

# Reading the Document on Mission of the Holy and Great Council from a Missiological Point of View

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## Abstract

*Promulgation of the document on mission by the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete in June 2016 ensures an enduring place for mission in the future shape of Orthodoxy. After discussion of the methodological limitations of the document, this article explores the process by which it was prepared, the range of reactions to it, some problems of language, and changes in the final, approved version, offering some assessments of its meaning and import.*

## Theology and Experience

The word “orthodoxy” signifies correct dogma, correct doctrine. It focuses on theory, theology, dogmatics. But, as stated in James 2:20, “faith without works is dead.” Therefore, it is a common view that orthodoxy should be accompanied by orthopraxy, correct praxis. Nevertheless, one cannot help noticing that orthopraxy often comes as a supplement to being orthodox, an afterthought.

A more general linguistic and semiotic question on the relation of the signifier and the signified and the dynamic of this relation is also applied in this specific context. Does the signified define the signifier, or does the signifier construct the signified? A lasting temptation of Orthodox theological output seems to be a certain satisfaction with nicely rounded theories and theoretical constructions, the relevance of which remains questionable when it comes to the common experience in the life of the Orthodox Church.

Being Orthodox does not mean that one is more virtuous on the practical, ethical level. As one naturally focuses on one's good points, among the Orthodox many a time orthodoxy becomes a flag, an emblem, or an ideology.

This has been a temptation in Orthodox theology ever since the theological renewal starting in the 1930s in the Orthodox diaspora in the West, peaking in the 1960s, and still strongly influencing things up to the 1990s. The collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe redirected priorities in theology and contemplation, which were no longer so keen on the idea of seeking what is uniquely Orthodox (our *ιδιοπροσωπεία*), but the common, in an aspiration and wish to belong to a now completely West-centred world. A romanticized Orthodoxy is no longer suitable. The real concern is the true relevance of things in a postmodern global village.

If one moves from a more sociological approach to theological thinking and its evolution and shaping in different times to seek out its essential and timeless characteristics, one must see that the Orthodox way of actually doing theology (*θεολογείν*) is mainly based on experience. This is the theological methodology par excellence within Orthodoxy, according to the patristic Eastern theological tradition, where theology is conceived as the experience of God. It is the experience of the living faith that finds its expression in doctrinal formulations, rather than the reverse, where doctrine dictates the experience and defines life. In the language of systematic theology, substance comes before essence.

Experience in a broader sense received rather short shrift in the Document on Mission. Yet some minor alterations and adjustments, considered mostly linguistic and editorial in nature, quietly introduced into the final Conciliar Document (CD)<sup>1</sup> reveal that this question was a more common concern than originally thought, as we shall discuss later. As to the final Preconciliar Document (PD),<sup>2</sup> one has to acknowledge that it seemed more like a document produced from the top down, lacking the freshness and variety of life of the local churches, at the parish or even the diocesan level. It was a document on mission, but had very little relevance to the reality of mission, the very existence of the church worldwide. This was the first impression to the eye of a missiologist. In a document on mission, one would expect less abstraction and much more variety and freshness of life; at the least,

<sup>1</sup> All documents are on the official page of the Holy and Great Synod, <https://www.holycouncil.org/> The CD is at [https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_VA0WE2pZ4Y0I\\_languageId=en\\_US/](https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world?_101_INSTANCE_VA0WE2pZ4Y0I_languageId=en_US/)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.holycouncil.org/-/preconciliar-mission?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_VA0WE2pZ4Y0I\\_languageId=en\\_US/](https://www.holycouncil.org/-/preconciliar-mission?_101_INSTANCE_VA0WE2pZ4Y0I_languageId=en_US/)

one would expect to see a focus on some selected samples, cases, and places where mission actually takes place.

Mission is not all about talking, but also about keeping one's ears open, carefully listening to what real people, peoples, and local churches need, what they prioritize, and so on. Missiologists need to listen more than to speak. If missiology is useful in missionary work, it is because it enriches a practical methodology with the wisdom distilled from historical experience. It is therefore of vital importance to facilitate people's ability to speak for themselves. Even if a Council held after 1200 years of silence should produce a document that would go beyond the timely and the local, for the very same reason one could see a great opportunity to go to the grassroots in this process. In the many decades of the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod, there was ample time for that. The limitation was in our mentality. Perhaps such a process might have brought some life into a document where many corners have been rounded, in order to reach a lowest common denominator. Unity is not mediocrity, but the quest for the truth, which is Christ, present in multiple historical conditions. How can one be catholic and universal without being local? This issue was raised in the early church, in the second century, and forever solved within Orthodox theology by Irenaeus of Lyons.<sup>3</sup>

More freedom and a greater diversity would more adequately reflect the image of the church as body of Christ, a body that has different parts and functions. Unity in diversity, as described by the apostle Paul, is a desideratum. Abstraction that leads to uniformity, a roof that overshadows everything, is one of the main problems of the Document from a missiological point of view. More space is needed for the local churches, for the local expression of Orthodoxy worldwide.

## On the Procedure

The Document was well prepared by a committee of delegates from the churches, mainly bishops and scarcely any lay people. The Document was never discussed at the grassroots level of the church, among different groups of people, as should have been the case. Such a discussion would have enriched the document with real people's concerns.

The schedule for the conciliar process being quite tight, it seemed almost too late when a group of missiologists and academic theologians of other disciplines, under

<sup>3</sup> *Against Heresies* 1.10.1-2.

the lead and the initiative of Prof. Petros Vassiliadis, gathered to express their views on the Document and submitted a paper including some critical observations and some proposals for improvement.<sup>4</sup>

The gathering of missiologists during the spring of 2016, mainly a long-distance, virtual gathering through the assistance of electronic and social media, led to an illuminating insider discussion, though not all of it could be expressed in the proposal paper.<sup>5</sup> Within that process, a paper was received from the African brothers, signed by His Grace Bishop Athanasios Akunda of Kisumu and Western Kenya and Fr Dr John Njoroge and titled “The View of the African Orthodox Missiologists on the Document on Mission.” There we find, among other things, the opinion that “the document misses out the practical aspects on mission of the church and challenges faced today.” Besides, it is noted that “the document could have proposed possible mission and evangelism methods and approaches to be discussed in the council.” I couldn’t agree more.

The Document on Mission was originally not written by people who have experience, academic or practical, in the field of mission. In fact, originally it was not about mission at all. It was conceived as a practical and ethical guideline referring to moral issues of contemporary life. It was changed into a Mission Document, upgrading the previous subtitle to the status of the main title and vice versa. An extended article by Prof. Deliconstantis elaborates on the history of this Document, and the original desire of the participants in the preconiliar process on various phases to provide basic guidelines on issues of social concern – mainly on the contribution of the Orthodox Church on peace and justice as well as combating racism – and to link the horizontal to the vertical dimension of faith.<sup>6</sup> He also reports on the history of the reception of the document, at first with great enthusiasm, and in

<sup>4</sup> This paper, signed by a number of missiologists and others, is found in Greek and English at <http://blogs.ath.gr/moschosg/files/2016/03/%CE%A3%CE%A0%CE%9F%CE%95.pdf/> Also, under the title “Some Comments on the Mission Document by Orthodox Missiologists,” one can find the introductory text to the Document in English at <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/05/09/some-comments-on-the-mission-document-by-orthodox-missiologists/>

<sup>5</sup> This is also a reason why, given time and space, I felt the need to elaborate on some personal views I expressed more or less within the framework of this close expert discussion. Besides, the final document calls for a slight shift in our evaluation, as some of our expressed concerns have been partly remedied. I feel very much obliged to the *International Review of Mission* and personally to Prof. Jooseop Keum for the opportunity to elaborate further on this issue of great importance, and for the hospitality.

<sup>6</sup> The text is in Greek: Κωνσταντίνος Δελικωνσταντής, “Πτυχές της ιστορίας και της θεολογίας του κειμένου της ημερησίας διατάξεως της Αγίας και Μεγάλης Συνόδου της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας ‘Η αποστολή της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας εν τω συγχρόνω κόσμω,’” <https://www.orthodoxcouncil.org/-/ptyches-tes-istorias-kai-tes-theologias-tou-keimenou-tes-emeresias-diataxeos-tes-agias-kai-megales-synodou-tes-orthodoxou-ekklestias-e-apostole-tes-ort?inheritRedirect=true&redirect=%2Fmission/>

a more skeptical spirit later. Detailed references on the history of the Document and its reception, as well as on the efforts, quite elaborate and sincere, to respond to all possible concerns raised by various sides are to be found in Deliconstantis's report. Among other readings, the originally enthusiastic view of the text by His Eminence Metropolitan George (Khodr) of Mount Lebanon,<sup>7</sup> which a few months later gave way to a more reserved reaction, is noteworthy. Metr. George stated his regret that in such an excellent and well-founded document, he felt full of grief that the church lives in a world of ideas, but so far away from real humans and more particularly the members of the flock.<sup>8</sup>

This is very much in line with my personal feeling. It seems that the notion of unity in the Orthodox world is mainly conceived as a unity of the heads of the churches, a unity of the bishops within the church. This kind of unity of course cannot be taken for granted, and one can only praise and thank Patriarch Bartholomew for his efforts to bring the Orthodox churches together, to invite them to meet and finally to lead successfully to the realization of the Great and Holy Synod. This kind of unity is nevertheless anything but sufficient, if the heads of the churches are not in unity with the people of God on the local church level, in their own jurisdiction. Thus, it is quite sad when decisions are taken on a conciliar level that are in serious disharmony with the ecclesial and theological consciousness of the people.<sup>9</sup>

Noteworthy among critics is the view of Fr John Chyssavgis, who expresses the opinion that the later version of the text took a more conservative turn.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, Prof. Deliconstantis considers the earlier and the later versions of the text more or less similar in spirit.<sup>11</sup>

In the later version of the PD, the prologue, written by one of the most distinguished Orthodox theologians – also well known for his openness and willingness

<sup>7</sup> Deliconstantis is referring to Khodr's opinion, included in the typed minutes of the Preparatory Committee Meeting in Chambésy, Geneva, 15-23 February 1986, 131.

<sup>8</sup> In the typed minutes of the 3rd Preparatory Committee Meeting in Chambésy, Geneva, 28 October – 9 November 1986, Synodikon IX, 175.

<sup>9</sup> An example of that kind on the local level was offered recently by the Church of Greece, initiating a rather unfortunate conflict with the theologians planning the curriculum for religious education in secondary education. Through this conflict, escalating to its peak in September and October 2016, it became evident that bishops and religious education teachers live in worlds apart. A lot of effort is now required somehow to remedy the situation.

<sup>10</sup> J. Chryssavgis, *Toward the Holy and Great Council: Retrieving a Culture of Conciliarity and Communion* (New York: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, 2016), 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

to engage with modernity – Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, offered a new theological depth. Yet, this effort was neutralized by objections expressed by the churches of Georgia and Russia, which led to the elimination of certain references to the sacredness of the human person, a sacredness inseparably linked with the notion of freedom.<sup>12</sup> I only mention this example as an illuminating one about the difficulties and the heterogony of ends<sup>13</sup> along the way of this collective and common process.

We shall not, however, elaborate further on the long history of the Document, but concentrate on the final PD and CD.

After all, the introduction of the word “mission” in the title caused a shift of content and a reason to rejoice in the fact that mission, witness, *martyria*, an extroverted and open overall attitude, are being prioritized. Yet, some questions about the extent to which it corresponds to the title still remain. We shall come to that in what follows.

## On Content, Style and Follow-up

The nature and literary genre of the Document on Mission is peculiar, if not unique.

As a conciliar document, it is a text of high importance and authority. It is not a dogmatic or symbolic text, but rather a canonical text in the broader sense of the

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Reservations of a somewhat obscure nature as to use of the word “person” in the Document were also raised by His Eminence the Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Ierotheos (Vlachos) in his letter to the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece of 5 March 2016, Protocol Nr. 70, paragraph 2, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/> His proposal to eliminate the word “person” was not accepted by the Council. Metr. Ierotheos also refused to sign the final document, “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World.”

<sup>13</sup> The terminology “heterogony of ends” is introduced by the Greek philosopher Panagiotis Kondylis. See Falk Horst, ed., *The Political and Man: Basic Features of Social Ontology* (Unpublished text. Translated by C.F. from the original German: Panajotis Kondylis, *Das Politische und der Mensch. Grundzüge der Sozialontologie* [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, Band 1, Soziale Beziehung, Verstehen, Rationalität, 1999]), 48. He also states, “The thorny implications of the heterogony of ends were hardly noted by the evolutionists of differentiation because their optimism in respect of the philosophy of history has found expression in the belief in the immanent rationality of the highly differentiated social system as such” (90). One cannot expect much rationality, and there is not much room for optimism.

word. It may not contain a list of laws and canons strictly speaking, but it provides us with an outline, a way of thinking, and moreover a framework that establishes law. What is mentioned, what is emphasized, and what is omitted and shrouded in silence are meant to give direction and to shape a guideline, an actual road map for the life of the church in the years to come.

Symbolic and doctrinal texts of the older ecumenical councils contained *oroi* of a very concrete and compound character; they were also brief and specific, restricted to the topic in question. They did not aspire to express a theological truth in the form of a philosophical diatribe. Theology developed along with the questions and challenges addressed to the church.

Similarly, canonical texts may have expanded on various issues, raised by the circumstances, quite often leading to specific rules. Though continuity and respect for Tradition (in the theological sense) is affirmed in many ways, particularly by the abundance of patristic references, the Document as such does not emerge directly from the patristic era. It belongs to a more modern style of texts, coming from the dawn of modern times. I am mainly alluding to the symbolic texts produced after the Fall of Constantinople. These symbolic texts appeared among the Orthodox strangely enough after, or as a result of, the Protestant Reformation. They were primarily initiated by the questions of the Protestants about the very character and nature of the Orthodox understanding of the Christian faith, and served theological and diplomatic purposes. They vary in type, style, and theological quality, but they all try to meet the need of a holistic and systematic outline of the Orthodox faith, to a certain extent corresponding to the style and manner of Martin Luther's Augustana (Augsburg Confession) (1530). They hide and at the same time reveal questions of dialogue. In the same category, one could classify the symbolic text written by (theologians under the leadership of) the patriarch Gennadius Scholarius, addressing Mehmed the Conqueror right after the Fall of Constantinople (1453), presenting the Christian faith at his request.

There is a certain similarity of all the above-mentioned symbolic texts to the Document on Mission, inasmuch as the latter aspires to give a holistic answer to the presence, role, and mission of the church today. The Document is treating this specific topic in a holistic manner. The analogy stops there, as the subject matter differs. The Document on Mission is not of a dogmatic but of an ethical character, a *genre sui generis* given its holistic perspective, unprecedented in conciliar decisions in the past. Times change, and they require different tools.

The Document is unique for a conciliar document, yet not completely unknown in its style. It reads like an ethical treatise. The purpose of the document is not merely theoretical. It is meant to give guidance. How one should read, understand, and implement this document, given the very economical and less legalistic ethical thinking of the Orthodox in their tradition, is something one should give more thought to. In any case, there is a lot of room to elaborate and take further steps in the wished-for direction.

As the Metropolitan of Nigeria Alexander (Gianniris), official representative of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and member of the Secretariat of the Council, stated right after the Council at the press briefing,

The Church in Africa was pleased with this text [the said Document on Mission]. We consider it a bit reserved at some points, we expected it to be more dynamic, but still it paves the way for further discussion. It is very important for us to further develop the comments made on issues of international economics. Our Continent is being plagued by the consequences of free economy and neo-liberalism. These may not have been included in the text as such, but it [the Document] gives us the possibility to become more denunciatory of certain phenomena. Be sure that this will happen very soon.<sup>14</sup>

He further elaborated on the inter-relationship between the expansion of HIV/AIDS and financial exploitation and poverty, on the role of the World Bank, the European Union and the underhanded collaboration with local governments, on the continuation of colonialism in a different form (that of financial colonialism despite all the people's struggles), on the role of European countries and multinational corporations regarding the natural wealth of Africa: more specifically, on the role of the pharmaceutical companies and on questions of climate change and its grave implications in the region.

The possibility of such a reading is of paramount importance. And indeed, the Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa, in its synodal meeting of 16 November 2016, along with an overall evaluation of the works of the Holy and Great Council, decided on the re-establishment of a women's diaconate, upon the suggestion of His Eminence Metropolitan Gregory (Stergiou) of Cameroon.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Γιώργος Κώνστας, “Βολές” κατά του νεοφιλελευθερισμού στη Μεγάλη Σύνοδο της Ορθοδοξίας”: *Χανιώτικα Νέα*, <http://www.goodnet.gr/chania-trechonta/articles/boles-kata-tou-neofileutherismou-sti-megali-sunodo-tis-orthodoxias.html/> I considered it important to translate the first part, as the reports in English give only a vague or partial description of it, and also miss the tone.

<sup>15</sup> Second day of works of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, <http://www.patriarchateofalexandria.com/index.php?module=news&action=details&id=1207/>



On the other hand, there have been reactions of a deeply conservative nature to the Document and to the Holy and Great Council as a whole, which were extremely irrational and populist in character, highly aggressive and sometimes even taking the form of mob reactions. They are worth mentioning only in regard to the difficulties and general reactionary atmosphere surrounding any forward step that is taken. Yet, Prof. Theodore Yangkou, a member of the Secretariat of the Holy and Great Council representing the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, wrote an extensive and detailed commentary on the observations and criticism on the preconciliar texts.<sup>16</sup>

Though the process was not very open overall, the fact that the preconciliar texts were made public gave everyone the opportunity to comment on them, in a multi-level and unofficial free public discussion.

Yet, discussing the preconciliar documents (PD) is one thing, and discussing the conciliar ones (CD) quite another. This happens not only because the PD are treated as drafts where everybody still tries to overwrite their own agenda, while the CD are final and invested with a conciliar authority, but also because there are slight alterations here and there that may not be insignificant.

The latter is also the case with the Document on Mission.

When one reads the PD in English, one has the feeling that the language is vague, maybe a bit pompous. As to the Greek version of the document, it is written in old-style *katharevousa*, a choice that is contradictory to the purpose and goal of communicating the faith.<sup>17</sup> Yet this kind of language is familiar to the church administration; it is the jargon of (some of) the church's inner circles.

As to the CD, there have been notable efforts to remedy this. As far as the Greek text is concerned, it was unfortunately not possible to change the old-fashioned language. However, in the Message of the Great and Holy Synod, a kind of final communiqué, modern everyday (*dimotiki*) Greek was opted for, a revolutionary choice compared to what one has been accustomed to. Concerning the English text, some editing took place, too. It is striking how slight editorial changes and

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.jp-newsgate.net/gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/001.pdf/> (in Greek).

<sup>17</sup> One has to state that this problem of language was discussed during the synod, a fact that led to a different and quite modern linguistic choice for the final communiqué of the Council, the "Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church to the Orthodox people and to all people of good will": [https://www.holycouncil.org/-/message?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_VA0WE2pZ4Y0I\\_languageId=en\\_US/](https://www.holycouncil.org/-/message?_101_INSTANCE_VA0WE2pZ4Y0I_languageId=en_US/) This is a reason to rejoice.

more sensitive language make a difference!<sup>18</sup> This also makes me realize that some of the problems of the document were possibly linked with the use of English as a foreign language, something that is common at international meetings of all kinds.<sup>19</sup> I shall now elaborate a bit more on this.

PD, Paragraph 2.2, under the heading “Freedom and Responsibility,” refers to “the imperfections and shortcomings which predominate in modern-day life.” This is in accord with PD, Paragraph 6.13. Modern life is considered as opposed to tradition, and the above-mentioned imperfections, especially drugs and addictions, are presented as a temptation for the young in a prejudiced, inexact, and almost racist way. It becomes evident that older people take precedence and speak about their uneasiness with adapting to the course of history, with facing modernity and postmodernity; thus they try to protect the young from danger and life from evolving. Evidently, there are scarcely any young people among the authors of the Document.

In the CD, this has been changed into “shortcomings prevailing today.” The PD’s formulation, “negative phenomena such as drug use and other forms of addiction that have gained popularity among young people,” has now (in the CD) become “in the lives of certain youth.” Generalization of a racist nature has been avoided, and the tone is less aggressive toward the young, though they are still targeted by being singled out.

The use of the expression “modern-day life” in the PD leads one naturally to ask how a document on mission can be missional when it pleads for preservation and tradition, without making a fundamental distinction between the Holy Tradition and a traditional, long-gone way of life. If there is no room for God in modernity, and the return of a traditional nostalgic paradigm is not possible, is it then perhaps possible that the church preaches the death of God, instead of Christ’s resurrection and God’s omnipresence in history, in the present time, in modernity? The problem is less acute in the CD, proof that someone (the final editor) shared this concern and tried to accommodate it.

Paragraph 5.3. (PD), concerning issues of discrimination, has been characterized as “an agenda as conservative as it is anodyne.”<sup>20</sup> It has received a lot of criticism as

<sup>18</sup> The credit for this excellent editing, for its discretion, sensitivity, and feeling, goes to the Rev. Dr Gregory Edwards.

<sup>19</sup> On the PD it is stated that “The following English text is a working translation. An official English translation is forthcoming.”

<sup>20</sup> Leonid Bershidsky, “The Orthodox Church Stays in the Dark Ages,” *Bloomberg View: Religion*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-06-16/the-orthodox-church-stays-in-the-dark-ages/>

to the selective nature and adequacy of the church's understanding of human rights.<sup>21</sup>

Despite all the protest, there was no essential change in the CD. The conclusion of the paragraph (E.3, CD) that "the Church has the right to proclaim and witness to her teaching in the public sphere" also poses questions of a different nature. The affirmation of the "right to proclaim" reveals a fear of censoring, as in many societies the understanding of human rights by the church is considered inadequate, while some sermons by certain bishops and priests against some specific categories of the population are considered (and indeed are) hate speech. Hate speech is forbidden by legislation in many countries. From a theological and specifically missiological viewpoint, it is puzzling to see how Christian preaching, instead of being a source of joy and the announcement of the good news, can become a reckless, judgmental speech to the point that it risks being characterized as hate speech. Is this a right the church should fight for?

Another major missiological issue becomes evident in this paragraph. The emphasis on proclamation points directly to a preference for the verbal. What about the example of life within the church? Why is the notion of witness directly linked to the "right to proclaim"? Witnessing is not just a right, as it presupposes a lived experience, which can be a reality and an obligation. Witnessing has been of paramount importance throughout the history of the church; witnessing is the very core of Christian mission. We are witnesses to the resurrection, inspired to live up to it within the church, in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Since there is hardly any self-criticism in this document – in fact, none at all – and the concept of repentance is remote to it, one should expect at least the expression of a wish that the church should not only have the right to witness her teaching, but also the responsibility to reflect it within the life of the ecclesial community.

This responsibility is poorly expressed or served, at least as far as gender issues are concerned. Nevertheless, one should rejoice at the decision to re-establish a women's diaconate and the subsequent decision of the Patriarchate of Alexandria to do so. This is a bold and wise decision, coming as a direct aftermath of the Holy and Great Council, bringing to life something much more important than mere words. And this decision is very fitting within the African reality, with its traditions of very

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Fr Robert M. Arida, Susan Ashbrook Harvey, David Dunn, Maria McDowell, Teva Regule, and Bryce E. Rich, "Defending Human Dignity: A Response to the Pre-Conciliar Document, 'The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World.'" <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/06/15/defending-human-dignity/>

active participation of women in the life of the church. One can only encourage further steps in this direction, a direction of accord between theory and praxis.

## Some More Specific Missiological Observations

Mission is combined with the announcement of the good news to the world from the very beginning of the church. “Christ is risen” was a salutation among brothers and sisters and also constituted the very core of Christian preaching, in an atmosphere of enthusiasm thanks to the presence and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The joy of sharing what was important, in a spirit of love and human solidarity, communion, was a fundamental motivation of the apostles of all times.

The announcement of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is important and closely linked to human salvation and the anticipation of his second coming and our new life in the kingdom of God. Christians pray for his kingdom to come; they eagerly await his coming, crying “Maran Atha!” In their daily lives, they try to reflect the kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven.” The very existence of the church is part of God’s divine *Oikonomia*, God’s plan. There was a general concern that these elements were not adequately emphasized in the Document, at least in the PD. Guidelines and obligations were outlined, but the joy, the very fruit of faith and the communication of faith, was hardly expressed. Mission is a gift, a charisma and a need, before being an obligation.

However, a paragraph was added in the introduction (right before the last paragraph) of the CD that is of major importance, as it refers to Matthew 28:19 as the basis and inspiration of all missionary activity. There, too, some of the most necessary clarifications on the methodology of mission are noted. The methodological principles are that “mission must be carried out not aggressively or by different forms of proselytism, but in love, humility and respect towards the identity of each person and the cultural particularity of each people.” Besides, it is affirmed that “all the Orthodox Church have an obligation to contribute to this missionary endeavour.” The peculiar grammar, namely the plural form of the verb following the word church, may lead to a more pluralistic understanding of the church, as unity in plurality, and points to the missionary obligation of the Church’s members, of the catholicity of the apostolic charisma and obligation at the same time.<sup>22</sup> This is inclusive and not exclusive; clergy and laity are equally responsible. This affirmation

<sup>22</sup> It is also possible that an original subject of a plural form, e.g., churches, was changed to the singular, emphasizing the unity and catholicity of the one church. Yet, as it stands, it creates an interesting dynamic.

is of vital importance and a clear response to many misunderstandings lingering among the Orthodox. Another basic missiological concern is addressed in this paragraph, namely the question of indigenization and cultural integration, presented adequately and in a bottom-up way in the form of respect to “the cultural particularity of each people.”

In A.2 CD, the understanding of mission is further clarified and the need for collaboration among Christians for the protection of human dignity and peace is highlighted. Opposing the notion of religion as a factor of conflict, the church understands herself as a servant of peace and unity. This is an understanding of mission in the direction of *missio Dei*, excluding any self-imposing predisposition. People and churches should work together so that the kingdom may come, that divine *Oikonomia* is fulfilled. This becomes even clearer in A.4, referring to “*God’s fellow workers* (I Cor 3:9).”

This remedies a deep personal concern of mine, that the title of the Document – though common in its formulation<sup>23</sup> – might signify a return to the outdated notion of *missio Ecclesiae*, abandoned in the late 20th century and particularly after David Bosch. Bosch indeed transformed our understanding of mission in a way that is, among other things, much more pleasing to the Orthodox.<sup>24</sup> The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, another Westerner close to Orthodox hearts, rephrased it in more trinitarian way: “It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.”<sup>25</sup> The same triadological understanding of mission, omnipresent in the patristic tradition of the East and in full accord with the patristic understanding of the Divine *Oikonomia* and God wishing all people to be saved,<sup>26</sup> is taken up by the Orthodox.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Father Alexander Schmemmann, one of the greatest Orthodox theologians of the 20th century, has written a book titled *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (New York: St. Vladimir Press, 1979), which was translated into Greek under the title *Η Αποστολή της Εκκλησίας στον Σύγχρονο Κόσμο* (The Mission of the Church in the Contemporary World) (Athens: Akritas, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> “Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God.” *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 389–90.

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 64.

<sup>26</sup> God is the one “who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth,” 1 Tim. 2:4.” Comp. John Chrysostom, *On 1 Tim.*, 6. 2 | PG 62, 536[B].

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Πέτρος Βασιλειάδης [Petros Vassiliadis], *Ενότητα και Μαρτυρία* [Unity and Witness], Thessaloniki: Επίκεντρο, 2007.

Slight alterations in the following A.3 CD lead to a shift of emphasis and meaning. It now seems that syncretism is not a danger lurking in all interfaith relations, but “the various local Orthodox Churches can contribute to inter-religious understanding and co-operation” and are therefore encouraged to do so. The element of locality is finally introduced into the Document.

Some concerns concerning the PD were also addressed by missiologists: that it “seems to *neglect the major achievements made in contemporary world mission by renowned Orthodox theologians*” and that some significant terminology of today’s missiology, like “*martyria/witness*” and “*liturgy after the liturgy*” are missing (point [b] of the missiologists’ proposal paper).

In my opinion, this statement is a bit too strong, though its clarity and strength may have brought some change, just in time! The word *martyria* lightens and explains the word “mission,” but does not need to replace it. The way mission is described in the CD, especially in the above-mentioned added paragraph of the introduction, is diaconal and indeed corresponds to the notion of *martyria/witness*. The popular expression “liturgy after the liturgy,” which has almost become a slogan, is indeed missing, but the whole CD describes the way worship should be lived out in today’s society and should inspire our daily praxis on a number of issues that are commonly considered of sociopolitical and financial interest. In fact, the subtitle as well as the length of the entire paragraph F might cause some concern about possible secularization and over-stressing the horizontal dimension of the CD, but if one looks at the history of the Document, and the shift from ethical to missiological, one may understand why.

Still, to me as a missiologist, and despite my personal political stand in life, I would wish to see more on mission – its methods, aspirations, difficulties, and hopes in the modern world – as well as some self-criticism on our shortcomings in this field. The lack of self-criticism is a step backwards compared to previous inter-Orthodox consultations.<sup>28</sup>

Humility and knowledge of one’s self, self-criticism and self-reproach (to choose a more patristic wording), clarity in humbleness in front of God, repentance and not guilt – all in abundance are a sign of genuine love.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., In Rhodes, 1988, it is acknowledged that “owing to human weakness and sinfulness, Christian communities have not always and in all places been able to suppress effectively ideas, manners, and customs, historical developments and social conditions which have resulted in practical discrimination against women” (*The Place of Women in the Orthodox Church*, B.VII.24). I thank Arida, Harvey, Dunn, McDowell, Regule, and Rich for bringing this up in their reading of the PD, “Defending Human Dignity,” (see n. 21).

And this is exactly the spirit of my criticism, even if it may seem harsh at some points. Compromise and asking for less would reflect an Arian spirit, a spirit of asking for less than longing for God. The infallibility and the sanctity of the church are recognized mainly in the Councils. They radiate light, but do not reflect an autonomous status of prestige; they are present through our inseparable union with the Omnipresent. With him who is the way and the life and the truth. They co-exist with our fallacies and our sins, being purified by Christ our Lord in his holy communion, becoming part of the divine providence and *Oikonomia*.

## Conclusion

The procedure is evident in the result. The history of the Document is present in its structure, construction, and content. Furthermore, the Document reflects what we are, at the present state. It gives a true, unretouched, and clear picture of the Orthodox Church, given all her antinomies. The fact that this document was produced in the framework of the Great and Holy Council held in Colymbari, Chania, during Pentecost 2016 was a step of major importance. Mission is being prioritized and it is of vital significance. More steps need to be taken, but the Document on Mission will hopefully shape a loving and open mentality.

It also seems that on the ecumenical level, a major emphasis is placed on mission. Along with Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium*<sup>29</sup> and *Together towards Life*<sup>30</sup> ecumenical affirmation on mission, the Orthodox also see the need for and priority of mission. These most inspiring texts urge and motivate us to proclaim the faith and diacoonally serve humanity. On the other hand, there is a people of faith, a people of God, wishing to meet and share what we cherish and value. Today's world is a world of much sorrow and grief, and we must rediscover the way of being its salt and its comfort by following him who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). In this regard, the Document on Mission opens up possibilities and widens our potential. The rest is in our hands.

<sup>29</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican: Vatican Press, 2013), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html/](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html/)

<sup>30</sup> Jooseop Keum, ed., *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: WCC, 2013).