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Research paper on Missiology
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Towards a mission as continuous liturgy

“in the world but not of the world”

-An Orthodox perspective-

Introduction

The role of the Holy Liturgy in Orthodox mission was and still is of a great importance. The value of the Eucharistic assembly as venue for the proclamation of the Gospel can never be denied.

In discussing the mission of the Orthodoxy today it is necessary to look at those areas of human society that are today far removed from the Church and which need the salvation that church can bring. And I am thinking here to those who let themselves be carried along on the waves of the troubled technological-economical sea without founding any spiritual calm. They seek deaden their moments of boredom and disgust by means of such palliatives as drugs, alcohol and sex which, though they may bring moments of forgetfulness, in long run are destructive and destroy their nervous system. These secular and destructive elements become more and more present in the life of the people, especially teenagers of this post-modern society. For this reason I consider necessary a renewal of the liturgical consciousness of all of us, to realize that Christ came not just for us, the salvation is not just for us the faithful. Is for all the creation. And in this sense each of us is responsible for what he does and also for the other's salvation.

And this mission is not at all simple. Somebody compared the mission that the Christians have today with the mission of martyrs from the first centuries. Today we are not any more supposed to die for our faith (although in some part of the world still exist places where Christians are killed); today we are asked to die for our brothers and sisters who need our help. But to die in the sense that we have to do our best for their salvation, to do our best for they could feel the love of God. Because this is the moment and the fact that converts people: the love, our love. And this is also a form of martyrdom.

I. The double movement in the Liturgy.

The Liturgy was and is the “climax of the Church’s life”¹. For the Orthodox the Liturgy is the very central point of their existence. They are, or they should be, in this way liturgical beings.

When we speak about Liturgy we can find, or identify a double movement in the Liturgy. On the one hand, the assembling of the people of God to perform the memorial of the death and resurrection of our Lord "until He comes again". It also manifests and realizes the process by which "the cosmos is becoming ecclesia". Therefore the preparation for Liturgy takes place not only at the personal spiritual level, but also at the level of human historical and natural realities. In preparing for Liturgy, the Christian starts a spiritual journey which affects everything in his life: family, properties, authority, position, and social relations. It re-orientates the direction of his entire human existence towards its sanctification by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, renewed by the Holy Communion and the Holy Spirit, the members of the Church are sent to be authentic

¹ Prof. Ion Bria, “The liturgy after the Liturgy”, in *Martyria mission. The witness of the Orthodox Church today*, edited by Ion Bria, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1980.

testimony to Jesus Christ in the world. The mission of the Church rests upon the radiating and transforming power of the Liturgy. It is a stimulus in sending out the people of God to the world to confess the Gospel and to be involved in man's liberation.

The Liturgy is not an escape from life, but a continuous transformation of life according to the prototype Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit. For Christians Liturgy is not just something to listen to, because the Liturgy is the Great event of liberation from sin and after, the great event of koinonia (communion) with Jesus Christ through the real presence of the Holy Spirit, then this event of our personal incorporation into the Body of Christ, this transfiguration of our little being into a member of Christ, must be evident and proclaimed in actual life.

The Eucharist is the most distinctive event of Orthodox worship because in it the Church gathers to remember and celebrate the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ and, thereby, to participate in the mystery of Salvation.

II. Our liturgy for the others

The Liturgy doesn't finish when people go back home from the church. It's just the first step of another process you are part of. And this time the priest, the one who celebrates, is you. The Liturgy has to be continued in personal, everyday situations. Each of the faithful is called upon to continue a personal "liturgy" on the secret altar of his/her own heart, to realize a living proclamation of the good news for the sake of the whole world. Without this continuation the Liturgy remains incomplete. Since the Eucharistic event we are incorporated in Him who came to serve the world and sacrificed for it, we have to express in concrete diakonia, in community life, our new being in Christ, the

Servant of all. The sacrifice of the Eucharist must be extended in personal sacrifices for the people in need, the brothers for whom Christ died. Since the Liturgy is the participation in the great event of liberation from demonic power of evil that are working inside us, a continual reorientation and openness to insights and efforts aimed at liberating human persons from all injustice, exploitation, agony, loneliness, and at creating a real communion of persons in love.

If the Liturgy is the “thanksgiving“ which people bring in a Eucharistic way to God, philanthropy is the continuation of this Liturgy, is the missionary witness about God’s love to the humanity. Hence the Orthodox theology considers that the divine philanthropy celebrated in Liturgy can not be separated by the social witness of this fact – the social philanthropy.²

At the basis of philanthropy, very often identified with Martha from Luke’s Gospel³, are the social aspects of the Liturgy. These two faithful women from Luke’s Gospel are not at all opposed. On the contrary they are very complementary. Mary is the woman of prayer, the expression of spiritual life, contemplation while Martha is the social spirit of hospitality. The social aspect must always be based on the spiritual one which is the fundament of our existence. And both of this two aspects one can find in the Liturgy. That’s why we can say, without any fear to be wrong, that the Liturgy is in a way, or should be, the spiritual basis of any social philanthropy and the social philanthropy is the confirmation and the witness in the world of the gifts we have been given in the Liturgy.

² Cristinel Ioja, “Liturgie si filantropie”, in *Altarul Banatului* review, no.1-3, Timisoara, 2006.

³ *Luke 10, 41-4.*

“The ecclesial koinonia is constituted by the participation of the baptized in the Eucharistic communion, the sacramental actualization of the economy of salvation, a living reality which belongs both to history and to eschatology. While this emphasis is deeply rooted in the biblical and patristic tradition and is of extreme importance today, it might easily lead to the conclusion that Orthodox limits the interpretation of the Church to an exclusive worshipping community, to protecting and to preserving the Good News for its members. Therefore a need was felt to affirm that the Liturgy is not a self-centered service and action, but is a service for the building of the one Body of Christ within the economy of salvation which is for all people of all ages.”⁴

So the Church is called to open towards the social dimension of the world, to heal the social, to transform its life according to the prototype Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit. St. John Chrysostom said once in one of his homilies that if you want to praise the Body of Christ don't ignore him when you see him hungry. Don't praise him just in the church. Because the one who said: “this is my body” also said “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.”⁵

The Church has this belief that within the poor it's Christ who asks for food, for water, for healing, for love. So the Christians are called to share with the poor all what they have, but first of all to share with them the love that God has given to us.

⁴ Prof. Ion Bria, art. Cit., p. 69

⁵ *Mathew 25, 34-46.*

So "The liturgy after the Liturgy" which is an essential part of the witnessing life of the Church, requires:

- To re-affirm the true Christian identity, fullness and integrity which have to be constantly renewed by the Eucharistic communion. A condition for discipleship and church membership is the existential personal commitment made to Jesus Christ the Lord⁶. A lot of members of the Church are becoming "nominal Christians who attend the Church just as a routine". Often such people still find it possible sociologically or culturally or ethnically to relate in some manner to the Christian community. The re-Christianization of Christians is an important task of the Church's evangelistic witness.
- To enlarge the space for witness by creating a new Christian milieu, each in his own environment: family, society, office, factory, etc., is not a simple matter of converting the non-Christians in the vicinity of the parishes, but also a concern for finding room where the Christians live and work and where they can publicly exercise their witness and worship. The personal contact of the faithful with the non-believers in the public arena is particularly relevant today. Seeking for a new witnessing space means, of course, to adopt new styles of mission, new ecclesiastical structures, and especially to be able to face the irritations of the principalities and powers of this age.
- The Eucharistic gathering means also public and collective action and therefore there is a sense in which the Christian is a creator of community; this particular charisma has crucial importance today with the increasing lack of human fellowship in the

⁶ Col. 2:6

society. The Christian has to be a continual builder of a true koinonia of love and peace.

There is always an "open gate", namely the readiness of the human heart to hear the voice of the beloved⁷ and to receive the power of God's Word⁸. Therefore more importance has to be given to the presentation of the Good News as a calling addressed to a person, as an invitation to the wedding house and feast⁹. God himself is inviting people to his house and banquet. We should not forget the personal aspect of the invitation. In fact the Christian should exercise his personal witnessing as he practices his family life.

It is very interesting to mention in this respect that St. John Chrysostom, who shaped the order of the Eucharistic Liturgy ordinarily celebrated by Orthodox, strongly underlined "the sacrament of the brother", namely the spiritual sacrifice, the philanthropy and service which Christians have to offer outside the worship, in public places, on the altar of their neighbor's heart. For him there is a basic coincidence between faith, worship, life and service, therefore the offering on "the second altar" is complementary to the worship at the Holy Table.¹⁰

Conclusion:

For the Orthodox Church is very important to keep this inner unity between the Liturgy, mission, witness and social diakonia, which gave it this popular character and historical vitality. At the inter-Orthodox consultation from Valamo in the final document was stated: "In each culture the Eucharistic dynamics lead into a 'liturgy after the

⁷ *John 3:29*

⁸ *Mt. 8:8*

⁹ *Luke 14:13*

¹⁰ These points were articulated by Fr. Ion Bria, a Romanian Orthodox theologian who was involved for a very long period of time in the WCC's missionary struggles.

Liturgy', a liturgical use of the material world, a transformation of human association in society into koinonia, of consumerism into an ascetic attitude towards creation and the restoration of human dignity."

On the same final evening on which Jesus celebrated the Communion with his disciples He made a farewell speech to them and prayed to his Father for them and for those who, through their words, believed in Him. He spoke of the believers and of the world, in which they would have trouble.

In our post Christian time, the concept of "world" in the sense in which Christ used it¹¹ can be felt very clearly. Lands which were originally Christian are now either officially atheist or are neutral towards religion. Faith seems to be considered more and more as a private affair for the citizens.

People seem to have forgotten officially and publicly God. Turning his back on God, he now looks after the affairs of the *world* with his own genius.

The Creator, from His own essential nature, endowed people with his self awareness, creativity and a free will. And what do we see in practice? Separated from the will of God and indifferent in relation with Him, man's free will is transformed, as the result of his pride, suspicion and hatred, into a world destroying power which causes both man and nature to groan.

I am wondering if there is no place from which we might expect something decisively new, which could change the direction of this wrong development? Is it not our fault for that they don't feel God anymore as a savior of humanity. Perhaps a solution it is to be found in what has been left behind. It came as good news "to all the nations"-as the Gospel. Its influence can still be felt in all that is really beautiful, good, and right.

¹¹ *John 17.*

When Christ incarnated He didn't come for "nothing". The Eucharist – whether celebrated secretly or in a huge cathedral – contains the timeless presence of the message. In the Liturgy, in the meeting with God indeed time loses its meaning in an intersection of past, present and future, in the way in which Christ is in the same time both the Lamb of God who has taken away the sins of the world and the King of Glory raised to the glory of the Father.

Exactly as the Christians at the time of the martyrs met their crucified but risen Lord in Communion, so Christians in our time, who are "in the world but not of the world", experience the Eucharist as the source of the power of their faith. Again and again this power is given to the hard workers along God's way. Thus the "new" is continuously new and fresh in this age "till He comes". And until then, the Christians walking in the newness of life¹² are "from Liturgy to Liturgy" a continuous longing for the Love feast of the Kingdom of God.¹³

So the Liturgy based upon the proclamation of the word of Jesus Christ and the faithful communion of the Eucharist and other symbolic actions, while intended for the inside worshippers, becomes an arena for sending the faithful on an apostolic journey.¹⁴

¹² *Romans 6, 4.*

¹³ Archbishop Paul of Finland, *Feast of the faith*, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988.

¹⁴ Ion Bria, "Dynamics of Liturgy in mission", in *The International review for mission*, no. 82, 1993, p. 317

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