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THE PURPOSE AND  
MOTIVE OF MISSION

*(From a theological point of view)*  
(1967)

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Orthodox theological thinking about mission has not been systematically developed. Consequently when anyone is invited to speak from the Orthodox point of view about the purpose and motive of mission (a subject with which Western thought has been concerned for many years), there is a two-fold danger: Either he will limit himself to a repetition of the ideas of others or that, after studying the Catholic and Protestant conceptions, he will attempt to construct an Orthodox one distinct from the other two, merely in order to complete the familiar trilogy. There is a third way, more serious, more modest, and consequently more Orthodox. That is to avoid this controversial tactic—to begin with the general presuppositions and principles of Orthodox theology; to meditate upon Orthodox soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology from the perspective of mission. Still, if it is to be done properly, this requires time and elaboration beyond the limits of this paper. This paper is offered merely as an introduction to the study of the subject.

#### A THE THEOLOGICAL STARTING POINT

It will be useful for a better understanding of the points to be developed if we first recollect that, on the whole, the theological thought of the Eastern Church moves in a broader theological and cosmological framework, in which the domi-

nant element is St. John's conception of the love (*ἀγάπη*) of the Trinitarian God, seen in the perspective of eschatology and in doxological contemplation of the mystery of God. A key to the Orthodox understanding of the process of history is, I think, the glory of the most holy God, viewed in the perspective of His infinite love: "the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the beginning and the end" (Rev 21:6), "the first and the last" (Rev 1:17), remains God. He is the One "who is and who was and is to come" (Rev 1:8). He who is worthy to receive glory and honour and power, who created all things, and "by thy will they existed and were created" (Rev 4:11).

The development of human history, of which the Bible speaks, begins and ends with the glory of God. When our Lord says, "and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence (*παρά σοί*, by, near thee) with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made" (John 17:5), He points us to His glory as a condition which existed before creation. As for the end of history, it is characteristic of the last book of the Bible that it says a great deal about the glory that God receives. In the description of the heavenly Liturgy, in which the redeemed by Christ participate "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9), the basic theme is the doxology of the most holy God (Rev 4:5).

Let us analyze the theological data further. Creation was one more expression of the pre-eternal glory of God. But man rejected the absolute glory of God and, in seeking to create his own glory and in worshipping himself, he separated himself from the living God and provoked a cosmic catastrophe—the appearance of a new condition, death, in which the glory of the living God is overshadowed. The sin of men is a continual hindrance to the pouring out and manifestation of the glory. Amid the discord, the confusion and the disruption that human sin creates, the praise of God languishes.

However, God does not cease to reveal His glory to man (Exod 3:2–6; Isa 6:1f) and finally, "when the time had fully come" (Gal 4:4), He sends His Son, through whom He had "cre-

ated" (πλάσσω) all things, in order to "recreate" (ἀναπλάσσω) "all things" (τά πάντα), so that "God is glorified in him" (John 13:32; cf. 17:1–10, where the work that the Son is given to accomplish is the glory of the Father on earth). His Incarnation is hailed with doxology, and is characterized by the angels as, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace" (Luke 2:14). By His whole life and by His miracles He "manifested his glory" (John 2:11, cf. 11:4). By His transfiguration "He showed his glory to his disciples and they were able to receive it," as a "prelude to the future visible appearance of God in glory" (προοίμιον τῆς ἐν δόξῃ μελλούσης ὀρατῆς Θεοῦ θεοφανείας)<sup>1</sup> and as a sign of the transfiguration of man and of the whole creation.<sup>2</sup>

But above all, it is His Cross and His Resurrection that are the revelation of the glory of God. In Orthodox worship, the Cross is presented mainly as the symbol of victory and glory, and always closely connected with the Resurrection.<sup>3</sup> The distinction between the agony of the Cross and the glory of the Resurrection which is so common in the West is unusual in the

1. Grégoire Palamas, "In Defense of those who Practice Sacred Quietude, 1, 3." J. Meyendorff, ed., *Défense des Saints Hésychastes*, Louvain, 1959, p.193.

2. For the significance of the Feast of the Transfiguration in Orthodox spirituality and theology, see Andreas Theodorou, *The Essence of Orthodoxy*, Athens, 1961, p. 148ff. In the Vespers of this feast we sing, "Being transfigured, Thou didst free again the nature of Adam which had been dimmed—having transformed it into the glory and splendour of Thy divinity." (Τὴν ἀμαυρωθεισαν τοῦ Ἀδάμ φύσιν μεταμορφωθείς ἀπαστράψαι πάλιν πεποίηκας, μεταστοιχειώσας αὐτήν εἰς τὴν σὴν τῆς θεότητος δόξαν τε καὶ λαμπρότητα.)

3. See the hymns sung at Matins on Sundays, where the praise of the Cross is interwoven with the praise of the Resurrection. See also the various expressions used to describe the Cross in Orthodox hymnology: "most illustrious" (ὑπερένδοξος), "life-bringing" (ζωηφόρος), "life-giving" (ζωοδώρητος), "Christ's divine glory," (Χριστοῦ θεία δόξα) "invincible trophy" (ἀήττητον τρόπαιον) and "the Cross, the thrice-blessed wood" (σταυρὸς ὁ τρισμακάριστος), "Thy Cross, O Lord, is life and Resurrection for Thy people" (ὁ Σταυρὸς σου, Κύριε, ζωὴ καὶ Ἀνάστασις ὑπάρχει τῷ λαῷ σου).

Orthodox Church; both are revelations and manifestations of the glory of God. In general, the Incarnation, the Passion, the Resurrection—the whole movement of the divine philanthropy in *kenosis*—are not only expressions of the divine love, but at the same time new manifestations of the glory of God. One could say that agape and glory are two aspects of the same thing: the life of God.

As He approaches His passion, the Lord says, “Father, glorify thy name. Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again’” (John 12:28). Similarly, during the Last Supper, the ultimate revelation of the meaning of His mission begins with these words: “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once” (John 13:31–32). The same night, He begins His high-priestly prayer: “Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee” (John 17:1). During the discourse at the Last Supper, two of the most central themes which recur with varying shades of meaning are *glory* and *love*—the two poles of redemption. In our Lord’s prayer on this night, the glory of God is related to the perfect unity of the faithful in God: “The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one” (John 17:22). And the “beholding” (*θεωρία*) of the glory of the Son is presented as the basic purpose of “being with Christ”: “Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

The manifestation of the glory of God and the revelation, in *kenosis*, of the infinite love of God are linked together in the mystery of redemption. They constitute one single movement whose originator is God—a movement which makes a decisive change in the process of human history, which has been diverted towards separation and egocentricism, disregarding and obscuring the glory of God. In Christ, through His Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension, not only was human

nature (*τὸ ἀνθρώπινον*) redeemed “from the bondage of decay,” the universal order restored, which had been disrupted since the time of Adam, returning the entire universe once again to “cosmos” and the paradise it was created to be, thus fulfilling the will of the heavenly Father. Man, the king of the universe, the mind of nature, the sum of creation, began to participate by grace in the glorious life of the Holy Trinity—“he entered into glory.”

With this event, history reaches its “goal” (*τέλος*). The “last day” (*ἔσχατα*), the great day for which God laid the foundations of the universe, has dawned; but this beginning of the eschatological era which leads to the final consummation does not mean the end of history. God’s mission does not end, but receives its definite meaning and direction. Furthermore, the movement of history is now oriented to a definite goal. The Holy Spirit comes to continue and to complete the divine plan—with the participation of Christ’s disciples, whom He authorized to proclaim redemption until the Second Coming when the glory of God will be fully revealed. So, in addition to a vertical movement from heaven to earth, the redemptive work of God now also has a dynamic horizontal direction on earth, though the participation of the Church.

## B

### THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF MISSION

Within the perspective that we have outlined, we can discern both the ultimate and the immediate purpose of our mission. Since Pentecost, when God’s mission was revealed in its Trinitarian dimension, all who by faith and the mysteries “have beheld his (Christ’s) glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14) are incorporated into Himself and, having received the seal of the Holy Spirit, participate in this mission. “As the Father has sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21; cf. 17:18). At this point, I should like to comment that it is not quite

correct to say that "the mission is not ours, but Christ's."<sup>4</sup> It is also ours, inasmuch as we are incorporated into Christ: "All things are yours," St. Paul would say again in this case, "and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:22–23).

Since the Christian mission is incorporated into God's mission, the final goal of our mission surely cannot be different from His. And this purpose, as the Bible, especially the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians clarify, is the "recapitulation (*ἀνακεφαλαίωσις*) of all things" (Eph 1:10) in Christ and our participation in the divine glory, the eternal, final glory of God.

After His Resurrection and Ascension, Christ becomes "the rallying point of the restored unity, the reintegrating center of human and cosmic life."<sup>5</sup> "It is by him in his body and no more in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim, that the meeting of humanity with the Father will be realized in spirit and truth."<sup>6</sup> We could say that the centripetal tendency of the Old Testament, by which the nations are called to come to Jerusalem, and of which Professor Johannes Blauw speaks in the *Missionary Nature of the Church*,<sup>7</sup> is replaced not so much by the centrifugal movement of the disciples towards the nations, as by a new centripetal movement, whose center is Christ.

Furthermore, men are not called simply to know Christ, to gather around Him, or to submit to His will; they are called to participate in His glory. In the Old Testament, the ultimate goal of the eschatological period is the vision of God's glory, "They shall come and shall see my glory" (Isa 66:18); "They shall see the glory of the Lord" (Isa 35:2). The New Testament reveals that the call of God is to something more: to be "glorified with him" (*συνδοξασθῆναι*, Rom 8:17, cf. 1 Pet 5:10, Rom 9:23, 1 Cor

4. Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, London, 1958, p. 28.

5. E. Roels, *God's Mission: The Epistle to the Ephesians in Mission Perspective*, Franeker, 1962, p. 67.

6. G. Khodre, "Church and Mission," *Porefthendes – Go Ye 3* (1961), p. 40.

7. J. Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, London, 1962, p. 40.

2:7). Our participation in this glory has already begun with our incorporation into Christ. "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them" (John 17:22, cf. 1:14)—that is, the glory of the Sonship—and "those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom 8:30; cf. 2 Cor 4:6).<sup>8</sup>

This glory will find its consummation in the Parousia. "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:4; cf. 1:27, Phil 3:21, Rom 8:17, Matt 13:43, 2 Tim 2:10). Meanwhile, in spite of trials and suffering, we enjoy the pledge, the guarantee, of the glory—"The spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Pet 4:14)—and we walk in the "light of His glory"; "Beholding the glory of the Lord, [we] are being changed (*μεταμορφούμεθα*, being transformed) into his likeness from glory to glory" ("*ἀπό δόξης εἰς δόξαν*," [RSV—"from one degree of glory to another,"] 2 Cor 3:18). This phrase, "from glory to glory" defines the process by which the faithful are sanctified during this present life, until the Second Coming.<sup>9</sup>

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8. St. Gregory Palamas, who speaks especially of the acquisition of God's glory by man, distinguishes clearly between the divine glory and the divine essence. In commenting on John 17:24 and 17:5, he writes: "So He gave to human nature the glory, but not the nature of deity. The nature of God is one thing; the glory of that nature, another—though they are inseparable from one another. And even though it is distinct from the divine nature it is not numbered among the things created in time; it is not so because of exceeding excellence, but it is united to the divine essence in an ineffable manner. And yet this glory, beyond and above all created beings, was not given only to Him who hypostatically was united with human nature, but also to his disciples, saying, 'The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one.' But He also wanted them to see it. This, then, is the glory by which we inwardly acquire and mainly see God." Palamas, *In Defense*, II, 3, 15, p. 419; cf. pp. 417, 645, 667, 705.

9. The prepositional usage of "from . . . to," which constantly recurs in the Pauline epistles (cf. "from faith to faith" *ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*) expresses the idea of *having* and, at the same time, *not yet having*, which is the basic characteristic of New Testament piety. *Theologisches*

Moreover, it must be remembered that it is not only "human nature," but also the whole universe which participates in the restoration and finds its orientation again in glorifying God. The object of the phrases: "recapitulate" (*ἀνακεφαλαίωσασθαι*) (Eph 1:10), "who fills" (*πληρουμένου*) (Eph 1:23), and "reconcile" (*ἀποκαταλλάξαι*) (Col 1:20) is "all things" (*τά πάντα*). This is expressed emphatically in Orthodox hymnology: "The Cross sanctifies all things."<sup>10</sup> "All things have been illumined by Your Resurrection, O Lord, and Paradise is again opened, while all creation praises You and offers a daily hymn."<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere we have this joyful expression: "Now all things are filled with light, heaven and earth and regions below the earth; for all creation is celebrating the Resurrection of Christ, upon which it has been established."<sup>12</sup> "The condition of the world depends upon the condition of humanity, upon the relationship of man to God and to his brothers in Christ, who is the perfect Man; in the mystical life of the Church, through which Christ never ceases to be with us until the end of the world, the universe recovers its nature, becoming a new miracle and praise,"<sup>13</sup> as Olivier Clement has noted.

Again, however, we must remember this distinction: while the reconciliation of all things has already taken place "by the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20), yet creation waits with eager longing to be free "from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). "Though this summing up and this reconciliation have taken place, the manifestation of this fact involves a historical process and awaits an ultimate eschatological fulfillment."<sup>14</sup> There is an eschatological

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*Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Stuttgart, 1950, vol. II, p. 255.

10. *Menaion*, Matins of September 14, Universal Elevation of the Holy Cross.

11. *Parakletike*, Vespers of Saturday, Mode Three.

12. *Pentekostarion*, Canon of the Resurrection, Ode 3.

13. O. Clément, *L'Église Orthodoxe*, Paris, 1961, p. 44.

14. E. Roels, *God's Mission*, p. 247.

aspect in every facet of the divine plan, and we find this eschatological dimension in the passages that speak of redemption.

The ultimate movement of history, however, goes beyond our incorporation into Christ and the “recapitulation” of all things in him. “When all things are subject to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, *that God may be all in all*” (1 Cor 15:28). The subjection of all things in Christ is not the “end” (τέλος); it is connected with and oriented towards the ultimate and eternal glory of God. “And every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11). Finally, the last book of the Bible speaks clearly of “the holy city, Jerusalem,” which has the glory of God (Rev 21:10), into which the glory of kings and “the glory and honour of the nations” are brought (Rev 21:24–26), and which is illuminated, not by the sun, but by “the glory of God.” The absolute glory of God fills eternity and remains the ultimate goal of the universe; and into “his eternal glory in Christ” (1 Pet 5:10), God calls men by mission.

## C

### THE IMMEDIATE GOALS OF MISSION

The immediate goals of mission must surely follow the same line and direction as the ultimate goal; they must be the starting-point and preparation for that goal. In the march of the Christian mission, our eyes must constantly be fixed on the objective, on the “end” (τέλος), if mission is not to lose its ultimate direction. It is important to note that Orthodox spirituality is persistently oriented towards eschatological fulfillment, and has continually in view the “wholeness” (καθόλου) of the mystery of redemption. Its worship is preeminently doxological: “Heaven and earth are full of thy glory” (Holy Liturgy). This is its emblem.<sup>15</sup> The foretaste of the end, the transcending of time,

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15. Every group of hymns ends and is linked together with, “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; both now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen.” This is the most frequently recur-

the life in eternity, which is taking place through the mysteries in the Church, give the Orthodox theologian a new understanding. He does not see the "recapitulation" as something that will take place at a given moment in the future; he knows, he feels that it is already taking place. Mission is the participation of the faithful in the process of this "recapitulation." The period after the Ascension and Pentecost is not merely a time, but is "the time of the Lord"—not so much "time in years" (*χρόνος*) as "the season of the Lord" (*καιρός Κυρίου*) in which the divine plan is fulfilled.

1. *Preaching the Gospel is a basic condition for this fulfillment, and is consequently the immediate objective and goal of mission.* The incorporation and participation of men in God's promises begins with the Gospel: "The nations (*τά ἔθνη*, nations, not *gentiles*, R.V.) are fellow heirs, members of the same body (*σύσσωμοι*), and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph 3:6), of which every missionary becomes a "*διάκονος* (servant, rather than minister) according to the gift of God's grace" (Eph 3:7); ". . . the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27); must be made known to "the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). We should note particularly that the "service" (*διακονία*) of "the gospel of glory" constitutes, and already is participation in the glory of God, as it is analyzed in the third chapter of Second Corinthians, where it is compared with the service of Moses (2 Cor 3:5–11). [. . .]

So mission is not a question of proclaiming some ethical truths or principles, but the beginning of the transfiguration inaugurated by the "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2

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ring phrase in all Orthodox worship. The Holy Liturgy is a continuous series of exclamations of praise to the Holy Trinity, and prayers are nearly always concluded with phrases such as, "For to Thee belong all glory, honour and worship . . .", "For Yours is the dominion, and the kingdom and the power and the glory . . .", "For blessed and glorified is Your all-honorable and majestic name . . .", ". . . and to You be given the glory"—these and others are repeated as conclusions to the prayers of virtually all the services of worship.

Cor 4:4; cf. 4:6), through which we are called “so that [we] may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 2:14). This transfiguration is taking place “from glory to glory,” so that it may end in “conformation” (*συμμόρφωσις*) to the image of the Son in His eternal glory (Rom 8:29). Accordingly, “the goal of preaching is,” not only the gathering of the community to await the expected Lord in glory,<sup>16</sup> it is more of “a doxological movement,” *an invitation to participation in the life of the glorified Lord, a mystical sharing in His glory, and a communion in the glory that is to be revealed at the Second Coming* (cf. Rom 8:18; 1 Pet 5:1).

This transformation, however, is not accomplished merely as a result of hearing the Gospel. In the first chapter of Ephesians, we read: “In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph 1:13). The successive stages are “to hear,” “to believe” and “to be sealed with the Spirit.” Without this seal, salvation does not become personal. This is the “guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:14). By His work of redemption, Christ redeemed human nature (*τὸ ἀνθρώπινον*); but personal participation in this salvation, the sanctification of human persons, is effected by the Holy Spirit in Christ, by “communion” with Christ, and the seal of the Spirit. It is therefore vital that after the preaching of the word of God, that those who accept the Gospel should become “a community of faith,” “the Church.” The basis is the creation of a new being through the presence of the Holy Spirit;<sup>17</sup> and this, in Orthodox thinking, is realized through the sacraments. It is “the sacraments” which “constitute the Church. They alone enable the Christian community to transcend human dimensions and make it into the Church.”<sup>18</sup>

16. W. Freytag, “Von Sinn der Weltmission,” *Reden und Aufsätze*, eds. J. Hermelink and H. J. Margul, München, 1961, vol. II, p. 217.

17. Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body*, p. 20.

18. G. Florovsky, “L’Église, sa nature et sa tâche,” *L’Église universelle dans le dessein de Dieu*, Neuchâtel, Paris, 1949, p. 65.

The Lord stressed that, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Saint Paul, before assuring the Corinthians that ". . . you are the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27), had emphatically stated, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Rom 6:3, Eph 4:5; "You were buried with him (*συνταφέντες*) in baptism . . ." Col 2:12). Further, the Lord clearly stressed that only those who eat His flesh and drink His blood will have "life" in them, "eternal life"; they will abide in him, and He in them (John 6:53–58). The sacrament of the Holy Eucharist remains the center, the rallying point of unity in Christ, "until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). This creates the visible unity of the Church: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body" (1 Cor 10:17). By her whole life, the Church "makes real—in a hidden way, but real—the glorious Body of Christ." As Olivier Clément says, "The Body of Christ, the Church, upon which the fullness of the Holy Spirit never ceases to rest, thus appears (through a legitimate extension of the dogma of Chalcedon) as a divine-human, (*theandric*) reality. It is not so much, in the proper sense, a continuous Incarnation; as it is the place where a perpetual "movement" of Ascension and Pentecost unites heaven and earth through the "veil" of the sacraments, the place where the Holy Spirit manifests the presence and the flesh of the glorified Savior."<sup>19</sup>

2. *The establishment of the "local Church"* which, through the mysteries and through her whole life, will participate in the praise and the life of the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" whose head is Christ (Eph 1:22, 4:15, 5:23, Col 1:18), is surely the basic goal of mission, according to Orthodox tradition and theology. In each country, the Church is called to glorify God with her own voice. That means that in missionary work there must be a sincere respect for the identity of every nation; an investigation into the past of each particular people, of how God "allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways;

19. O. Clément, *L'Église Orthodoxe*, p. 65.

yet he did not leave himself without witness" (Acts 14:16–17). This means, we must endeavor not only to "adapt," but to "incarnate" the logos of God into the language and customs of the country; and the sanctification of the people's characteristics, so that they may become truly themselves, develop their own voice and add their own contribution to the common doxological hymn—always in harmony with the praise of the whole Church. Orthodox missionaries are always opposed to any monolithic, administrative concept of the Church, and for them the unifying factor in the ever-expanding Church has been the common doxology, multilingual in form, but one in the Spirit of the living God.<sup>20</sup> In the unity of the Church there is diversity in the Holy Spirit. This is the ecclesiological meaning of Pentecost. "They were all together in one place . . . there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them" (Acts 2:1–3).<sup>21</sup> [ . . . ]

It is within the Church that the incorporation of men "into Christ" is realized, that the glory of God is (*ἀποκαλύπτεται*) re-

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20. See Anastasios Yannoulatos, «Βυζάντιον, Ἔργον Εὐαγγελισμοῦ», στή *Θρησκευτική καί Ἠθική Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, Ἀθήναι, 1964, Vol. 4, pp. 19–59. (Byzantium, Work of Evangelization) Idem, "The Missionary Activity of the Orthodox Church," in *Syndesmos VI Assembly, Finland, 1964*, Athens, 1964, pp. 36–52. F. Dvornik, *Les slaves, Byzance et Rome, au IXe siècle*, Paris, 1929. J. Glazik, *Die russisch-orthodoxe Heidenmission seit Peter dem Grossen*, Münster, 1954. N. Struve, "Orthodox Mission, Past and Present," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 1(1963).

21. We shall not discuss here in detail the relation of Church and mission—whether mission is only an instrument of the Church or a goal, and *vice versa*. We would merely recall that the designations of the Church in the Letter to the Ephesians, "body," "bride," "dwelling," "holy temple" always refer to the Church as the objective or goal, and never as an instrument of mission (see E. Roels, *God's Mission*, p. 152). The Church is the recipient of all the blessings of Christ. The Church, "which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23), fulfills and completes Christ. "He is the head, we are the body," writes St. John Chrysostom. "Is it possible for any interval to exist between the body and the head?" (*Homily 8 on First Corinthians, Greek Fathers*, 61, p. 72). The smallest interval would mean death.

vealed to us, and that the right doxology resounds. "A worshipping liturgical community is not only the image of the realized communion between God and man and of union of the human race in one Body in front of God, without any exception or distinction of individuals; it is not only the bulwark where the principalities of this world are weak and find no place. It is, basically, the missionary outcry of the Church triumphant to the whole world and the doxological announcement of the Kingdom, which is present and which is to come."<sup>22</sup> "To him the glory (*ἡ δόξα*, meaning *the* glory, not *be* glory) in the Church and in Jesus Christ to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph 3:21).

3. Incorporation into Christ must not, of course, be understood as an inner, mystical flight from the world, which finds its expression in the setting up of closed congregations, but as the starting-point for an active participation in the work of God, which is directed towards the recapitulation of all things in Christ, to the "glory of the Father." *The doxology of the redeemed must also echo beyond the limits of their own community and fill the universe.* Our Lord described His disciples as "light," "salt," and "leaven"; and we need to remember that light, salt and leaven all have a role and a meaning which is mainly concerned with the wider whole, which they serve. If

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22. N. Nissiotis, "The Ecclesiological Foundation of Mission," in *Porefthendes—Go Ye 5* (1963), p. 7. It is worth noting that the Russian Orthodox mission to the interior of northern Asia began as a worshipping, doxological march by Russian monks. They retreated into the forests for religious exercises and in search of a mystical vision and doxology of the holy God. They settled among the various wild tribes and enlightened the surrounding heathen. Later, from St. Stephen of Perm (1340–1396) to the great missionary to Japan, Nikolai Kasatkin (1836–1912), the doxology of God by the community of the faithful was the lung of the Orthodox mission which gave special power to its voice. See E. Smirnoff, *A Short Account of the Historical Development and Present Position of the Russian Orthodox Mission*, London, 1903, and footnote 20 of this present study.

leaven is left on its own, it will spoil and turn sour. Our inner union with Christ compels us to be as actively present in the history and development of society as our Lord, who is working in history and is also the Lord of history. We must have a positive attitude, not characterized by a superficial enthusiasm to impose the Kingdom of God by social and political means, or by anxiety and pessimism at the prevalence of sin and faithlessness. Redemption has already been achieved "in Christ"; the powers of darkness are decisively surrounded and the enemy, without doubt, has been totally defeated, but in desperation he still casts his last arrows; there are still the wounded, the dead, and the gloom of battle.<sup>23</sup>

We are still in the transitional period of "not yet." "It does not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2). We live in anticipation of the time "when his glory is revealed," knowing that they who "share Christ's sufferings . . . may also rejoice and be glad" (1 Pet 4:13), obtaining "the unfading crown of glory" (5:4). This anticipation, however, has nothing to do with the social passivity which characterizes the pietistic tendencies of some, who face the world with timidity and escape into the vision of the last days. It is a dynamic anticipation, marked by positive action and a positive attitude, derived from the certainty that, in the divine condescension, this eschatological fulfillment requires our participation. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14). Our anticipation is also full of courage and peace, in the face of every present problem: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4). We know that, although we still live in the period of "not yet," "we are God's children now" (1 John 3:2). In the world, therefore, we move with the grace and freedom of the sons of God, just as the sons of noblemen behave and move on their fathers' property. "Whether . . . the world or life or death or *the present or the*

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23. See W. Freytag, *Von Sinn der Weltmission*, p. 213.

*future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's"* (1 Cor 3:22–23).

Mission is to cooperate "in the Holy Spirit" for the sanctification of all things, for their recapitulation in Christ and for "access" to the Father (Eph 2:18). We become "God's co-workers" in a broader sense, participating in the development of the unity, peace and love towards which God's plan is directed: "As children of God through grace," incorporated into Christ "for whom and by whom all things exist" (Heb 2:10), and united with him who not only "recreated," but "created" "all things." Christians study and share in the works of their Father and their first-born brother, "in the Holy Spirit." These are not only works of salvation, but also of creation. With joyful praise, they develop the abilities they have received from Him (mind, imagination, a sense of beauty), in the certainty that: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom 11:36).

In this perspective, we can include as an indirect goal of the Christian mission, everything that may help a people (and man in general) to develop all the possibilities received from God and to become truly themselves; including for example: education, works of civilization and social progress. These aims, of course, are second in importance and urgency to the preceding ones; nevertheless they have their own value and distinctive tones to add to the doxological symphony that the universe is called to offer to God.<sup>24</sup>

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24. The intimate relationship between man and nature is very perceptible in Orthodox worship, and may be seen from its use of many natural elements and from the number of prayers made for various material objects; for instance, "the fields," "the vineyards," "the sanctification of the water," "the sick animals," "the silkworms," "the blessing of the flock," and so forth. The sense of creation and recreation of God permeates these prayers. Their starting-point as a rule is the fact that God is "the builder and creator of all things" (Prayer at the laying of foundations); "the One who created heaven and earth, and all things in them, who ornamented both with ineffable beauty for the glory (doxology) of His glorified name" (Prayer for the silk-

The first Christians brought the fruit of their labor to God (which were the products harvested from nature) not only for sanctification, but also as an offering of sacrifice and praise to God. Today we are also called to offer our fruits—from nature, of our mind and labor—as an offering of praise to Him who is the *Alpha* and *Omega*, by whose will all things “existed and were created” (Rev 4:11).

It should be underlined finally that, in the Orthodox understanding, the value of a work depends upon the extent to which it is done for the “glory of God.” This is the criterion: it is the intention that matters. “Though a work be very humble,” wrote St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, “though it be very small” (and we would add, though it be entirely indifferent to mission), “yet if it is done for the purpose of pleasing God and for His glory, it is worth infinitely more than many lofty works, glorious—and magnificent—which are done without this intention.”

Finally, Christians, upon whom “the spirit of glory and of God rests” (1 Pet 4:14) and who are “partakers in the glory that is to be revealed” (5:1), are called to proclaim redemption in Christ, glorifying him in every act and work (Matt 5:16, 1 Cor 6:20, 1 Pet 4:11). Moreover, beholding the face of the risen Lord and His glorious Presence, and being transfigured “from glory

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worm). All these prayers conclude with the assertion that He is the One who “governs,” “preserves,” “blesses and sanctifies all things” (*τά σύμπαντα*), to whom by all means “we offer glory.” Often the request for the sanctification of nature is interwoven with a reference to spiritual truths. For instance, in the prayer for the harvest of the vineyards, we say: “Thou should be called the Vine . . . grant that He who invited us may be a participant of the true Vine.”

Everything is a “*sign*” related to the entire perspective of the mystery of redemption. The atmosphere of all our worship is filled with the certainty that the doxology of the redeemed is nothing other than our participation in the doxology of the universe. “Accept, O Lord, our doxology, which we offer according to our power, with all Thy creatures,” we repeat every morning “for before Thee every knee bows, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every breath and creature praises Thine incomprehensible glory” (11th prayer of Matins).

to glory" (2 Cor 3:18), they are called to live, to be themselves—*ontologically*—"for the praise of his (God's) glory" (Eph 1:12).

## D

### THE MOTIVE OF MISSION

The question of the motive of mission can be studied from several angles: Love for God and men, obedience to the Great Command of the Lord (Matt 28:19), desire for the salvation of souls, longing for God's glory. All these, surely, are serious motives; and the last especially is in perfect harmony with those that have been developed already. However, we think that the real motive of mission, for both the individual and the Church, is something deeper. It is not simply obedience, duty or altruism. It is an *inner necessity*. "For necessity is laid upon me" said St. Paul. "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). All other motives are aspects of this need, derivative motivations. Mission is an inner necessity (a) for the faithful and (b) for the Church. If they refuse it, they not only omit a duty, they deny themselves.

1. The Christian who is "incorporated" into Christ and who really lives in Him cannot think, feel, will, act or see the world in a different way from Christ. It is impossible for him to limit his horizon to his parish, his town, his nation, the so-called "Christian" world; it is impossible for him to be indifferent to the millions who still live as "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). He knows that God "made of one (blood) every nation of men" (Acts 17:26) and "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). He knows also that: "The times of ignorance God overlooked, now (*τᾶν ὄντων*, now, without *but*, R.V.) he commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

It is the sense of the importance of this "now" that urges on the missionary. It is this "all men everywhere" that compels

him to see his duty in its worldwide dimension. This way of thinking has nothing to do with the cosmopolitan mind, which leads men to seek adventures outside their fatherland and their own culture, nor with a romantic disposition, which leads them to ignore the needs of the fatherland, the crisis of the "Christian nations." Living "in him" who is the  $\Omega\nu$ , the absolute reality, the missionary always remains realistic. He knows that everywhere there is a mission field. Nevertheless, he can see that in some countries the needs are more urgent and "the workers"—not even—"few" and that there are territories in which the Gospel has never—not even once—been preached. "But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14-15). These four "how's" inflame his mind and heart.

The missionary believes that for every human being there is no treasure more precious than the truth that was revealed by the word of God. Therefore, he feels that the people who suffer injustice most in our time are those who have been deprived of the Word, not because they themselves refuse to listen, but for the simple reason that those who have known it for centuries have not been interested in passing it on. He further feels that his "honour," "justice," "faith" and "love" cannot be genuine, if he does not try to do something practical—the best he can—in this direction. Like St. Paul, he feels that he is "under obligation" (*ὀφειλέτης*, debtor) "both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish" (Rom 1:14). He cannot look upon the Cross by which the Lord "raised with Himself Adam and all of fallen nature,"<sup>25</sup> the Cross upon which He "stretched out his hands and embraced nations and peoples,"<sup>26</sup> as the Orthodox hymns constantly affirm, and at the same time simply confine

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25. *Menaion*, Vespers, Universal Elevation of the Holy Cross, September 14.

26. *Parakletike*, Ode 1, Matins of Friday, Tone Two.

himself to praising the Crucified One and asking for His mercy, without sharing the universal purpose of this sacrifice and its cosmic meaning (see Col 1:20).<sup>27</sup>

When he contemplates the mystery of Christ revealed to and through "his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph 3:5); so that the nations are "members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ" (*εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη σύσσωμα καὶ συμμετόχα*) (Eph 3:6); when he sees the glory of God, though it be "in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor 13:12), he feels the need to cry everywhere, "Behold! Come!" These feelings, as well as the universal and cosmic meaning of the Passion and the Resurrection, are beautifully expressed in the following hymn, which is sung during Sunday Matins:

O come, all nations; Learn the power of the awful mystery  
That Christ our Saviour, the Word in the beginning,  
Was crucified for us and willingly buried; Resurrected  
from the dead, To save the whole universe O let us wor-  
ship Him!<sup>28</sup>

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27. The image of man and the universe being embraced on the Cross is very often repeated in Orthodox hymnology. For example, "Thy palms outstretched, O Merciful, Thou gatherest the nations that were far from Thee, in order to glorify Thy great goodness" (*Menaion, Kathisma* hymn of Matins, September 14th. Cf. *Parakletike*, Ode 1, Matins of Friday, Tone Eight and the *Aposticha* hymns for Lauds, Matins of Friday, Tone Seven). "Upon the Cross Thou didst extend Thine immaculate hands, gathering all the nations proclaiming: O Lord, glory to Thee!" (*Parakletike, Kathisma* Matins of Friday, Tone Two) and "Thy Cross today is lifted up and the world is sanctified; for Thou, who are sealed with the Father and the Holy Spirit, didst stretch out on it Thy hands; Thou didst attract the whole world to Thy full knowledge, O Christ" (Matins, September 14 Feast of the Holy Cross).

28. *Parakletike*, Lauds of Sunday Matins, Tone Three. Cf. Also the Sticheron hymn of Sunday Matins, Tone Two: "Nations and peoples must come to praise Christ our God, Who willingly endured the Cross for us, and the three days in Hades; and they must worship His Resurrection from the dead, through which all the ends of the earth have been enlightened."

Every member of the faithful, who consciously lives the spiritual life and thinks conscientiously, feels that the praise and doxology which he offers to God is deficient as long as there are still so many races and tongues that do not participate. He knows that these missing voices of the world must also be added; so that they may harmonize with the existing voices, and the whole doxology may acquire its melodic beauty and depth. For this reason, the missionary cannot keep quiet while there are still so many languages that are silent in the praise of God, and while the Lord does not receive the glory due to Him from and by the whole creation.

Lastly, when the missionary contemplates the final end, the goal of history, the "recapitulation of all things in Christ," "to the glory of God the Father," he feels a spontaneous, *inner necessity* to tune the plan of his life to God's plan, to orient himself to it, praising the Lord and being a living doxology to Him. With eyes fixed upon the eschaton, Orthodoxy maintains its vigor and this has provided a particular power to mission.

For all these reasons, we believe the participation in mission of those who think and live theologically is not simply a matter of "duty," of "practicality," a matter of "ethic"; it is more interior, more profound, an existential command. Incorporated into Christ and living in the Spirit, the missionary can think and live in no other way.

2. If this inner necessity is true for the believer, it is far more valid for the Church, which is not only "incorporated into," but actually "is" the Body of Christ, "the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23). A Church without mission is a contradiction in terms. The Church has been "anointed," "has been sent," as Christ was (Luke 4:18; cf. John 17:18), to continue His work: That is, "to proclaim release to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). Moreover, the Church has been sent to fulfill this work. We can see this meaning of fulfillment in the word *πλήρωμα* (Eph 1:23). She

is also catholic<sup>29</sup> (from the adjective *καθολικός*, which refers to wholeness, in opposition to everything sectional or partial), and this definition, too, with its theological, topical and metaphysical meaning, does not cease to stress the missionary dimension of the Church. [. . .]

Consequently, if the Church is indifferent to the apostolic work with which she has been "entrusted," the salvation of the world, she denies herself, contradicts herself and her essence, and is a traitor in the warfare in which she is engaged. A "static Church" which lacks a vision and a constant endeavor to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world could hardly be recognized as the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" to whom the Lord entrusted the continuation of His work. She could not easily assert that she glorifies God and constitutes a "sign" of His glorious coming. The final cry of the Bible, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20), which resounds through Christian worship, cannot be separated from the eschatological vision; and that vision cannot be separated from the prophetic certainty that the Gospel "must first be preached to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14).

There is one more point that may be noted from our liturgical life. The prayers, with which the faithful at every Divine Liturgy are called to pray "for the catechumen," "that the Lord may be merciful to them, teach them the word of truth, reveal to them the Gospel of righteousness, and unite them to His holy, catholic and apostolic Church,"<sup>30</sup> is not merely a relic of the life of the early Church, but indeed a constant reminder of the real structure of the Christian community in worship. Every local Church, in order to be organically connected with the one apostolic Church and faithful to her "catholic" tradition, worshipping in the Orthodox manner, is obligated to seek constantly the extension of the doxology of God. She is obligated

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29. John Karmiris, *The Orthodox Doctrinal Teaching on the Church*, Athens, 1964, p. 25ff.

30. "Prayer for the Catechumens," *Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*. Cf. *Liturgy of St. Basil the Great and Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts*.

to have an uninterrupted flow of catechumens and to be praying: "That they too, together with us (the faithful), may glorify the most-honorable and majestic name"<sup>31</sup> of God. The strong desire to extend the doxology of God, the dynamic tendency of worship, is a basic element of Orthodoxy. The presence of these prayers in the Holy Liturgy is a continual remainder of the missionary dimension of every worshipping community, and calls for the revision of every static concept of Orthodox worship.

Finally, the following points should be stressed, especially for the Orthodox Church whose life and worship is centered in the Resurrection. The broadening of the horizon of the worldwide mission is directly related to the Lord's triumph through His Resurrection. The fact that He has received "All authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18) has to be proclaimed "to all nations" (28:19). It is, therefore, a complete contradiction then, on the one hand to sing and live the Resurrection so intensely, and on the other, to live in the days before the Resurrection; that is to confine our activity and interest to Israel—even to the new Israel of grace—without thinking of our imperative duty to proclaim the triumph of Christ "to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15).

The more one considers the mystery of the Church, her life, her worship and her tradition, the more one is persuaded that *mission—that is, the transmission of the word and the grace of God, and the manifestation of God's glory which "in Christ," is revealed and anticipated, "to the end of the earth" and to the end of time—is for her a profound inner necessity.*

When, in this perspective, we make a theological study of the purpose and motive of mission, it becomes clear that the Church's call to mission must be preached not only, or not so much, in terms of external reasons (such as the existence of still uncivilized tribes, the spread of hunger, the expansion of illiteracy), but precisely as a *call to repentance*, a call to rediscover

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31. See footnote 30 above.

the true meaning of the Church; for living out the mystery of our incorporation into Christ; for a true orientation in the face of both the immediate and the ultimate future, and for the right (*ὁρθόδοξη*) doxology of God.

14

REDISCOVERING OUR APOSTOLIC IDENTITY  
IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

(2003)

- A paper given at the Symposium on Missions, St. Vladimir's Seminary, February, 2003.
- "Rediscovering Our Apostolic Identity in the 21st Century," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 48:1 (2004), pp. 3–20.
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No one questions it in theory. On the contrary, we confess it solemnly and repeat it nearly every time we gather to worship. We profess our belief in the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church” and proclaim our membership in it. In practice, however, it would seem that many Orthodox believers, and even many local Churches, commonly embrace a rather limited definition of apostolicity. As a rule, most of the handbooks on dogmatic theology, with which generations of clergy of the Orthodox Church are educated, emphasize primarily three main points: (a) The Church is apostolic in that it was instituted by Christ and its foundations laid by the Apostles. (b) The Church preserves intact and unchanged the teaching of the Apostles, the apostolic faith and tradition. (c) The Church is erected firmly upon the unbroken succession of Bishops from the Apostles.

These are incontrovertible truths which have already been vividly described, and yet, there is another fundamental dimension, essential shading, to this colorful portrait of apostolicity that I would like us to focus on. Our guide to a deeper understanding of this theme will be the New Testament.

## A

### THE WORDS “ΑΠΟΣΤΕΛΛΩ,” “ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΗ,” AND “ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The idea of a divine mission appears in other religions (for example, Zoroaster, Mohammed, Nanak, and in the Greek

world: Epictetus and Hermetism). In biblical revelation, however, this idea is directly related to the salvation of the whole world and is expressed in language that draws especially from the basic verb *ἀποστέλλω* (I send out), and its related forms.

Christ's awareness that He *has been sent* by the Father is vividly portrayed in the Gospels. He is the one "whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world" (John 10:36; cf. 5:36 "The Father has sent me" 5:38; 6:29; 6:57; "I have not come of my own accord; he who sent me is true . . . and he sent me" John 7:28-29; cf. John 8:42).

In the Gospel of John, in particular, we encounter this truth forty times, like an impressive refrain. The absolute unity of the Father and Son is such that the attitude one takes towards Jesus is directly referred to the Father (John 5:23, 12:44 ff.).

This witness constitutes the basic point of the preaching of the Apostles: "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). "In this the love was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him . . . he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" 1 John 4:9-10; Gal 4:4). "Therefore, holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession" (Heb 3:1).

From the beginning, others were also called to participate in the work of announcing the salvation that was completed in Christ. At the time of Jesus, there were various understandings about perfection in man, as well as different groups of pious seekers. The well-known Essene community comes to mind, as does the circle of disciples that gathered around John the Baptist. Such groups usually were localized geographically. The characteristic of the new group that gathered around Jesus was the fact that from the first year of their discipleship, He sent them on a mission: "And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14-15). Christ Himself gave His disciples the name of apostles (*ἀπόστολος*). "He called his disciples, and chose

from them twelve, whom he named apostles" (Luke 6:13). Jesus did not found a static community that withdrew from the world. Nor did He attach Himself to one particular place. He traveled from town to town, village to village, and was constantly on the move. He sent out His disciples, still imperfect beings with weaknesses and shortcomings, who were at once His "disciples" and His "apostles." The community which He had gathered around Himself had mission (*ἀποστολή*) as its inner dynamic. Their work had a centrifugal energy, moving outward from the Lord, the Teacher, to the others; and at the same time, a centripetal attraction back to the one person, the Person of Christ.

As His earthly deeds drew to a close, Christ associated His own mission with that of His apostles. The theme is pronounced in His high priestly prayer: "As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). When Christ completed His salvific work, through His Crucifixion and Resurrection, the mission of His disciples was made explicitly clear. The risen Lord appeared to them while they were still terrified and shaken by the tragic events, and entrusted to them the continuation of His work. "As the Father has sent me, even so I sent you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:21–22). He clearly indicated to them that their mission would be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. At Christ's Ascension, He again reassured them, ". . . you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8).

2. The opinion has been formulated that the apostolic identity was limited exclusively to the Twelve who were eye- and ear-witnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Naturally, the Twelve hold a unique position in the life of the Church. They are the bedrock of the New Israel and will be its judges at the end of time (Matt 19:28). The election of a twelfth disciple, in the place of Judas, was made in order to maintain

the symbolic type of the New Israel that had come into being (Acts 1:15–26). At the same time, however, the election of Matthias demonstrated the recognition that others too possessed the attributes of eye- and ear-witnesses to the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. The Twelve will always be the foundation of the Church. “And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev 21:14). Nevertheless, the apostolic obligation is not limited to the activities of the Twelve; they in turn passed on to others the exercise of their apostolic work.

Already in the Gospel of Luke we find the tradition according to which Jesus “appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two” (Luke 10:1). The purpose expressed here, to send them out into the world, was the same as that assigned to the Twelve; both have the same formal character: “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16; cf. Matt 10:40). Consequently, the work of those who are sent out, the apostolic work, is not limited to the apostleship given to the Twelve.

Besides the Twelve and the Seventy, the risen Lord also sent out Paul, with a special calling from heaven. Paul’s vocation widened the apostolic circle and the nature of apostolic work. Paul insists again and again that he is “a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God (Rom 1:1; cf. Eph 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1; “I am an apostle to the Gentiles” Rom 11:13). The manner in which Paul himself understood his apostleship reveals that it is possible for the Lord to entrust a particular mission to new persons. In the New Testament, the name apostle is given to other less prominent personalities: Barnabas, Sosthenes, Epaphroditus, Timotheus, Titus. The Churches of Antioch and Rome already existed when the leaders of the Church arrived there.<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, apostolic ac-

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1. See Xavier Léon-Dufour et al., eds. *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, Paris 1974, 3rd ed., s.v. “apôtres.”

tivity is the work of every disciple who is “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matt 5:13–14).

Of course, apostolic tradition is based on the witness of the original Apostles, *par excellence*. But the apostolic work was not completed with the generation of the first Twelve, *it is continued in time*. The Lord’s final commandment to the Eleven (Judas had by then definitively cut himself off from their circle) did not concern only those particular disciples. In the same way, Christ’s teaching and the other commandments given in a broader or narrower circle of disciples, did not exclusively concern those particular audiences, but were of relevance to the entire Church.

Let us consider how absurd it would be to interpret in such an exclusive fashion the Lord’s words at the Last Supper, when He said to His disciples “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). Would it be possible to support the proposition that this commandment was of concern only to His circle of Twelve? If that were the case, there would be no Church. Instead, this commandment concerns the entire lifespan of the Church. Likewise, the final commandment given to the Eleven is determinative not only for those eleven, but for all who believe in the Gospel message, for the entire Body of the Church that would come into being from the seeds of the first Apostles’ words and deeds. Apostleship is a basic element—permit me the term—in the genetic code of the Church.

3. The Lord’s last commandment, as it is preserved in the Gospel of Matthew, defines the Church’s scope and character. From the stirring words with which the risen Christ directs His apostles emerge all the propositions that constitute the seamless, organic whole (Matt 28:18–20). [ . . . ]

Many people prefer to focus their attention on the last sentence, “And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age,” (Matt 28:20) which reinforces intellectually and emotionally, the certainty of Christ’s presence in our everyday life.

No doubts have been expressed as to whether the first, as well as the last verses refer to the fullness of the Church, that is to say, to all believers, without exception. Still it is peculiar and inconsistent to consider that the middle link, the verse "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations," refers exclusively to the Twelve. If we take away the conjunctions *therefore* (*οὖν*), and *lo* (*ιδού*), the logical connections are lost. The revelation that, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given" to Christ implies a specific obligation on the part of the Apostles and their successors. This obligation is the consequence of the great truth described in the first verse. Upon the fulfillment of their apostolic duty, they will have the guarantee of Christ's presence. Without the "and" (*kai*), connecting the last phrase to the preceding ones, the promise of Christ's constant presence is cut off and remains in suspension.

The obligation belongs to the *whole Body* of the Church. The Church, as the Eucharistic community of the Resurrection, shoulders the responsibility to proclaim the mystery of the Triune God, the divine Economy (*Oikonomia*) in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

A basic characteristic of apostolicity is that the disciples must "go." Their lives will unfold on an open horizon, with challenges, dangers, successes and failures; forever in motion. They must not be limited or obstructed by any boundaries whatsoever. Their duty is to go out and teach "all nations," without exception. From the very start, the universal character of the Church's mission is clearly defined.

The advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost dynamically constitutes the new community of disciples and empowers her for her mission "to all nations." The commandment is firmly bound up with the promise of the Holy Spirit's advent that was given by Christ. The Holy Spirit comes for the inauguration of a global mission. The gift of tongues was not given, of course, to demonstrate linguistic prowess, but as a tool for their mission and work among foreign peoples with different means of communication.

Christ completed His salvific work, but the transmission of His message to the whole world was not to be done by Him. He entrusted the responsibility to His Apostles (the Church He founded). The Apostles in turn entrusted the continuation of their work to their successors; this spiritual relay race is continued by the Church as a whole "until He comes." This characteristic of apostleship is indelibly wrought in the very nature of the Church and should be lived in every age. Apostolicity is an innate element of the Church. Mission is part of the Church's genetic material, a fixed element in its DNA. It is a gift of grace organically ordered in the Church, nourished by the Eucharistic community, which it constantly renews. And it will continue to be so constituted with the uninterrupted presence and energy of the Holy Spirit, within an eschatological perspective. Apostolicity is a process that has both historical and eschatological dimensions.

I believe that the perpetuation of the apostolic dynamic in historical time, in other words, the preservation of the apostles' flame and spirit, is a distinguishing feature of the Church in its entirety. An awareness of the magnitude of apostleship is utterly essential for our understanding of the very nature of the Church.

## B LIVING THE APOSTOLICITY OF THE CHURCH TODAY

Circumstances in the world at the dawn of the third millennium after Christ are certainly not the same as those of the first or second. So many events have intervened; so many different conditions have been formulated and consolidated. *How then will the Church's apostolic identity be lived out in our age?*

1. To begin with, it is necessary to stimulate our slumbering awareness that we belong to a Church that is "apostolic," in the sense that we have elaborated above, and that this "apostolic"

vocation belongs to the entire Church. Each one of us personally, bears his or her share of responsibility, as a living cell of this organic whole. Interest in apostleship, in mission, is not the specialty of particular groups or individuals, but a definitive characteristic of the Church herself. It is designated as the occupation of the Church. It is the *sine qua non* of its life.

Through the grace of God significant progress has been made in this direction during the last decades. [ . . . ]

Many Orthodox believe that the local Church to which they belong fulfills her obligation to the final commandments of Christ through pastoral care of her flock, or, at the most, through reaching out to those sheep that have strayed in order to bring them back into the fold to which they were born. This activity has been called "domestic mission" (without most people suspecting that this term has been adopted from pietistic Protestant terminology). The consequence of taking onboard what is immediately at hand has been an indifference to that part of the Church's obligation that extends beyond the local to the universal. Let us make here a short parenthesis in order to consider a working hypothesis. If humanity had waited for Orthodox Christians to make a move toward the mission "to all nations," innumerable areas, Africa, for example, would have been lost to Christianity and the great victor would have been Islam.

Many local Orthodox Churches, with thousands of clerics and monks, are circumscribed within their ethnic boundaries. They do not even dare to think of sending even a few properly prepared missionaries—with an appropriate ecclesiastical understanding—to work in other places, to strengthen the already existing, often small, cells of Orthodox believers. This exclusive, turning-inward to one land or one people simply does not correspond to the meaning of apostleship, of mission, as it is defined in the New Testament.

In North America especially, the Orthodox witness is offered within a dynamic society with universal interests. In such a society Orthodoxy is in a state of mission—and she cannot,

certainly, be content with a museum-like preservation of the glorious Orthodox past of far away homelands. Something substantially new and important ought to arise from this situation. We live in an age of extraordinary human creativity, the fruits of which are especially apparent in the realm of scientific achievement. I believe that a basic characteristic of our human nature, of being created in the image of God, together with freedom, reason, and love is *creativity*. In each new generation, with its unique challenges, we are called to offer the eternal treasure contained in the Church, thinking and acting creatively, and in organic continuity with the original, the apostolic tradition.

Of course, what we do not need are a few isolated missionary activities in distant lands. Let me repeat: It would be a great mistake to restrict the apostolic reawakening in our generation to the exotic escapades of a handful of zealots and others, as the peculiar, marginal activity of a few romantic types with a craving for adventure. Nor do we need to propagate the rumor that missionary work represents Protestant influences on Orthodoxy, whereas the true Orthodox spirit is expressed through asceticism and monasticism. Instead, firm foundations must be laid: (a) through serious theological study; (b) through probing deeply into the dynamic meaning of the Church's apostolic identity; (c) through educating the ecclesiastical congregation, both clarifying and invigorating the apostolic awareness of the faithful; (d) through honest self-criticism regarding the direction Orthodoxy is taking and should take, while disposing ourselves toward repentance. (e) Moreover, we must always be sensitive to the contemporary world, to its new challenges and inclinations.

The world "outside" the Church—that mission field *par excellence*—is inconceivably complex. One must be constantly drawing new maps and staying alert to new developments. Such mission also demands creative thinking about how best to execute and make viable the apostolic idea within each context.

2. It is enough to mention just a few *characteristics of our time*: The amazing speed with which information circulates around the globe. The electronic revolution and continuous advances that hasten further the spread of information with the speed of light. We have the pursuit and, at the same time, the undermining of Christian unity. On a day-to-day basis, we have a political, social, and educational co-existence with people of different faiths, or no faith at all. One could also mention the penetration of the Western world by ideas from the religious traditions of India. The return to, and airtight isolation of various religious communities, whose proprietors appeal to the need for security, the preservation of ethnic self-consciousness and cultural identity. One could include the multifaceted revival of Islam whose dynamic presence is assuming a central place on the world stage. A basic feature of this revival is the growing attempt, using intensive proselytism and the mobilization of violent means, to resist the so-called Christian world. Finally, people everywhere are waking up to the tragedy wreaked across most of the planet by poverty and illness at epidemic levels, as in the case of AIDS.

Amidst this constant flux, these endless shifts in the landscape of the inhabited world, how can we discern the path toward "all nations"? Clearly, not on the basis of the old geographical representations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that assumes the existence of a "Christian *oikoumene*," from which heralds of the Gospel can be sent out to other nations. Frontiers are no longer defined geographically—between the Christian and the non-Christian worlds. Just as the boundaries between good and evil do not lie outside us, but are drawn across each of our hearts—and these are shifting boundaries—so we must realize that in the same way the boundaries between Christian and non-Christian should be sought within those countless people who are Christian in name. Among many people with a Christian tradition, vast swathes of the population are either totally ignorant about or indifferent to religion. These people are found "outside" the Church. Amidst peoples whose major-

ity embraces other religions; islets of Christianity still rise above sea level and need encouragement and reinforcement.

The mission of the Church must keep a clear horizon to “all nations,” without exception. In geographical terms, those who lie “outside” the Church may be close at hand, or far away, but neither can be ignored for reasons of ease. Apostleship is the obligation of the “whole” Church and there is no justification for focusing solely on those who belong to our nation or resemble ourselves. The field of responsibility and action is the whole world and that cannot change. The Lord’s commandment is: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15).

We also must realize that responsibility for those “outside” is incumbent upon *all of us*. It is not a matter of disinterest for the faithful. Rather, it is *of direct concern* to the apostolic Church, of which we are members. The Church ought to be “present” constantly through its emissaries.

3. Apostolicity requires that the Church—and I stress the whole Church—not limit herself to pastoral care of those within; to cultivating what comes easily, what is beautiful and spiritually inspiring for the benefit of those who are “within the Church.” The Church is called constantly to dare to make an *exodus*, to *reach out*. [ . . . ]

We are called to go out from the confines of our closed, entrenched communities, to transcend our prejudices, misgivings, and fears and to bear witness together—to the best of our abilities—to the risen Lord. We are called to meet our contemporaries where they are grappling with the most pressing problems. We must do this “not to be conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2), but to help in its orientation toward the sacramental grace of the Church and the power of her truth. We must do this with earnest respect for the distinctiveness of every people and culture, for the freedom and dignity of each human being and with unfeigned love for the whole person. It is a matter of personal spiritual concern and not a political matter.

The issue is not for the Church to conquer “all nations,” but for the Church to teach “all nations”; to share with “all nations” the knowledge, salvation and experience she possesses. Every individual, every people are free to accept or reject the Gospel message. They have the right, however, to be informed responsibly—not catch it in bits and pieces, or from dubious sources, but from the apostolic Church.

4. I would like to underscore just two essential elements of our contemporary apostolic responsibility.

(a) *We must be present* as persons, conscientious members of the Church, and where possible, as a Eucharistic community proclaiming in peace the Kingdom of God. We must present in the countryside and in cities, and in the gatherings of those who are “outside.” We must present as living members of the Church, at conferences, at meetings, both intra-Christian and interfaith; but also even at scholarly, scientific, political, and economic occasions; offering calmly and humbly the Orthodox view and witness, helping to find worthy solutions to vexing problems. In our day, divine providence has opened for the Orthodox doors into areas that were previously hermetically sealed. The Orthodox witness should by all means be proclaimed in these areas as well.

(b) *We have to share* with others whatever we have, whatever goods God has granted us, both material and spiritual; knowledge, sacred and profane, means, capabilities, joys and hopes, the experience and power of love, the peace of God “which passes all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). To such “sharing” belong the innovative ideas and programs for the development of areas dominated by grinding poverty.

The presence of every living member of the Church radiates not simply thoughts and ideas, but also something of the grace of God. The apostolic service remains the duty of the Eucharistic community. It must be assumed by that community and experience by it. The Church, as a whole, in order to remain faithful to her apostolic self-awareness has no right to be absorbed in

her internal problems. In each generation, the right people must be sought and sent out to those “outside”—both geographically and socially.

Those who will dedicate themselves to this mission in the modern context should be prepared to avoid simplifications or naive romanticism. As soon as possible, they must become accustomed to being “strangers in a strange land.” It will be their lot to be the “other,” to live as minorities, sometimes enveloped in a cloud of suspicion and circumspection. We must all also free ourselves from the concern for immediate and large-scale results.

Throughout history, the attempt to establish the Christian ideal has produced two solutions: “the flight to the desert and the creation of the Christian empire.” As Fr. Georges Florovsky pointed out, “We are well aware that these two solutions were shown to be unsuccessful because it was never possible for everyone to escape to the desert, and the Christianity of the empires was never anything but nominal.”<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the Church continues to impart the Gospel message of salvation and the grace of the mysteries to all nations; she continues to give meaning to life and death and to the history of the world. Her mission preserves both its historical and eschatological dimensions. “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14). “The failure of all utopian hopes cannot overshadow the Christian message and the Christian hope. The King came, the Lord Jesus, and His Kingdom shall come.”<sup>3</sup>

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2. G. Florovsky, “The Body of the Living Christ, An Orthodox Interpretation of the Church,” in *Three Theological Essays*, trans. I. K. Papadopoulos, Thessaloniki 1972, (in Greek) pp. 92–93. Cf. Idem, “Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert,” in *Christianity and Culture. The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 2, Belmont, MA, 1974, pp. 67–100.

3. *Ibid*, p. 94

The Orthodox Church is called to be an apostolic people, the light and salt of the world, offering an ongoing, living witness to the living God.

## C

### RENEWING THE APOSTOLIC CONSCIENCE

A revival of the Church's apostolic consciousness means also a rediscovery and the living-out by the Orthodox clergy and peoples: (a) of the apostolic vision, (b) of the apostolic zeal, and (c) of the apostolic ethos.

1. *The apostolic vision* embraces all the world's peoples, as the risen Lord had directed in His last commandment. This vision had nothing to do with today's globalization of the economic market. The sending of Christ's disciples "to all nations" had in view the *universalization* of the love that elevates the human being toward the *theanthropos*, recreating him anew. That vision lives on as the goal of the Eucharistic community, made up of those joined by the Holy Spirit in each and every place. Their mission is to create a community of solidarity, a community of free persons filled with love for one another. The Apostle Paul refers to the honor, glory and power granted to the risen Lord and emphasizes that "all things" are under His authority (Col 1:16–21; Eph 1:21–22). This vision extends not only to the entire inhabited world, but reaches even unto the last things, preparing the way for the fullness of time, "to unite all things in him" (Eph 1:10). The teaching and the worship of the catholic and apostolic Orthodox Church broadens our optical view and the range of our heart to the dimensions of the whole *ecumene*, and ultimately, to the end of time.

2. *The apostolic zeal* that typifies the dynamic work of the Apostles is not something external, a straightforward task, a formal execution of one's duty. Their work sprang forth unceasingly from the depths of their beings. It was an inner neces-

sity. "For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting," states the Apostle Paul. "For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). This need applies to the Church as a whole. The love burning in their hearts for Christ and for humanity needs to be expressed. One searches for ways to share with others the divine gifts that have been received, not to impose them on others. It is the gift of the grace of God, which was given "by the working of his power" to St. Paul "to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (Eph 3:7-9). This love is a flame that is nourished by the fire of Pentecost and must be passed on to other souls (cf. 2 Tim 2:2).

3. *The apostolic ethos* is described in amazing terms and preserved in the Letters of St. Paul. It is an ethos of self-renunciation, filled with unfeigned love, spontaneous joy, and vigorous hope.

The apostolic service is sustained and upheld by the unique treasure given to the Apostles by grace, and not thanks to any particular worth or strength of their own. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels," writes Paul, "to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4:7). St. Paul even approaches boldly the rather sensitive matter of underestimating the Apostles by those with authority in his time. "We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute . . . When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate" (1 Cor 4:10-13).

An apostle's worth and power does not derive from his personal virtue or knowledge. "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me" (1 Cor 15:10). This grace is experienced, rather, in the sense of personal sinfulness, even in a state of utter powerlessness.

It is toward such apostolic spirituality that St. Paul directs the members of the Eucharistic community of Corinth—a spirituality which preserves a crystalline inner purity, even under the most difficult external conditions. He summarizes the apostolic ethos in an extraordinary manner in the Second Letter to the Corinthians:

Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain . . . but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way; through great endurance . . . by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God . . . as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything (2 Cor 6:1–10).

Finally, throughout the entire course of the apostolic work there prevails a distinct awareness of Christ's continuous presence. "And lo, I am with you always" (Matt 28:20). (I prefer the translation, "all the days"—*pasas tas imeras*—which we can understand as *in all sorts of days*.) This presence enlightens their existence, whatever difficulties each day may bring. Everything is done with the power of the Lord through the Holy Spirit. This awareness has emboldened the apostles across the ages to confront even the most painful moments. It brings them comfort and peace along the most tortuous paths they must walk, at times of sorrow and suffering. It fills them with constant rejoicing and the light of tranquility. This is not something graspable by the mind, something belonging to the realm of abstract thought. Rather, we are confronted with the radiance of grace pouring out from the Holy Spirit that penetrates and enlightens all existence. This is what it means to live and work in Christ (cf. Gal 2:20).

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Summarizing the views about the Church's apostolicity we discern these main features. Our Church is apostolic because:

(1) She was established by the One sent by God, His Son, Jesus Christ, and its foundations were laid by the Apostles; (2) She understands herself as being directly identified with the apostolic community as it was described in the New Testament and in Holy Tradition; the womb from which was born also the Canon of the New Testament; (3) She preserves intact and unchanged the teaching of the Apostles with an unswerving consciousness of its uninterrupted continuation throughout history and its faithfulness to the Word of God; as it was understood in the apostolic age and was preserved across the course of time, guided by the Holy Spirit; (4) She has rooted her life in the celebration of the Sacraments, as Christ ordained and as was passed down by the Apostles; (5) She is unshakable, erected on the unbroken apostolic succession of bishops and the clergy they themselves have consecrated.

There is, however, yet another aspect of this apostolic identity which I have tried to bring out by the points emphasized above. (6) Our Church is apostolic because: (a) She is in a state of constantly being sent out to do mission; (b) It is necessary, in that case, that the whole Church, following the example of the Apostles, continue to proclaim the Gospel to the whole of humanity, until the end of the world; (c) Our local Churches, but also each and every one of us, should, as members of the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church," take up our corresponding share of the apostolic calling. We should do this with consistency and with the use of our creativity, in both thought and deed. And finally, (d) we ought then to carry on the *diaconia of the logos* (the service of the word), of the sacraments, and of reconciliation with apostolic vision, zeal and ethos. The whole world is our stage, throughout the course of history that remains until the "coming of the Lord."