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Missionary Priorities of the Church in the Vision of Theologians from Arad: Petru Deheleanu and Ilarion V. Felea¹

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Abstract

Both father Petru Deheleanu and father Ilarion V. Felea take into account setting up Christian mission, not only personally and individualistically, but in the spirit of the Orthodox teaching about the Church they always have a clear balance between the personal and the communitarian dimension of the mission. The attraction and motivation of Orthodox mission must always remain the responsibility of Orthodox missionaries. It is firstly the responsibility of the priests before God and the Church, on how they conduct their pastoral missionary work, having as ultimate goal the thanksgiving and doxology to God and the salvation of the faithful.

Keywords

Mission of the Church, Dogmatic Theology, Petru Deheleanu, Ilarion V. Felea

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General considerations

In recent decades there are more and more studies and interviews about mission, the Church's presence in the world and, ultimately, about what means the lowest structure of the Church - the parish - in the context of Christian mission in general. The concept of mission or missionary work was not easily understood and accepted in the Orthodox space because it was associated in the past, especially with the work of the Western churches, Catholic and Protestant, which used, the concept of mission and activity or missionary work with a particular focus, to seize new members from their Church, and, not least, from the Orthodox Churches. However, especially in the second half of the last century, this concept of mission began to make pit also in Orthodox space because more people have become aware of the fact that the *raison d'être* of the Church in the world is to be missionary.²

The missionary dimension of the Church results from the fact that it consists of the very presence of Christ in history, through the Holy Spirit, with His whole Person, teaching and saving work. Therefore the Church must bear testimony of this Person, teaching and salvation to all generations of believers of every time and place. And to bear witness about the Person and work of Jesus Christ is to do mission and to be missionary. The believer has direct access to Jesus Christ and His salvation, through the lowest step of the Church which is the parish.

„Hence the parish thus understood, and in communion with all other parishes, led by bishop as guarantor of preserving the apostolic faith in its fullness, in unbroken succession, since the apostolic age until today, constitutes the indispensable framework of every believer's recovery in communion and community with

² See in this regard the following references: Ion Bria, *Mărturia creștină în Biserica Ortodoxă. Aspecte, posibilități și perspective actuale*, in „Glasul Bisericii” XII, 1982, nr. 1-3, pp. 70-109; I. Bria, *Curs de formare misionară și ecumenică*, Geneva 1984, 191 p.; Valer Bel, *Misiune, parohie, pastorație. Coordonate pentru o strategie misionară*, Editura „Renașterea”, Cluj-Napoca 2002; V. Bel, *Misiunea Bisericii în lumea contemporană*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca 2004. David J. Bosch, *Dynamique de la mission chretienne*, Editions Karthala, Haho et Labor et Fides, 1995, pp. 11-23; Ioan Tulcan, *Quo vadis, christiani? Impulsuri misionare*, Editura Universității „A. Vlaicu”, Arad, 1994.

all those who confess Christ the Saviour with one thought and heart".³

The Church's mission should be exercised with great concreteness in every time and place, as a sign that it is a witness over the centuries of Christ crucified and risen, Who desires the salvation of all people (cf. I Tim 2: 4). However, not infrequently the Church's mission has been provoked by schismatic and heterodox events, trying to misinterpret the word of Jesus Christ gospel. Then, the mission appears not only as an expression of conscience, faith and mission of the Church itself, but as an exterior attitude to restore saying the true of the saving faith in the ears of all, to keep people from losing direct link with what Saviour left us to be believed and confessed. Things happened this way during the Ecumenical Councils and this ecclesial attitude was repeated whenever it was needed in history, in order not to put at risk the salvation of any man who wants to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.

In this sense, we can also refer to our areas, which since the nineteenth century were confronted with other forms of confession of Christian faith which conceived a concrete project to attract people to this new expression of ecclesiality and Christian mission. Faced with this situation, the Church tried to develop missionary strategies in order to reaffirm vigorously and argued the content of the faith in Jesus Christ. In the west of the country, dr. Ilarion V. Felea and dr. Petru Deheleanu were the priests and bearers of an exceptional missionary ethos. They tried through letters and word to counteract the proselytizing phenomena that attracted Orthodox believers to other new forms of Christianity. Using all the treasures of faith and Christian life as they are expressed by the Church and skilfully wielding the Scripture, they envisioned a missionary strategy, with a genuine dynamic. They also, by setting priorities, opening perspectives and coming up with concrete answers to the concrete realities and questions. Before presenting how they were reported to missionary phenomenon, it is worth presenting some of their biographical.

³ I. Tulcan, *O perspectivă arădeană asupra misiunii Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în contemporaneitate*, în: *Istorie și spiritualitate în Episcopia Aradului (1706-2006)*, Arad 2006, p. 379.

*Missionary Priorities of the Church in the Vision...***2. Biographical of fr. prof. dr. Ilarion V. Felea**

Father professor Ilarion V. Felea was born March 21, 1903 in Valea Bradului, Hunedoara County, in a priestly family, being nine brothers. He attended primary school in his native village (1910-1914) and high school courses at "Avram Iancu" high school in Brad (1914-1920) and at "Moise Nicoară" high school in Arad (1920-1922), where he became baccalaureate.

Between years 1922-1926 he studied theology at the "Andreian" Academy in Sibiu, where he received the priestly diploma at June 22, 1926. In the school year 1926-1927 he worked as a substitute teacher at "Avram Iancu" high school in Brad. In 1927 he was ordained a priest in the Archdiocese of Sibiu, on 6 August 1927, serving as a priest in his native village Valea Bradului until 30 August 1930, when he moved to the diocese of Arad, obtaining by contest the parish of Arad-Șega (current parish Arad-Șega I). Between years 1927-1929 he followed and graduated from the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Cluj. In this parish he had a meritorious and fruitful pastoral missionary activity for 9 years until June 1, 1939, when he was appointed at the Old Cathedral of Arad, the parish Arad-Centre, where he shepherds the faithful with the same zeal and sacrifice until September 1958 when he was arrested and imprisoned at Gherla and Aiud, hence, passing away in September 18, 1961.

At December 20, 1932 he received the bachelor's degree at the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest with the subject *Salvation in Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Sectarian View*, and on October 30, 1939 he obtained a doctorate in theology with the valuable thesis *Repentance, a study of theological and psychological documentation*. He contributed to many magazines and newspapers: *Revista Teologică* and *Telegraful Român* from Sibiu, *Biserica și Școala*, *Calea Mântuirii*, *Apărarea Națională*, *Aradul*, *Granița* from Arad, *Duh și Adevăr* from Timișoara, starting year 1944; *Renașterea* from Cluj, *Viața Ilustrată* from Cluj-Sibiu, *Zărândul* from Brad, *Lumina Satelor*, *Oastea Domnului* from Sibiu. He also published other valuable works: *Christian Convert*, in *Seria Teologică*, Sibiu 1935; *Criticism of Baptist Heresy*, in *Seria Teologică*, Sibiu 1937; *God and Soul in Contemporary Romanian Poetry*, Collection „Cărțile Vieții”, Cluj 1937; *Selected Icons from the life of Orthodoxy*, „Biblioteca creștinului ortodox”, Arad, 1933; *Drunkness in Re-*

ligious, Scientific, and Social Terms, „Biblioteca creștinului ortodox, Arad, 1931; *Collection of Prayers and Hymns*, Arad, 1935; *Way of the Cross*, (in collaboration), Arad, 1937; *Theology and Priesthood*, ”Anuarul” from Theological Academy in Arad, 1938-1939; *Paisius and Paisianism*, Cluj 1940; *Orthodox Christian Catechism*, 4 editions, the last in 1955; *The Holy Sacraments*, „Veniți la Hristos” Library, Sibiu 1946; *Salvation*, „Calea Mântuirii” Library, Arad, 1947; *Kingdom of God – The Church*, Sibiu 1947. He edited *The Diocesan Calendar*, in 1948, 1952, 1956 and printed an *Anthologhion* particularly practical and useful for priests and church singers.

The highlight of Father Ilarion V. Felea theological creation remain the reference works: *Spirit of Truth*, sermons with dogmatic content, Arad 1942 and second edition in 1943, a work awarded by the Romanian Academy in 1943; *The Religion of Love*, Arad 1946, having an apologetic content, and the works left in manuscript, but published after 1989: *Religion of Culture*, The Romanian Orthodox Bishopric of Arad Publishing, Arad 1994 and the four volumes entitled: *Towards Tabor*, Crigarux, Piatra Neamt 2007 2008 and 2009.

3. Some fundamental mission priorities in the thinking of fr. prof. dr. Ilarion V. Felea

a. The theological dimension of the Orthodox mission

Since the beginning of its priesthood and teaching work, the priest Ilarion Felea realized that a fruitful mission cannot be achieved in parishes at random and by improvisation, but the outside events of the Church always have to be thoroughly prepared and organized. The Church's mission must mean transmitting Christ's Gospel message to more and more people. This starts from the theological schools, which are designed not only to teach young people to know the different theological disciplines, preparing them for exams, but this knowledge must be passed on beyond the walls of school. Quite rightly Father Felea asks himself:

„I often wondered: the Christian studies are only to be taught in schools and examinations, or have we the calling to propagate them beyond the walls of schools? Of course, yes. There is

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no doubt that at a time when the concepts of life are reviewed, all the enshrined values are contested and all moral principles and most sublime religious beliefs are denied, theology can no longer remain within walls of schools and books tables. It is required to be transformed into spiritual food for all the faithful, especially for those who live in towns”⁴

In other words, the real and convincing mission of the Church cannot be carried with a subsidiary, unilateral or superficial message, but a deep and vivid one, based on Revelation and on the deep and complex contents of Gospel, addressed by the theological disciplines in a systematic, organized, clear and coherent way.

For theologian Ilarion V. Felea the mission of the Church is not a conjectural and inconsistent act, with no horizon, but one which puts in the work of all the treasures of faith, feeling and living. In this respect it should be underlined the importance of theological disciplines content for training the future servants of the Church and for the pastoral missionary work.

„The theologian student who does not make serious studies and the priest, who does not use all the theological subjects in the pastoral and missionary activity, do not fully understand their calling. A likewise priest is quickly exhausted and bored and he starts complaining to his colleagues that he does not know what to preach to the faithful. The vast material of the theological sciences has particularly this benefit: it continuously refreshes the meditation and liveliness of the apostle. The theological sciences are like a miraculous fountain from which we continuously extract the living water of the sacred teachings and their springs never dry up.”⁵

In this way of understanding of things, Father Felea predicted several decades ago, how important and necessary is a close link between theology, life and work of the Church on the one hand, and, therefore, on the other hand the need to teach theological disciplines in such a way that they correspond to the missionary vision of the Church in every time and place.

⁴ Pr. Ilarion V. Felea, *Duhul Adevărului*, Arad, 1942, p. 7.

⁵ I.V. Felea, *Teologie și preoție*, Tipografia diecezană, Arad, 1939, pp. 25-26.

b. The systematic recourse to the word of Holy Scripture and of the Church Fathers, missionary needs and priorities

The theologian Ilarion V. Felea expressed through his writing and thinking that the church leaders cannot achieve a fruitful mission if they do not take into account and do not use for their missionary work the entire thesaurus of thinking, sense and the message of the Holy Scripture. Father Felea's words are particularly eloquent from this point of view, emphasizing that „The Bible is the Church's wealth. The apostles of Christendom work in its fields for centuries and all its fruits satiate the hungry for spiritual food. Its words are the daily bread for all good Christians, but especially they are the living bread and sweet like honey to the theologians and priests of the Church of Christ Our Saviour.”⁶

Reading and meditating on the words of Holy Scripture by Church priests who are missionaries par excellence converts their work into a legitimate, brave, permanently current and fruitful missionary work. The importance of the Bible can be seen too from the way it should be used by priests in their missionary work. The Church has to fulfil a threefold mission on earth: teaching or preaching, sanctifying or sacramental and guiding or ruling.

„The teaching mission is a mission of evangelization. In its frameworks, the priest has a very important and difficult task of prophet or teacher of the Christian truth. He is preacher in the church and catechist in the school. Wherever he goes to fulfil his holy call the priest cannot do anything without the Bible. Just as he cannot perform any service without his stole, he cannot do any missionary work without the Scripture. That is because the Bible is the foundation of our entire catechetical and preaching mission.”⁷

The Holy Scripture is a kind of general fragrance that envelops entire life and ministry of the Church. Through her mission, the Church emphasizes the gifts God bestows on her limbs by the living and active word of the Holy Scripture, made accessible to the believers through the missionary work of the Church.

⁶ I.V. Felea, *Teologie și preoție*, p 27.

⁷ I.V. Felea, *Teologie și preoție*, p. 28.

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In the thinking of Father Felea the well prepared preaching, thoroughly internalized and convincingly delivered is closely linked to the missionary priority of permanent contact with theological subjects even after graduation, and to the continuous use of the Scripture for study and meditation. Therefore, he himself used the Gospel word from the church pulpit, and, especially in the old cathedral in Arad.

This theologian's statements are so relevant to today's times, that their analysis can only bring an increase of light and understanding of Orthodox missionary ethos, by the church leaders, no matter what level of service they are. To be more convincing, Father Felea uses the text of the apostolic canon no.58, which declares unworthy the servant of the Church who does not teach people the true faith and threatens the careless and lazy servant to be defrocked. The priest must always have in mind the apostolic word: „How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10, 14). Because „woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (I Corinthians 9, 16). Although he is aware that frequently the word „preach” no longer has the same interest for the faithful, finding some conjunctural and psychological explanations for this situation, the theologian from Arad strongly recommends proper preparation and uttering of the sermons. The main reason for keeping the faithful at distance from sermons would be that it „does not meet the spiritual needs of listeners.”⁸ He states an undeniable reality about what believers await from the Church, namely they come to receive aid, impossible to find elsewhere.

„They seek God and His gifts. They lack the strength of saving faith and sanctifying grace. Consoling word, which they expect here, is the Gospel of light to reveal the path of redemption, the treasure of divine revelation, the wonderful promises and the saving grace and truth... The beginning and middle of a sermon should be doctrinal. Dogmas of salvation are the truths that make the power and attraction of a sermon”⁹.

⁸ I.V. Felea, *Teologie și preoție*, p. 38.

⁹ I.V. Felea, *Teologie și preoție*, p. 38.

The need for doctrinal preaching is not necessary because of any theological ambitions, but because it best meets the challenger context of the time. Church's message was always questioned by all sorts of ideologies and cultural forms of materialism and atheism, phenomena that have not lost their vigour even today. The need for doctrinal preaching is imposed because

„sectarian, atheistic and materialistic ideologies shake the balance of the faithful spiritual life. Fights and clashes between ideas born doubt and disturb faith. To support the strength and cleanliness of the faith we need to lean on the sacred and eternal dogma. Therefore, the lights proposed by the dogmatic, apologetic and biblical studies are of invaluable use”¹⁰.

We no longer need to argue how current the statements above are. Accordingly, the preach with a content of saving faith is an occasion to strengthen communion of the faithful in the Body of the Church as living witnesses to a world in constant movement and change, but seeking always help, comfort, peace and higher sense of life.

d. Various structures of the Church must work together in its mission

What surprises in Father Felea's thinking is the fact that he has a holistic view regarding the work of the Church in the world. He notes that the Church has such an organization no other institution has in Romania.

„From Patriarchate to hamlet we have nuclei of organization that are linked such as telegraph poles with wires. The same power of the Spirit manifests in all as a tree rises and spreads in all branches the same vim and vigour-giving force. Living cells are formed by the parishes of the Church ... Here is the priest, the missionary, the apostle. Next to him are the cantor, the sacristan and the singers. Slightly away from the holy altar are the curates and the parish council. Do we realize what these collaborative elements of the priest mean spiritually conquered and made to work from a certain moment? What power do they represent in the missionary work of the Church?”¹¹.

¹⁰ I.V. Felea, *Teologie și preoție*, p. 39.

¹¹ I.V. Felea, *Teologie și preoție*, p. 40.

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Father Felea outlined this thinking as an expression of a vision through study and reading, but equally from practical pastoral care in his parish. There, in the parish, he experienced the missionary and pastoral needs of parishes, and thus of the Church.

4. Biographical landmarks of Father Professor dr. Petru Deheleanu

The theologian from Arad was born on March 4, 1909 in Pilu village, county of Arad, where he attended primary school. Then he joined “Moise Nicoara” high school from Arad, which he graduated in 1928. Feeling attracted to the priesthood, he attended the Faculty of Theology in Chernivtsi (1928-1932). Here he is highly appreciated by his teachers, for his intelligence, diligence and conscientiousness. The results he obtained made Dr. Andrei Magieru, the Bishop of immortal memory from Arad (1936-1960) to grant him a scholarship to Strasbourg (1934-1935). Back in the country is called spiritual at the Theological Academy from Arad (1936-1938), then professor of New Testament and Sectology at the same Theological Academy (1938-1948), after he completed his doctoral thesis entitled: *The Charitologic Dogma of the Orthodox Church (Dogma haritologică a Bisericii Ortodoxe)*. He was editor of the diocesan sheet “Biserica și școala” from Arad Diocese (Church and School) (1948), lecturer at the Theological Institute of Cluj (1948-1952) and director of the Centre of clergy missionary guidance from Arad Diocese (1948-1952). Thereafter, he was appointed priest in Timisoara (1952-1953), cultural adviser to the Diocese of Arad (1953-1958), and between the years 1958-1978 he served as parish priest at the Romanian Orthodox parish from Arad-Centre (Old Cathedral), where he retire from at august 1, 1978.

He was ordained honorary archpriest in 1946 and stavrophore in 1949 by Bishop Dr. Andrei Magieru of Arad. He died on May 14, 1979.

As a professor of theology he was distinguished by a thorough preparation, by the proximity of his students, as well as by his remarkable intellectual and pedagogical qualities. He was one of the teachers of real value and vocation of the Theological Academy in Arad. Among his works we mention the following: *Charitological Dogma of the Orthodox Church (Dogma haritologică a Bisericii Ortodoxe)*, Arad, 1938; *War, a matter of moral and Christian sociology (Războiul, o problemă de morală și soci-*

ologie creștină), Arad, 1939; *Scripture literary beauties (Frumuseți literare în Sfânta Scriptură)*, Arad, 1946; *Sectology Textbook (Manual de Sectologie)*, Arad, 1948; *Glossolalia or "speaking in tongues", charismatic gift (Glossolalia sau „vorbirea în limbi”, dar harismatic)*, Arad, f. a.; *The Heresy of Papal Primacy. What Catholics teach and what the Bible says (Erezie primatului papal. Ce învață catolicii și ce spune Biblia)*, in: *Ortodoxia*, I, 1949, no., 2-3, pp. 143-170; *Orthodox Baptism. Biblical Documentation (Botezul ortodox. Documentare biblică)*, in: *MMS*, XLVII, 1971, no. 3-4, pp. 215-246; *Orthodox Priesthood. Biblical Documentation (Preoția ortodoxă. Documentare biblică)*, in: *BOR*, XCI, 1973, no. 3-5, pp. 379-389; and: 1975, no. 7-9, pp. 912-922; *The Holy Misteries (Sfintele Taine)*, in: *MB*, XXVIII, 1978, no. 4-6, pp. 175-191. He also wrote articles, notes, reviews in various magazines: „Biserica și Școala”, „Calea Mântuirii”, (Arad), „Duh și Adevăr”(Timișoara), „Mitropolia Banatului” etc.

His most substantial and valuable work which also consecrated him from a certain point of view remains *Sectology Textbook (Manual de Sectologie)*, Arad 1948. It is a voluminous work, which examines the sectarian phenomenon in Romania and exposes the Orthodox response to contestations brought by heterodox groups. He uses the rich arguments of the Holy Scripture, to show the permanence of the apostolic understanding of the Christian faith, which Orthodoxy professes.

5. Some missionary priorities of Fr. prof. Petru Deheleanu

Petru Deheleanu's missionary thinking did not spring from a curiosity more or less legitimate, but from the need to develop a missionary response which had to be coherent, articulate and valuable or credible in the face of a contesting avalanche that steadily manifested in the first half the 20th century, especially in the west of Romania. In other words, the growing pressure of questioning the Orthodox Church mission and her fundamentals doctrinal dogmas determined this theologian to highlight the whole theological, biblical, historical and missionary arsenal of the Church. He made visible the permanence of the Church missionary consciousness for about two millennia of existence. Petru Deheleanu had valuable bishops of Arad as allies in this missionary strategy: Dr. Grigorie Comsa (1925-1935), and especially Dr. Andrei Magieru (1936-1960). They understood

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the huge stakes that are in play in that period, that is credibility of the Orthodox Church and its apostolic faith. In presenting the dynamics of his missionary thinking we should highlight some of the aspects or details of this thinking, in order to seize its value, but also to see that it is actual and relevant to our times.

a. The missionary consciousness of priests concerning the inevitable occurrence of withdrawal from faith phenomenon and its missionary approach

The first thing P. Deheleanu carefully studied was the understanding of the heretical phenomenon and of the church community separation, from the apostolic age until today. He starts from the observation that the sectarian phenomenon arose at the same time as Christianity. The beginning of this phenomenon is made by Simon Magus, who tried to buy the Apostles divine grace with cash (acc. to Acts of the Apostles 8, 9-24). Since then it remains to this day the word *simony* that is selling the holy for money. Manifestations of the sectarian phenomenon can be found in the young community of Corinth that threaten to break the Church unity by asserting acutely and divergently four religious groups or parties in Corinth (acc. to I Corinthians 3, 3-9). This phenomenon continued with the group of Judaizers or the Judeo-Christians who claimed Christians to respect the Mosaic law entirely too, contrary to the Apostles teaching who received from Christ what Christians should believe and confess for the fullness of salvation (see: I Corinthians 11, 23; Galatians 1, 11-12).

Besides the sectarian phenomenon in the apostolic age, we should also mention those from the post-apostolic age: Gnosticism in the 2nd century and Aryanism in the 3rd and 4th Century which challenged the Church's life and mission. After that, there were other heretical groups, named after their founders: Nestorianism, Macedonianism, Apollinarism etc. The sectarian phenomenon has re-emerged strongly in 8th and 9th century, by the struggle against icons or iconoclasm.¹² So this phenomenon is specific to the fallen and self sufficient human condition which thinks it can be asserted divergently and opposing, but powerfully in front of a spiritual or religious authority. The sectarian phenomenon never lacked a moment from the time Christian Church born on the history stage.

¹² See more broadly: P. Deheleanu, *Manual de Sectologie*, Arad 1948, pp. 12-13.

As embodied reality or phenomenon it takes the form of religious groups and sects that claim to have as source the Holy Scripture, God of Jesus Christ etc.

b. The inevitability of the Church's faith objector phenomenon and its causes and positioning to priests

Peter Deheleanu relates the inevitability of the sectarian phenomenon to the tower of Babel, when the world was divided into different languages, thus showing the disunity of humanity. Since then, every nation has built its own tradition, culture and history, often in confrontation and conflict with other nations.

But even deeper into the history of humanity, the cause for this guilty diversity emergence is seen in that fundamental human act, equivalent to a true existential failure, when man fell into sin. Here it is a work of human mind darkness. The Bible History of the Old Testament brings more evidence of fallacies that people themselves caused as a result of obscuring their minds: see in this regard, making the golden calf, killing the prophets, grumbling against God and His messengers etc.¹³

The Saviour Himself stressed the inevitability of sectarianism by the words: „Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh” (acc. to Matthew 18, 7). From this verse follows three essential things: first, that „offences must come”, i.e. they are inevitable; secondly, they come by people because they have darkened and perverse mind, and finally, those who spreads follies are guilty. These words of the Saviour seem to be a fundamental contradiction. I mean, how can one avoid the errors and follies since they are inevitable? For if the follies are inevitable, how can one avoid them, and how can he be responsible for them? And if the man is responsible for his actions, then it means that the sectarian phenomenon cannot be inevitable. In fact, we have here a real contradiction. Somehow, folly is inevitable, but not as a blind force, which is absolutely necessary, but as something that can easily arise in the human mind, diverse and perverted by sin. But by discernment, by strength of mind, soul and faith this can be avoided.

¹³ P. Deheleanu, *Manual de Sectologie*, pp. 16, 17.

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The Saviour Himself confirmed the inevitability of sectarian phenomenon, he says, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; inasmuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect." (Matthew 24, 4-5; 24, 11; 24, 24). St. Ap. Paul also says: „For I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20, 29-30; see also: II Peter 2, 1-3).

It follows that the Saviour and the Apostles noted this phenomenon is inevitable and it should happen, but drawing attention to the truly faithful to forced them to be firm and clear in front of such phenomenon. The general cause of the phenomenon of sectarianism is not necessarily indicated in the above scriptural references but, as resulting from other places, the general cause is human mind diversity darkened by sin.¹⁴ To have a true perception of the mission we must know what causes the phenomenon of disintegration of the original Christian identity, in order to develop a real and proper missionary strategy. So we know that there is a more general and inclusive cause for the emergence of heterodox movements, namely, the expression diversity of the human mind darkened by sin, which is a kind of general background of other more punctual and more precise causes:

a. The appearance of Satan as "angel of light" who tempts people with the pride of their minds by rising against the truth (acc. to II Corinthians 11, 14-15). His face is soft and therefore he conquers many. St. Ap. Paul says in this regard: „Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils. Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4, 1-2). They take the image of gentleness, of faith and holiness, but they spread wrong teachings in the world, causing much confusion in people's minds.

b. The appetite for news and originality of some urges them to found new religious groups, often in contradiction with the old belief of Christians. The faith received by tradition of their forefathers no longer satisfied them, they feel it is outdated and inadequate to their present aspirations. „For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but

¹⁴ P. Deheleanu, *Manual de Sectologie*, p. 19.

after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”(II Timothy 4, 3-4).

c. Some people’s willingness to become leaders of human communities makes them propagate new teachings dividing the Church body and causing misunderstandings and tension in the communion of the faithful.

d. Passion for money can be an important source of division among Christians who become missionaries of a new teaching. During the Apostles time there were some Judaizers, who taught false teachings, from which they earned undue income.

e. Weakening and hardening of belief in the „faint of heart” people can lead them to embrace teachings that contradict what the Church always taught and learn.

c. The Orthodox missionary response to the trends of abandoning the true faith and the Church, and the causes of these phenomena

It is extremely important that in recent decades some faithful have a tendency of removal from the Orthodox Church and faith. This situation cannot leave indifferent priests as missionaries and bearers of a message of light and salvation. Petru Deheleanu concludes there are clear causes that are responsible for these scourges, and that obstruct a successful Orthodox mission. With respect to these causes, P. Deheleanu says there are internal and external causes that favour the expansion of leaving the Church, which should be considered when we set up a missionary strategy to counter these phenomena.

Among the *internal causes* for sectarian phenomenon emerging the first is the major deficiencies of the faithful to know their Orthodox teaching and its grounds. This demonstrates priest’s absence from his duty to catechize the faithful whom he shepherds in many ways. On the other hand, the lack of knowledge of the Church doctrine and faith can be explained by their lack of interest and concern for the Christian values. We can see here the priest does not involve himself in arousing the faithful interest for the Church life, faith and confession.

Also regarding the priest’s presence in the parish, an internal cause of the centrifugal phenomenon of leaving the Church is the major and flagrant gap in priest’s and his family morality and the life of the Orthodox

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believers. In some parishes there are many moral deviations which compromise the Church's mission in society. These deviations take the form of all sorts of passions: drunkenness, licentiousness, greed, violence, etc., which make the other members of the Orthodox community leave their own Church. Not without reason, many believers claim a perfect consonance between what the priest preaches from the pulpit and what he does in everyday life.

Some priests' greed or argyrophilia is a rock of offense to many faithful, who cannot understand how some ministers of the Church cannot maintain a straight balance regarding their saving mission among the faithful and the exaggerated claims to be paid by them. Some take this situation as an excuse to leave the Church.

Some Church ministers' lack of pastoral tact is also a cause for some faithful to adopt a hostile attitude toward the Church and leave her. There are people who have some intention to exercise different functions in parish life, and unless they fulfil this desire, they leave the Church confusing her with the priest himself. The priest's pastoral tact should be exercised especially against such persons. He must put in work his theological preparation, patience, wisdom and gentleness, in order to keep them all those entrusted to him in Church unity and communion.

The theologian Deheleanu mentions not only internal causes for weakening the Church's unity and cohesion, but also *external* causes, which should not be minimized as the domestic ones must not be ignored. He shows that in a parish community there should not be internal weaknesses in the priests and faithful life, and yet the unity of the parish could be weakened by the dislocation of smaller or larger groups from that community. For example, one or more persons can come for economic or business reasons in a parish, and they carry a different Christian message, which produces trouble and confusion in the parish. They will question the fundamental teachings of the Orthodox Church, causing confusion in the ecclesial community.¹⁵ This is the starting point of a phenomenon known in Scripture,

¹⁵ P. Deheleanu, *Manual de Sectologie*, p. 29. David J. Bosch, *op. cit.*, p. 20: „La foi chrétienne est intrinsèquement missionnaire... L'élément distinctif des religions missionnaires, à la différence des ideologies missionnaires, est que toutes elles implique la révélation d'une vérité absolue et universelle. La foi chrétienne considère que toutes les générations du globe sont l'objet du plan de salut de Dieu ou, selon le Nouveau Testament, elle conçoit que le règne de Dieu venu en Jésus Christ est destiné à toute l'humanité. Ce n'est pas là un aspect accessoire de la foi chrétienne: le christianisme est missionnaire par nature, sinon il trahit sa raison d'être.” See also: Mihai Himcin-

as preaching “another Gospel” (cf. Galatians 1: 8), than the one preached by the Church for two millennia.

Father Petru Deheleanu’s missionary thinking proves to be realistic, responsive and dynamic from this perspective too. It is not enough to note from a missionary point of view, there are certain dangers to the Church’s mission in a community, but you must have the necessary antidote to overcome those phenomena which occur beyond the control of the priest or the parish community. Moreover, his missionary vision is one that tries to prevent such centrifugal events through a complex, integrated and concrete pastoral care adapted to the needs of the parish members. From this point of view, his missionary vision is profoundly apostolic and patristic, as we can apprehend it in the New Testament and the Church Fathers missionary work.

Another important element of this vision is the emphasis on knowing the Holy Scriptures by the Orthodox faithful as in the early church communities. By knowing the Holy Bible believers become more attached to the authentic values of Christ’s Gospel. The believers feed from the Scripture light and sources through its words and this roots them in the Body of Christ - the Church to unceasingly receive Jesus Christ’s saving gifts. On the other hand, the missionary vision is rooted in the continuity of traditional Christian mission. We know from the Scripture, that the last and highest reason for the mission is the very life of communion and love of the Holy Trinity, Who became known to the world and peoples’ by the incarnated Word of God, Who becomes Father’s messenger or apostle for salvation of all people¹⁶.

schi, *Doctrina trinitară ca fundament misionar*; Editura „Reîntregirea” Alba Iulia 2004; Teofil Tia, *Reîncreștinarea Europei? Teologia religiei în pastorală și misiologia occidentală contemporană*, Editura „Reîntregirea” Alba Iulia 2003, pp. 282 u.

¹⁶ Valer Bel, *Temeiurile teologice ale misiunii creștine*, in: *Pastorație și misiune în Biserica Ortodoxă*, Editura Partener, Galați 2007, p. 7: „The Church’s mission is „participation” in sending the Son and the Holy Spirit in the world (John 14, 26), revealing God’s life of communion in order to share it, for the kingdom of God is the life of communion with the Holy Trinity, shared by people through Christ in the Holy Spirit”. See also: Ioan I. Ică, sen., *Importanța parohiei pentru misiune. Unitatea dintre parohie și Biserica locală, unitatea internă a parohiei, mijloace și metode de menținere a acesteia*, in: *Pastorație și misiune...*, pp. 17-27.

*Missionary Priorities of the Church in the Vision...***d. Familiarization of the faithful to the Holy Scripture reading and comprehension**

From his personal pastoral experience Father Petru Deheleanu noticed that many Orthodox believers do not know the Scripture, are not familiar with its contents and cannot defend their faith from Scripture. Therefore he advocated for returning to the Bible and systematically reading it, which the priests themselves should use it more often and better. He urged clergy to think new forms of closeness to Scripture, depending on the specifics of each parish, revealing to the faithful its beauty, depth and accurate understanding. Father Deheleanu recommended priests to offer the Holy Bible to the faithful, but being “like a two-edged sword, a pharmacy, where an ignorant can take poisons instead of healing medicines”¹⁷, it must be provided to the faithful with minimal explanations for all who wish to enter its bright world and to make them capable to do so. At the same time, there must be a permanent connection between priests and their faithful.

e. Strengthening of the faithful in the knowledge and experience of the true faith

In the missionary work of the Church since always and also now there cannot miss the imperative of strengthening the faithful in the knowledge, love and living the mysteries of faith. This cannot be achieved other than by an intense, coherent and lively preaching the true faith by sermons, catechesis, conferences, meditations, etc.¹⁸. Therefore, the first means of communication of faith is preaching the word of God and the liberating message of faith.

Conclusions

1. From the above, we can grasp the missionary dynamics of the two aforementioned vocational priests thinking and theological work. This dynamic of their missionary thinking is based primarily on the fact that it is in close connection with the Divine Revelation, written in the Scripture. Any mis-

¹⁷ P. Deheleanu, *Manual de Sectologie*, p. 40.

¹⁸ P. Deheleanu, *Manual de Sectologie*, p. 38.

sionary strategy imagined by someone cannot ignore the written word of God. On the basis of the Church's missionary work must be some clear priorities, which she tenaciously pursued by all her work. The purpose of the Church's mission must be the spiritual benefit those wishing to come to God should acquire and His gifts received through the Church.

2. An Orthodox Christian Mission cannot ignore the religious and spiritual condition of the concrete parishes and priests, who must allow to be analyzed in the light of priestly service and Church mission requirements. In other words, the whole centre of gravity falls on the servers of the Church, with serious consequences for mission deployment, them being directly responsible for the state of their parishes, for the spiritual impoverishment of the faithful and their leaving the Church.

3. Both father Petru Deheleanu and father Ilarion V. Felea take into account setting up Christian mission, not only personally and individualistically, but in the spirit of the Orthodox teaching about the Church they always have a clear balance between the personal and the communitarian dimension of the mission. The attraction and motivation of Orthodox mission must always remain the responsibility of Orthodox missionaries. It is firstly the responsibility of the priests before God and the Church, on how they conduct their pastoral missionary work, having as ultimate goal the thanksgiving and doxology to God and the salvation of the faithful.

4. Thus the Christian mission receives a special dynamic, since it does not only stop to powerless findings in the face of reality, but takes note of them, analyzes them and seeks to find the best antidote to the negative religious conditions of the parishes. This reveals a vivid responsibility that must be present in the hearts of priests, but not least of the faithful. By analyzing the meaning of the Orthodox mission in understanding these two theologians, we can grasp new, more complex and deeper meanings in close liaison to the primordial sources of the Christian mission present in the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament and then argued by the Church Fathers lights of understanding.

5. The attention that the Church leaders pay to the theological disciplines, the new re-deepening of the sermons sense, and especially the well prepared and forceful sermons with a live and doctrinal content brings light to souls and forms the permanence of thought and activity of the two leading theologians of Romanian Orthodoxy.

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In conclusion, any Church missionary strategy and today missionary work as well would have much to gain, if we pursue some clear and urgent priorities, closely linked to the pastoral needs of the faithful in a social, cultural and mental context, marked by increasing secularization. This strategy would benefit greatly if we consider the thinking, work, experience and missionary zeal of the two theologians from Arad: Ilarion V. Felea and Petru Deheleanu.