonicity” or to an external liturgical “rectitude” or, finally, to “success” as such”.²² In general, the emphasis is placed on external criteria: the Orthodox way of life requires a regular attendance of church services, the observance of a minimal set of external rules, the payment of dues to the Church, in short, it is a life mainly centred on the fulfilment of one’s formal religious duties.

When the power of Orthodoxy to actually transform a person from the inside out is ignored, then it effortlessly embraces a secular logic that Fr. Schmemmann denounces with the following words: In reality, however, a simple coexistence of religion and a “philosophy of life” (secularism) alien to it is impossible. If religion does not control the “philosophy of life”, the latter will inevitably control religion, subdue it from outside to its set of values. One cannot be Orthodox in the Church and a “secularist” in life. Sooner or later one becomes secularist in the Church also.”²³ In such a secular society, the Orthodox Church becomes a “*Sunday Church*”. A liturgical life limited to the attendance of church on Sundays, and on a few other compulsory days like Easter and Christmas, is symptomatic for the decline or fall out of liturgical piety, which was once actively and vitally involved in the structure and manifestation of the Christian’s daily life. “All that, which was so vital, so central, so essential in the liturgical piety of the past: the feasts and their eves, the “bright sadness” of the Lenten services, the unique celestial beauty of the Mariological cycle, the warm, almost personal, commemoration of the Saints, the long and solemn *crescendo of*

²² Idem, *Problems of Orthodoxy in America. III. The Spiritual Problem...*, p. 175.

²³ Ibidem, p. 176.

the Holy Week—all this, although it is still dutifully listed in ecclesiastical calendars—is virtually absent from the real liturgical life."²⁴

A highly practical example of this fall at parish level is reflected in the administration of the Church.²⁵ If the "content" of Church administration means only to take care of the material success of the parish, then why should a priest have to be more competent than a panel of experts? Father Schmemmann notes how this matter proves that both the clergy and the laymen have adopted secular administration ideas. What does father Schmemmann understand of this situation? He writes that this area of Church life, i.e. the administration and managerial economics, seen exclusively in secular terms, has not been related to the purpose of the Church that is revealed in the Liturgy. For example, the money and the gifts remain disconnected from the Eucharist and the Eucharist from man's entire life. It is, however, the priest's duty to convert the offering or the gift into a religious act, for "*he gives this offering to God's Church*"²⁶.

Still, father Schmemmann asserts that the parish, in its present state, brimming with officers, decisions, finances, properties, debts, meetings, elections, is more likely a recent phenomenon. What the Orthodox Christian today thinks of as normative in the Church, was not always perceived as such. For centuries on end, the Church was the religious centre of a more or less "natural" community within a village or a town district. "Within the Christian community the Church had no other function, but that of literally making Christ *present*: in preaching, sacraments, worship, education—and of making the life of "parishioners" as Christian, as permeated with Christ, as possible. Those who

²⁴ Idem, *Problems of Orthodoxy in America. II. The Liturgical Problem*, in "St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly", vol. 8, no. 4, 1964, p. 164.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 174.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

were selected, ordained, set apart to carry this work of the Church were the “clergy”—and not so long ago the clerical status included not only “ordained ministers” but also psalm-readers, prosphora-makers, etc. To govern and to administer the Church, both spiritually and materially, was not their “right” but their sacred obligation, the very reason for their being “set apart”. Similarly the sacred obligation of all other “parishioners”, called laity, was to receive the teachings of the Church as diligently as possible, to worship God together, to contribute “according to the will of their heart” to the needs of the Church, and, finally, to live as much as possible by the precepts of Christian religion.”²⁷

The primary role of the parish used to be exclusively Eucharistic. When it appeared as a church administration form, it was “*the product of a need*” that arose both from the Christians’ sudden increase in number, and from the necessity to celebrate the Holy Eucharist uninterruptedly, under such circumstances when the bishops could not cope with the existent situations anymore. “*The parish was the Church—the other, the ultimately serious pole of life, which one could minimize, by-pass or even reject personally, but which no one could reduce to his own image and ‘needs’.*”²⁸ The subsequent evolution and development of the parish system has not strayed essentially from this core characteristic and function, it is only its perception by the faithful (and many times even by the clergy) that has altered. “In the Orthodox tradition, the parish exists in the world not as a religious corporation aimed at directing and accomplishing certain religious forms and conventions, but as a integral community that is independent from and uninfluenced by worldly societies, and by their life

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 182.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

and purposes. For, the parish as Church ‘in a certain place’ has its own life, its own purpose”.²⁹

In father Schmemmann's view, the “parish organization” has replaced the Church. “The parish organization has replaced the Church and, by the same token, has become a completely secular organization. In this it is radically different from the parish of the past. It has ceased to be a *natural* community with a Church as its center and pole of “seriousness.” It has not become a *religious* community, i.e., a group united by and serving a common religious ideal.”³⁰

The clergy and laymen are, ironically, part of a system that they themselves have created. “But in our Church today the hierarchy and the clergy are, in fact, prisoners of a system which ironically they themselves have helped to establish, they are literally crushed by a construction in which they have invested so much of their energy, heart and love.

Their surrender to the two fundamental secularistic “reductions”: that of the Church to the “parish” and that of the Christian person to a “parishioner” may have not been a conscious one for, as I have said, the parish in its new organizational, secular and legal form appeared at first as the only way to support the Church in a radically new situation. But the fact remains that progressively the clergy themselves were “reduced”, i.e., have become the servants and the promoters of the “system” and of its “needs”, so that today it is mainly through them that the “Church” serves the “parish” and not *vice-versa*.”³¹

²⁹ Gheorghios Metallinos, *Parohia – Hristos în mijlocul nostru/The Parish - Christ in our midst*, translated by fr. Prof. Ioan I. Ică, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2004, p. 39.

³⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, *Problems of Orthodoxy in America. II. The Liturgical Problem...*, p. 183.

³¹ *Idem, Spiritual*, p. 186.

The more the parish fails to incorporate the Orthodox vision of life that the Liturgy conveys, the more difficult it is for it to have an impact on other dimensions in the parishioners' lives, i.e., family, professional path, education and spare time. The Liturgy has become "an engine not connected to the wheels, producing an energy which nowhere becomes motion, light or warmth".³² Father Schmemmann summarizes the transformation that took place in the fundamental understanding of the Liturgy as follows: "The question, which underlies the whole liturgical experience of Orthodoxy, "what does it reveal about me and my life, what does it mean for my activity and my relation to men, nature and time," is replaced little by little by all entirely different question: "how much of the liturgy is needed to put me in 'good standing' "? And where religion becomes a matter of obligation and good standing, there inevitably all questions concerning the "right" and the "wrong" practices acquire a kind of independence from their moral, existential, truly religious implications.

The priest is satisfied if he celebrates the "correct" liturgy, the people are satisfied if they know exactly the amount of their religious obligations, the whole parish is proud of its beautiful church and beautiful services—but that which, from the very beginning was the real fruit of the Liturgy, that unique mixture of joy ("We have seen the true light") and deep *dissatisfaction* or repentance ("I see thy bridal chamber adorned but I have no garment to enter it"), that *challenge* to my whole life, that call to perfection, that nostalgia for a change, a transformation, a transfiguration — all this is *absent*."³³

From a strictly formal point of view, "The liturgy is still the center of our Church life, unquestioned, unchallenged, unopposed. But it is in fact a center without periphery, a heart with no control on blood circulation, a fire with nothing to

³² *Idem, Problems of Orthodoxy in America. II. The Liturgical Problem*, p. 175.

³³ *Ibidem*.

purify and to consume, because that life which had to be embraced by it, has been *satisfied with itself* and has chosen other lights to guide and to shape it".³⁴

In the face of modern society secularism, father Schmemmann states that Orthodoxy has responded in two mutually exclusive ways: on the one hand, through the pessimistic negativism of the *"super-Orthodox prophet of the apocalyptic destiny"*, and on the other, through the *"super-Orthodox optimism of the enthusiastic Westerner, which is specific to secular Christianity"*.³⁵ The first approach includes those who reject the "Europeanisation" of Orthodoxy, whereas the second rejects more of the Orthodoxy *"in the name of European integration"*. The super-Orthodox person takes refuge in an *"artificially created past"* and believes that only through that kind of retreat can the Church keep its faith in front of apostasy. These profoundly conservative Orthodox Christians are attached to all that is covered by the brightness of the Orthodox glory of the past, without trying to understand the challenges of the present. The other Christians, who are open to modernity, do nothing else than confess their total surrender to contemporary secularism.

Father Schmemmann claims that both groups prove their lack of understanding of the true purpose of Orthodoxy, which has to be *"in a relationship of creative tension with the world it lives in"*³⁶, and which has to question all the "values" and ways of life in the world, and then to re-evaluate and alter them by correlating them with the Supreme Truth revealed in the Church.³⁷

³⁴ *Ibidem.*

³⁵ Idem, *For the Life of the World*, p. 160.

³⁶ Idem, *Problems of Orthodoxy in America. II. The Liturgical Problem*, p. 184.

³⁷ *Ibidem.*

Father Schmemmann considers that what we need to do is neither accept, nor reject the world we live in, but rather face it as the Orthodox Christians that we are. To face the world means to connect the entirety of our lives to our faith (to live our whole lives in faith): “it is indeed the central and all-embracing idea and inspiration of Orthodoxy that the whole life not only belongs to God, but is to be made God-like and God-centred, transformed into communion with God, and, therefore—no “sector” of human activity or creativity, be it the most “secular” or “profane” can be neutral, not capable of being sanctified, i. e. transformed into communion with God”.³⁸ In this way, Orthodoxy claims the necessity of an all-embracing way of life a “*total and all-embracing vision of the world*”³⁹.

4 The rediscovery of the liturgical dimension of the person and the human existence - the solution for overcoming the effects of secularism and the way out of the contemporary liturgical crisis

Father Schmemmann believes that the only way to overcome all the problems generated by the entrance of secularism in the contemporary society and also in the Church is to return to the faith and the way of life of the early Christians, whose daily lives were centred on their participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In his opinion, the Holy Liturgy reveals the Church as the Body of Christ and Mystery of the Heavenly Kingdom, wherein Christ gathers all in Himself, in His mission, sacrifice and resurrection. Hence the Holy Liturgy is also the quintessential context where Christians ready themselves for their missionary labour. For, to be in communion with the crucified and resurrected Christ means to be pierced by His love for the whole humanity, which

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 173.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

He ultimately died for, and to be fully committed to bringing the Kingdom of God into being.

The secularization of the ecclesial life produced a separation of the Holy Eucharist from the other Mysteries, an alteration of the eschatological character of the cult and an exaggeration of the external symbolism and forms of the church services. In order for Orthodoxy to escape this situation, retrieve its missionary zeal and become once more the “path to the Kingdom”, father Schmemmann proposes the following solutions:

1. The Holy Liturgy must be the Mystery of the Church par excellence - in and through it the Church attains perfection and the faithful truly participate in the Eucharistic Supper of the Kingdom. The Church manifests and fulfils itself through the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, but it also has a missionary role, that of expanding into the world and of encompassing the entire humanity, in a true and real manner, in the mystical body of Christ. The Holy Liturgy does not need to undergo a secular instrumentalisation that would transform it into a means towards the fulfilment of certain material and spiritual needs of the faithful;
2. The Holy Eucharist must be re-connected to all the Holy Mysteries of the Church, as it is their fulfilment and crowning;
3. The interpretation of the cult and Liturgy needs to overcome the analogical-historical symbolism that is reduced to a descriptive function of the events connected to the life of the Saviour Jesus Christ, by reverting to the vision that the early Christianity had on the Liturgy as a Mystery of the world to be, as the Supper at the table of the Kingdom;
3. The Church must be perceived by all the believers as the divine-human Mystery, in which the human element, made up of clergy and laymen, constitutes a dialogical structure based on co-celebration (the Eucharistic assembly, the prayers in the plural, the liturgical dialogue between the priest and the faithful, and the return to some practices from the Early

Church: exchanging the kiss of peace, bringing and offering gifts);

4. For the Holy Liturgy to truly reach its goal it is necessary to revert to its old practice of the priest reading aloud all the prayers; to supervise through catechesis the correct understanding of the Liturgy as Mystery of the Heavenly Kingdom both by priests and laymen; to promote the active participation of all the faithful in the celebration of the Holy Liturgy, by bringing gifts, chanting, and finally by taking the Holy Communion “with the clear witness of the conscience”; to add to this Eucharistic communion the spiritual communion with Christ that comes from the practice of virtues and prayer, through which the faithful can become aware of and feel the presence of Christ;

5. The rediscovery of the social-humanitarian dimension of the Holy Liturgy. Uniting with Christ and uniting with the poor are two aspects of the same unique reality. Alms-giving is both a qualifying criterion for admittance to the Mystery of Holy Eucharist, and a consequence of the Communion with the Body of Christ. By uniting with Christ, the person enters a way of life that is characterised by the logic of self-sacrifice born within Christian selflessness, and by that of witnessing the truth of Christ's Gospel.

The egotism of modern secular world, the individualism and the Eucharist are mutually exclusive. Generally speaking, there is an emphasis on certain continuity between Liturgy and the daily life, yet the syntagma 'Liturgy after the Liturgy' is at risk of keeping the two compartments of the Christian way of life - the liturgical and the social life of the Church - tragically separated. The Social and the Liturgical dimensions ought to be joined. Their union offers the clue to the correct comprehension and interpretation of the expression: “The Liturgy after the Liturgy”. There is but one Liturgy, one participation in the love of the Holy Trinity, one love dialogue between God and man, which comprises all the facets of our lives, and only one imperative of witnessing the truth of the Gospel. Therefore, all the acts of our

earthly life are not solely some good deeds amongst the many that help us gain any merit or worthiness before God, but rather the man's appropriation and tasting of Christ's new life, which has each of us ontologically changed and transformed. Once enrolled in the Holy Trinity's circuit of sacrificial love, the human being senses that everything is a gift and that all gifts must be returned to the Giver, and humbly understands that there is nothing we can do besides “what was our duty to do” (Lk. 17:10).

5 Conclusions

The current religious, cultural, social and historical context highly requires that the Orthodoxy be the ferment in the midst of the world that “leavens the whole batch of dough”. The challenges of modernity are enormous and reverberate in all aspects of life and in all areas of activity. They demand a rebirth of the Orthodox theology, which is the only one able to give ultimate answers to the major issues that the modern consumerist society is confronted with. That is why Theology must choose the path of Patristic and Liturgical renewal, by living in the spirit of the Apostolic Tradition, and adapting it to the requirements of the times.

In the current world, wounded as it is by the pluralism and democracy of egotism and by the assertion of humanism, the Liturgical Theology has an onerous missionary task at hand: If the Holy Liturgy becomes the source of all theological expression, as well as of the individual life of each Christian, then the response of the Church to all the problems of modernity will be a living, profound, personal and relevant one. The theology that is not rooted in the Liturgy and bears no mark of the personal experience resulted from conversing with God, risks to fall prey to the extremes of (dogmatic) scholasticism, (liturgical) ritualism, or (ethical) formalism. The

profound crisis of the modern society can be overcome only by a revival of Theology, by re-orienting its focus and centre on the liturgical life of the Church. Only then can the modern theological discourse acquire a pastoral and mystical depth that is relevant for the 21st century man.