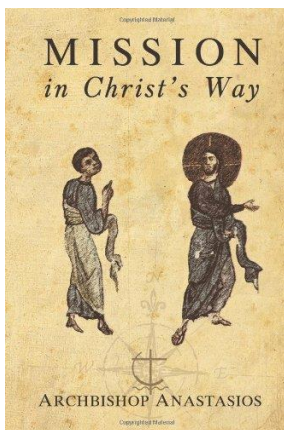


Ioan Filimon



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Reviewed by

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Anastasios Yannoulatos, Archbishop of Tirana and of entire Albania, is regarded as one of the most insightful Orthodox analysts of religious pluralism and its consequences for the Christian doctrine and mission in the second half of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st. As Archbishop, theological authority, Christian scholar, and

Review

*Archbishop
Anastasios
Yannoulatos,
Mission in Christ's
Way. An Orthodox
Understanding of
Mission*



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leader at national and international level, Anastasios Yannoulatos contributes in a significant way to the development of Christian theology and mission. Regarded as the one who has rediscovered the Orthodox missionary ethos, Archbishop Anastasios was Professor of History of Religions at the University of Athens (1972-1992), Member of Honour of the Academy of Athens, *Doctor Honoris Causa* in the field of Theology or Philosophy at 18 universities, faculties or departments worldwide, member of numerous scientific societies and international organisations, vicepresident of the Conference of European Churches (2003-2009), chairman of the World Council of Churches (2006-2013), and president of honour of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (from 2006); likewise, he was honoured with medals, distinctions and awards by many Orthodox Churches, as well as by many countries (24), being nominated in the year 2000 for the Nobel Prize for Peace. He wrote 15 academic works and over 140 essays and articles on the Christian mission and dialog with persons of other faiths, translated into 12 languages.

The value of his work may only be understood by starting from what Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos himself emphasized, namely that: "Christian mission is inseparable from the very nature of the Church" (p. xv) – and all his achievements were meant to serve that goal, of promoting relentlessly the mission as a witness (*martyria*) of the Church "till the end of the world" (Acts 1:8), to all peoples, to those beyond the walls of the Christian world.

Archbishop Anastasios' book "*Mission in Christ's Way. An Orthodox Understanding of Mission*" is a collection of 15 papers written between 1964 - 2003, strongly emphasizing the theology of mission, and being more relevant today than ever.

Archbishop Anastasios started his approach concerning the Christian mission in the context of the discussions between the Orthodox Churches, at the end of the nineteen fifties, when he realised the fact that the Orthodox world was often downplaying or minimizing a fundamental command of Christ:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Mt. 28, 19). In order to stress the fact that, from the outset, the topic of mission is of interest to all, not just to certain specialized theologians, Archbishop Anastasios underlines the fact that mission is linked to a fundamental requirement: "Thy will be done, in earth, as in heaven", which Christ Himself made in on behalf of every believer, addressing not merely the Orthodox world, but all the Christian world in general (p. xvi). Therefore, to him the new missionary current, which started like a breeze of the Holy Ghost, had a clear dimension and a theological and ecclesiological contribution, emphasizing and underlining the consciousness of the universality of Orthodoxy and the obligation of activating it.

In Archbishop Anastasios' view, the key word "mission," having a multitude of shades, means to give witness to the Trinitarian God, who calls upon the human being to salvation, and binds them to the the Church, human beings who don't belong to it or have lost their connection to her. Today, the field of the Christian mission is not just the area of faraway regions, of the so-called third world, but the entire world (p. 191).

By the phrase in the title of his book, "mission in Christ's way," Archbishop Anastasios highlights five elements which define it: triadological relation, commitment of the entire human person, radical and eternal novelty: love, the paradox of humbleness and sacrifice on the Cross, and the last one: we are to do everything in the light of the Resurrection and eschatological hope (pp. 7-12). This shows that mission is a participation to the fulfilling of God's will on earth, and conversely, that divine will implies our active participation, co-operation with the Trinitarian God.

The goal of Christian mission is not to conquer the world; because the aim is not the expansion and projection of a Christian community that were to control everything. Its purpose is not to increase the authority of an organized Church, but to serve the world in love and humbleness: to offer it salvation. The axis around which the Orthodox community

gravitates, and the source from which it draws its spiritual power for its mission, is the liturgical life, and above all: the Holy Liturgy. According to Archbishop Anastasios: "the Holy Liturgy becomes witness and mission, mission signifying the discovery thereof, an invitation to doxological participation, to the event of salvation in Christ through the Holy Spirit" (p. 130). As to the motive of the mission, Archbishop Anastasios affirms that it can be regarded from several viewpoints: that of love to God and to people, of obeying God's command (Mt. 28:19), of the wish to save souls, of the eagerness to glorify God. However, the fundamental reason for mission, both for human persons, and for the entire Church, is an inner need (I Cor. 9:16), an existential command. The missionary, by excellence, is never limiting himself to just his area of preaching, but his purpose is to bring all to Christ, therefore he spontaneously feels the inner necessity of harmonizing the plan of his own life with God's plan.

Speaking of the development of Orthodox mission in our time, Archbishop Anastasios considers two aspects to be of fundamental importance: firstly, the development of missionary theological thinking, in the sense of raising the awareness, so far as possible, of all members of the Church, that mission is a fundamental manifestation of our ecclesial conscience, and therefore, that certainty must be transmitted to our Church structures; and secondly, a serious study of the modern secularized world, and the understanding of its pluralistic character, are necessary.

Within the Christian mission, Archbishop Anastasios tackles the issue of the Orthodox position in respect to people of other religious faiths, stressing the fact that our attitude should always be one of respect and love, taking the example of Christ, seeking to understand the others' fundamental elements. Archbishop Anastasios considers that Christians were obliged from the very beginning to be in a dialogue with people of other religious beliefs, to give witness of their self conscience and their hopes. Today, when dialogue presents itself to us as *a new*

possibility and challenge, the Orthodox faith, confident in its self-conscience and identity, is neither attacking, nor despising people of other religious beliefs, but is open to dialogue (p. 227).

In conclusion, the essence of religion remains the search for the supreme Truth. From that perspective, the essential contribution of Orthodoxy is not to keep silence, but to make known its own particularities, spiritual experiences, and deep beliefs. Thus, to Archbishop Anastasios, the goal of Christian mission in dialogue is "Orthodox witness."

The relevance of his contribution to this field of theology should be regarded as a valuable instrument, because, by conveying his own rich missionary experience, accumulated during his life in Greece, Africa and Albania, he laid the foundation for the possibility of dialogue, which is to be expounded and further developed for the good of the Church, in very concrete terms.

I wish to recommend this new publication, quoting the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomeos of Constantinople, who emphasizes in his introductory word to the volume: "We congratulate you, with brotherly love, for this extremely precious work, and we arduously pray that God Who is glorified in the Trinity should bless you with His mysterious Grace, in length of days and in the power of the Spirit" (p. xiv).