

Assuming the culture of the world according to the model of Jesus Christ

The mission of the Church is carried out in a secularized, independent, individualistic and rationalist culture, with strong vitalist-narcissistic-consumerist aspects. These are just some of the directions that characterize the current culture expressed in a large media effort, a sort of „global screen”. Also, we can dissociate between a culture heavily influenced by evolutionism-scientism, positivism-rationalism, on one hand and a cultural manifestation to overcome a cultural rationalism and spiritual affirmation through the oriental religions, which merges with the newest quantum science, on the other hand. Can this culture, within which the Church confesses the Gospel of Christ, exclude the mission of the Church? Certainly not! Nor the Church Fathers ignored the culture of their time. Instead, they identified the positive aspects in terms of Revelation and they have used them in the prospect of faith and life of the Church. If the time of the Church Fathers we speak of a pagan culture, today we are talking about a culture that carries in it the signs of a more pronounced neo-pagan society.

Therefore, neither the twenty-first century Christians can ignore the culture of their time - even if it often manifests contrary to the Revelation - but they must make the most of its potentialities opened to the saviour truth present in the Church. In this regard, we must affirm not only the value of reason in theology, but also the value of current theological aspects of culture. However, we believe that through theology the culture can acquire new horizons, avoiding a number of shortfalls and reductions that have characterized the modern and post-modern culture over time.

In this context arises the question: what is the model according to which the Church is guided in its encounter with the culture of today's world? The Church is beset by rapid changes in today's world and it is sometimes in a slight inadequacy to reality. I say this because the mentality

of today man, on the meaning of creation - man and cosmos, is more influenced by a secular, scientist, hedonistic and consumerist culture, rather than the ethos and the perspective offered by the Church. For us there are the risks of not to do mission, or to do it above the realities of which we are speaking about, or of confronting with the facts. Therefore, in order to avoid the missionary immobilism, on one hand, and to avoid the mentioned confusion on the other hand, it is necessary to reflect on the missionary way that Jesus Christ Himself expressed the will of the Father in a given cultural and historical context.

Thus, the model according to which the Church projects its entire mission in the world must be that of Christ and the Apostles. Let us remember how the Son of God came into the world, assumed our condition and perfected it. This should guide any mission: a descent of the missionary towards the needs and the interrogations of the contemporary man, an assumption of them and an edifying indication of the path to the Kingdom of Heaven. We do not do mission for the improvement of the living conditions for the world, but for recovering people for the Kingdom of God. In this perspective, the Church speaks about a culture that can eternalize itself by participating to the Kingdom and about anthropology and a cosmology opened to transfiguration, as the central purpose of the existence of the creation.

Following Christ as a model in our current deployment, we highlight at least two essential elements of the mission: on one hand, we avoid adapting the message of the Gospel of Christ to the culture of our days and on the other hand, we selectively use the values of the cultural context in which we confess. In the first case we do not remain stuck, or slaves of a particular cultural context, but we open to universal, on the other hand, show that we are able, from the perspective of the Revelation, to make a distinction within the world and consequently a settling and separation between what is light and what is dark. By following the model of Jesus Christ, by following the archetypal way that was given to us in all His earthly manifestations we can actualize in each era the saviour truth, made possible through Him. Jesus Christ as the model of mission in every age protects us from demonizing culture, on one hand and from idolizing it on the other. Thus, the Gospel and the culture are not separated, nor confused. The Gospel expresses itself in a particular historical context by making appeal to the culture of that context, while the culture of each historical

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context is set by the Gospel in a close relationship with the universal culture and its transcendental possibilities to remain beyond death.¹

Following the model of Jesus Christ in our mission into the present world imposes certain requirements that are necessary to be assumed by every missionary who confesses in the name and the power of Christ. If Orthodoxy, because of historical conditioning, failed to win the encounter with the modernity because it decisively influenced the mindset and lives of many Christians, it is imperative to mobilize its forces, spiritual and material, for a constructive dialogue with post-modernity. Why? Because modernity has failed to eliminate religion from the private sphere, but not from the public one, by gradually influencing the perception of it, post-modernity, through more subtle actions, makes a caricature of religion, by relativization and syncretism, by a depersonalization guarded by autonomy and hedonism, by immanent and idolatrous principles.

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¹ Cristinel Ioja, *Homo economicus. Iisus Hristos, sensul creației și insuficiențele purului biologism*, Editura Marineasa, Timișoara 2010; Cristinel Ioja, *Hristos, Biserică, Misiune. Relevanța misiunii Bisericii în lumea contemporană* (convorbiri cu Pr. Prof. Dr. Acad. Dumitru Popescu), redactori Pr. Dr. Lucian Pietroaia, Pr. Drd. Ninel Țugui, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Dunării de Jos, Galați, 2011; Cristinel Ioja, *Teologie și viață. Relevanța teologiei ortodoxe în lumea contemporană* (convorbiri cu Pr. Prof. Dr. Acad. Dumitru Popescu), Editura Cartea Ortodoxă, Alexandria, 2009).