

The Missionary Dimension of the Orthodox Theological Faculties

In Romania the Orthodox Theological Faculties are part of the mission of the Church. They are integrated into the state system of higher education, being numerous and distributed throughout Romania – which is an Orthodox majority country. The Orthodox Theological Faculties play an important role in the mission of the Church both in the academic environment and in the whole Romanian society. Thus, by the very manner of their manifestation, the Faculties of Theology have a strong missionary dimension with social, ecumenical and interdisciplinary opening. This opening comes from the fact that the Orthodox theology professor is also the priest of a particular community. Thus he embodies in his life the requirements of mission in the academic environment and the social demands of the parish mission. Therefore, the requirements of the mission professed at the theology class do not remain simple concepts, but for many times they are incarnated in the parish where the professor of theology is priest. Moreover, the very concepts stated in the Faculties, by the status of theology professor are developed and enriched with new and real insights, immediately collected in the parish. So, there is a very close unity between chair / professor, parish / priest and mission / ministry. All these facts are embodied in a person who is able to make a diagnosis of the parish in terms of academic requirements and the implementation of remedies in terms of mission and pastoral requirements. Assuming this missionary perspective and being part of the Church mission, the Orthodox Theological Faculties act in several directions for: 1) overcoming the separation between faith and culture improperly created by the communist regime, 2) rediscovering the unity between Liturgy and Philanthropy, between spirituality of prayer and spirituality the social work of the Church, 3) the union between freedom and responsibility: the renewal of mentalities through ecclesial experience, social action and environments, 4) on globalization: by avoiding

both isolation and loss of identity; 5) affirming the values of holiness in the vacuum of secularization, 6) confessing Christ's love for every person, for all people and for the whole world; 7) confessing of Christ's gospel along with Christians from other European countries¹.

These directions are coordinated by several principles: a) The Church cannot and does not intend to fill all the gaps or voids of the society; b) It must not act as a political institution that gives answers for political problems, nor as a cultural or educational institution that would replace the competent institutions nor as a legal, economic and social assistance institution that provides unique solutions to these domains; c) What the Church can and must do is to inspire and not to dominate, to bless creativity and to heal the wounds of personal and collective sins, by rediscovering man's relationship with God, as a fundamental relationship of human life and society; d) Neither the Church does replace social, political and economic institutions of the world, nor it can be substituted by anything, since Christ is present through the Holy Spirit, thus giving the ultimate purpose to all our actions and aspirations; e) this vision helps us not absolutize anything is relative and not relativize anything is absolute².

Whereas in Romania, the confessional, religious, cultural and social context began recording worrying changes, the future priests are initiated on the relationship Gospel-culture, Gospel-society and Gospel-religions by a minimum program of missionary education of our Church. In this respect, the formation of priests as missionaries should be enhanced with new studies and strategies since in big cities there is the risk to replace the Church ethos with the ethics of consumption, hedonism, syncretism and individualism. Based on Christians' experience and communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit, the Parish communities need to focus on isolated people, on different kinds of people, on young and homeless. In this respect, our faculties sharply increased the study on the relationship between Liturgy and Philanthropy and between spirituality of prayer and spirituality of social work of the Church. The last one took a considerable boost with the election of Daniel Ciobotea as Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

¹ The Most Reverend Archbishop Daniel Ciobotea, *Giving and Surviving. Rays and Images of Light from the Romanians' History and Spirituality*, Trinitas Publishing, Iași, 2005, pp. 343-348.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 350-351.

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Moreover, in the last years in the academic theological environment of Romania more social theology courses were introduced that are complementary to the mission courses. They facilitate a better perception of socio-cultural and religious mutations and of the missionary theological implications. Thus, the Faculties of Theology irradiate the light of Christ's gospel in the expanded missionary area through the missions organized by teachers / students in the Orthodox parishes. These missions are designed to strengthen the faith of the communities, to provide live models for maintaining the interest in priestly vocation and to experience by the students the requirements of gospel confession in the community. We think this close and constant liaison of students and theology teachers with the parish and the immediate ecclesial realities is the strong point of the Faculties of Theology mission.

A growing dimension of the Theology Faculty is the mission through media, directly coordinated by the Romanian Patriarchate through *Trinitas* television and radio and the newspaper *Light*. Through them, not only the Theology faculties, the teachers and the priests, but the entire ecclesial body of Romanian Orthodoxy, including laity, express Christ's Gospel message in various forms and contexts. Certainly, almost every Theology Faculty has its own publications addressing the academics on the one hand – i.e. the specialized magazines - and the faithful – that is the various Christian newspapers and magazines. This way of doing mission should be strengthened as the rhythm of the secular environments development influences and heavily structures the masses mentality. It encourages different ways of doing mission on the internet, starting from the perspective of internet ambivalence and the opportunity it offers to present Christ's Gospel message throughout the world. Thus, the Internet can run not just devalued messages and images of the human person, but also images and messages that ennoble human dignity in Christ and are related to a certain hierarchy of values. Internet marks a new stage in the thinking of Christian missionary strategies in a globalized world, offering multiple opportunities for the saving truth revealed in Jesus Christ to reach the hearts and minds of contemporary man.

In today's world context we consider the mission Theology Faculties should have the following perspectives: 1) a deeper relationship between the chair and aisle, between the conceptual and practical requirements of the mission, between theology as a science and its ecclesial experience;

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2) a more profound assumption of local ecumenism through the social commitment and overcoming proselytizing tendencies in every parish; 3) identification of common themes of theology, philosophy and science in universities and initiating debates without going beyond the jurisdiction; 4) an increasing presence of Christ's Gospel message in the media as an alternative to the contemporary, hedonistic and secular vision on the meaning of life offered to man.

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