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DOCTORAL THESIS

The pastoral-missionary coordinates of the priestly service in the context of the contemporary world

(SUMMARY)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IRM – rev. "International Review of Mission" (Geneva)

EIBMBOR = Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church

GOTR = *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Brookline, MA, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1964 –

IRM – rev. "International Review of Mission" (Geneva)

MA = The *Mitropolia Ardealului* Magazine, Sibiu, 1956 -

MB = The *Mitropolia Banatului* Magazine, Timisoara, 1951 - *MMS* = The *Mitropolia Moldovei si Sucevei* Magazine, Iasi, 1949 - *MO* = The *Mitropolia Olteniei* Magazine, Craiova, 1949 -

O = *Ortodoxia* Magazine, Bucharest, 1948 ș.u -

PSB = Collection "Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești", Bucharest.

SC = Sources Chrétiennes, Lyon-Paris, 1941 –

ST = *Studii Teologice*, Journal of Theological Institutes of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1949 –

SVTQ = *St. Vladimir Theological Quarterly*, New York, 1969 –

Keywords:

- priesthood,
- pastoral;
- mission of the Church,
- parish,
- the role of seculars in mission (orthodox perspective),
- the role of women in the Church (orthodox perspective),
- orthopraxis,
- philanthropy,
- Liturgy and pastoral-missionary mission,

Argument . The doctoral research project aimed at continuing and deepening my older concerns, materialized in the BA thesis entitled "*Holy Trinity*" Church - *Tocile Schei Brasov. Historical considerations and pastoral implications*, respectively the master's dissertation entitled *The priest's calling in the light of his main duties. A pastoral-catechumenal diagnosis* . Both papers focused on the priestly service, in the very center of the missionary theology of the Orthodox Church. Therefore, this doctoral research project analyzes this topic further, taking into account the challenges posed by the socio-historical and cultural-religious context of the modern world.

The priestly service is in the very center of the missionary theology of the Orthodox Church. Thus, the premise from which I started was: the fundamentals of the Orthodox mission are determined by the type of spirituality they promote; to go on the mission means to continue the earthly service of the Lord, to accept the path of the Master's life; the missionary is called to live among people and to manifest the glory of God and the mystery of the Incarnation (Mc. 10,45, Fil. 2.6-8 and In. 1,14). But, being a living testimony of the presence of the Lord requires the missionary to have an uninterrupted personal relationship with Him; he must not only think or speak about Him, but "live in Christ" (Gal. 2,20). The missionary lives not only intellectually, but with his whole being in a relationship with Christ and letting himself totally transformed by Him. His message is nothing but what he heard and saw. Just as Christ did the will of the Father (In. 8,28-29, 8,26, 8,38, etc.), and the Apostles participated in the relationship of the Father and the Son (In. 13,20, 17,23).

Status of the research . Therefore, the reflections on the pastoral-missionary service of the priest in the Church and in the world are an ongoing current topic. The bibliography dedicated to the theological theme of the priestly ministry is very extensive. We should mention the patristic "treaties" "about the priesthood", of which a special position is held by St. John Chrysostom the Golden Mouth¹ . Then, referring to the contemporary period, it is likely that any attempt to provide a list of books, volumes, studies and articles alone would far outpace the scope of this study. However, this abundance of theological literature on priestly ministry does not exhaust the subject. On the one hand, there are certain aspects related to the "perennial side" of the Christological-Pneumatological dimension of the priestly work; on the other hand, this service is always facing

¹ Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre preoție*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1998.

new aspects, related to the different socio-historical and cultural contexts in which the priest's work takes place. Consequently, the initial aspect of our research precisely targets this aspect: to identify and find answers to the challenges of the Orthodox Church in general and to the priest's service especially to the postmodern world.

Selectively, among the Romanian theological literature we mention: Petre Vintilescu, *Parohia ca teren de dezvoltare, o existență a spiritualității creștine*, Bucharest, 1937, Antonie Plămădeală, *Preotul in Biserică, in lume și acasă*, Sibiu, 1996, Ion Bria, *Liturghia după Liturghie*, Publishing House Athena, Bucharest, 1996, Ion Buga, *Pastoral. Calea preotului*, Second Edition, revised and added, Publishing House Sfântu Gheorghe-Vechi, Bucharest, 1999, Mihai Himcinschi, *Misionarismul vieții ecleziiale*, Publishing House Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2008, Mihai Iosu, *Duhovnicul. Vocație, formație, misiune*, Publishing House Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, 2010.

Other works concern the quality of the Orthodox priest not only as a priest, but also as a "shepherd of souls" or psychotherapist. Worth mentioning are: Hierotheos Vlachos, *Psihoterapia ortodoxă - Știința Sfinților Părinți*, 2nd edition, translated by Irina Luminița Niculescu, Publishing House Învieirea, Bucharest 2016; Pavel Chirilă și Teofan Munteanu, *Psihologia in textele Sfintei Scripturi*, Publishing House Christiana, Bucharest, 2012; Marius Vasileanu (coord.), *Preotul ortodox in veacul XXI – schițe pentru un portret –*, Publishing House Lumea Credinței, Bucharest 2019.

Similarly, there are relevant reviews that have highlighted the social-philanthropic work of the members of the Romanian Orthodox Church in today's world. From a sociological perspective, the two books published by Ion Petrică, at the Publishing House of the European Institute of Iași, are relevant: *Biserica și asistența socială din România*, and *Religiozitatea și instituțiile sociale in România*. Following his review, the conclusion of the author was that "the 1989 landmark meant for the social assistance in Romania a rebirth and then a consistent development both at the level of university education and at the level of institutions with activity oriented totally to the social side." ³. In this whole social activity, the Church is one of the decisive factors, in the sense that it was concerned with both the spiritual needs and the material needs of the believers, both being viewed in light of their goal, salvation.

² Ion Petrică, *Biserica și asistența socială din România*, Publishing House Institutul European, Iași, 2012; Idem,

Religiozitatea și instituțiile sociale in România, Publishing House Institutul European, Iași. 2013.

³ Idem, *Religiozitatea și instituțiile sociale in România*, p. 9.

Another paper that analyzes the topic of clerical ministry in the new context after 1990, but this time from a socio-political, historical and anthropological perspective, is the doctoral thesis written by Iuliana Conovici under the guidance of Daniel Barbu, with the theme *Orthodoxy in post-communist Romania*.⁴ . Aiming an objective point of view, the author exposes the involvement of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Romanian socio-historical and cultural-religious context, both with its successes and failures.

It is very useful for the people interested in the collective volume edited at the Publishing House Basilica of the Romanian Patriarchate, under the coordination of pr. prof. dr. Constantin Pătuleanu, with the title: *Asistența social-filantropică și medicală organizată de Biserica Ortodoxă Română în trecut și astăzi*. This paper exposes topics such as: the liturgical dimension of social assistance, the scriptural basis of the Christian philanthropy, the relevance of patristic testimonies on the social involvement of the Orthodox Church, the relationship between love and ministry, the definition of the social doctrine of the Church as "integral Christianity", the contemporary social ethics, the challenges of the mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church today, etc.

Last but not least, other doctoral research projects, such as the one undertaken by Pr. Petru Ovidiu Băgăcian at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Alba-Iulia, under the guidance of Fr. Prof. Dr. Mihai Himecinski⁶. Another PhD thesis, unpublished, belongs to Nichita Dănuț: *Parohia ortodoxă – orizont al propovăduirii Evangheliei, mărturiei creștine și culturale și al filantropiei* (Iași, 2014, tutor pr. Prof. Dr. Petraru Gheorghe)

The importance and topicality of the theme . The realities of the totalitarian times in Romania, ended in the human sacrifices of December 1989, are still present in the experience and mentality of many of us. From a completely different perspective, the years that followed proved to be - for Christianity, in general, and for Romanian Orthodoxy, in particular

- even more difficult, through social, cultural, political and religious tests; through a certain kind of institutional and personal degrowth; by the invasion of the so-called "Evangelists", with the intention of "re-evangelizing" the Romanian people; by increasing the attacks of the same order coming this time from cults and sects with a historical background in our space; through manifest and constant distrust, expressed above all

⁴ Iuliana Conovici, *Ortodoxia în România postcomunistă. Reconstrucția unei identități publice*, 2. vol, Publishing House Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2009.

⁵ Constantin Pătuleanu (coord.), *Asistența social-filantropică și medicală organizată de Biserica Ortodoxă Română în trecut și astăzi*, Publishing House Basilica, Bucharest 2012.

⁶ See Petru Ovidiu Băgăcian, *Ortopraxia Bisericii Ortodoxe Române la începutul secolului al XXI-lea. Aspecte misionar-pastorale*, Publishing House Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2018.

in recent years, in the governing institutions and its granting, to a large extent, to the Church; through the emergence - at first subtle and feeble, then increasingly more concrete - of the elements of secularization at the level of Christian living; through the social and mental effort to initiate the request for Romania's accession to the European Union and then by adapting it to the status required by the suprastatal structures; by instrumentalizing and exacerbating the human power in moral actions, which mainly concern decisions taken in place of others, especially in the field of medicine; by problematizing the human being and especially the life of his neighbor, from birth to death, through the bioethical act, etc. The hope of the first months after gaining freedom in Romania - after all, after an extended confinement, this was understood by most as libertine - passed through the risk of turning into despair.

The contact with the new realities of the society in search and assertion of a new identity, dismantling of the traditional society, the effects of the "delayed" modernity directly merged with postmodernity, the mirage of the search of the West and the movement of the population that followed, the excessive technicalization and the search for the new economic and financial crisis and so on are phenomena suddenly faced by all of us, without any prior training and whose first general effects are the weakening of social relations and the tendency to privatize religious living. On the other hand, the relationship of the Church with the believers - and we refer primarily to the Orthodox ones - has already begun to be devoid of the traditional aura that gave it authority and credibility and has reached the ordinary social relations, almost competitive, with other institutions, and human relations have become impoverished in their dynamics and utilitarianism that engaged the human being in the race to seek and choose, at his pleasure, a variety of goods, the religious and spiritual realities - devalued to a certain extent - being likened to a consumption market and, therefore, subjecting itself to new competition.

At present, the Church is called to become involved in society, in the economic and political life, fighting against social injustice and oppression. Pastoral theology, as a practical discipline encompassing Christian social assistance and the cult of the Church, and can only lead to the full definition of true faith. Nevertheless, the Orthodox Christianity cannot be leveled at the stage of social practice, because the Truth is the source of every act. The transition from the Eucharistic Liturgy to the "brother's liturgy" is the essential fact of life in Orthodoxy. The permanent Easter of the Church means "the passage from *Orthodoxy*, that is to say the right confession and

worship of God, in *orthopraxia*, that is , in serving the neighbor and the world”, wrote Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion Bria ⁷ .

Research methodology The research methodology is characterized by its interdisciplinary nature. Thus, this work will be placed at the intersection of several theological research disciplines: missiology, dogma, liturgical theology, catechetical etc. Among the research methods I mention: the historical method, necessary in the correct perception of the mutations produced in the history of humanity and which have determined a certain kind of pastoral-missionary service from the Orthodox Churches; the comparative method helping us to mark the specificity of this ministry both in the different socio-historical contexts, and in relation to the social-philanthropic activity carried out in other Christian traditions (when we considered it relevant); eventually the analytical method, the one that helps us draw the conclusions of this research, aiming especially at highlighting possible solutions for optimizing the priestly ministry in the context of contemporary world. (Obviously, these expositions are not exhaustive, and the proposed solutions refer only to some of the levels of activity of the Orthodox Church in nowadays world.)

Structure of the thesis . The first part of our thesis discloses the fundamental characteristics of a post-modern society. Thus, it is marked by:

1) Globalization. The information and material exchange of today's world is unprecedented in human history. However, this does not only have positive effects; for example, the community - creator and keeper of cultural, ethnic and religious identity - is undermined by the unrelenting individualism (manifested through libertarianism, self-centeredness, hedonism and indifference to the suffering of other people). It is therefore necessary to strengthen the community spirit, that can be offered - in the orthodox perspective - by Christ and the Church.

2) Secularization In modern society, structured mainly on economic and political principles, the Christian faith has been separated and considered a strictly private matter. Religion, in the context of secularism, has a definite or restricted place. Going to Church is interpreted in light of meeting the religious obligations. Thus the one who goes to the Church lives with different visions of the world without realizing that such visions are in radical contradiction to each other. Most of the Christians of the secularized society live and think in terms of a reality and some

⁷ Ion Bria, *Dictionar de Teologie ortodoxă*, 2nd edition, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1994, p. 279.

values that have nothing to do with the religious beliefs they confess (generally more formal). The Church's response to secularization takes both the form of rediscovering some basic teachings of Christian doctrine and the form of practical measures. In theological terms, greater importance should be given to the *oikonomy* of God. We speak of the cosmic dimension of salvation brought in and through Jesus Christ. His work has a double dimension, creative and saving, and has total implications for the salvation of all humanity and creation. The whole universe is redeemed by the life-giving sacrifice of Jesus Christ - the Son of God incarnatPublishing House

3) Pluralism, syncretism, relativism In the opinion of some contemporary authors, we find two predominant lines in the religiosity of the world in which we live: on the one hand, the exacerbation of religious extremisms in the world, on the other, the predominance of the diffuse religious spirit, the eclecticism and the syncretisms. Unfortunately, these tendencies also manifest in Orthodoxy and affect the whole ecclesial body. But it is above all doubt that Orthodoxy is open to dialogue - though this opening should not lead to relativization or the abandonment of essential Christian teachings. In the direct testimony to the world, Christians must have as role model St. Ap. Paul who had a dialogue with the Athenians in Areopag (F. Ap. Chap. 17). At the center of his sermon, however, was the Gospel, the special significance of the person and the work of the Christ Savior. Certainly, the Christian vision was a radical review and a scandal for the Hellenic philosophy, and it is possible that the Christian testimony by members of other religious traditions may be viewed today. This does not have to become a reason for the Church to give up its mission.

4) New secular religions, political correctness, future technologies and transhumanism All these phenomena determine a certain religious ethos, whose influences are increasingly felt by Eastern Christianity. We also meet aggressive feminism, civic activism for gay rights, almost religious fanaticism for the protection of animals, rewriting of recent history and so on. "Sacralization" of new technologies, such as the Internet is addPublishing House Finally, the postmodern ideal becomes transhumanism - the secular cult of *Homo deus* .

The second part of the thesis had as its central theme the Orthodox parish, as a "local church". The church is the condition of the Christian mission, the instrument of the mission and, more than that, the purpose of the mission and the accomplishment of the mission, because the Church is part of the Gospel message.

Having a theandric structure, it is the symbol and anticipation of the eschatological kingdom of God. The attributes of the Church, defined in the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Symbol (325,381), represent both a given fact and a mission for its members, a fact especially evident in the case of the ecumenism / catholicity. The pattern of organization of the human society must be constituted according to the model of the Holy Trinity: a free existence, in the eternal communion of love.

From such a perspective, the most recent Orthodox studies reassessing the position and role of the seculars - and especially women - within the Church must be appreciated and exploitPublishing House Exercise of the ecclesial mission, expressed by the phrase "Liturgy after Liturgy" (arch. Anastasios Yannoulatos, pr. Ion Bria), implies a Eucharistic revival, and a reconsideration of the participation of the seculars in the Eucharist and, in general, in the social-philanthropic activity of the Orthodox Church. Thus, the revitalization of the role of the seculars in the Church takes concrete forms: "declericalization of theology", in the sense of revising the language, the forms and the methods, as a common concern of the Church, which both clergy and seculars need; guiding the youth, a vulnerable human category, for which increased attention is required for effective sharing of faith; increasing the attention to the family cell, to which there are many contemporary threats, endangering the "priesthood of the parents" (these being "temporary representatives and mirrors of parental care and divine mercy"); reassessment of the role of women in the Church, in recognition of her dignity, equal to that of the man, and possessors of a special charisma that absolutely need to receive a place of exercise in the ecclesial community. Regarding this last aspect, certain preconceptions regarding the position of women in the Orthodox Church must be overcome, based on the refusal to accept the ordination of women. However, a reassessment of the role of the deaconesses in the current pastoral-missionary service would be beneficial for the Orthodox mission in the current socio-historical and culturally religious context.

Equally challenging is the issue of "local ecumenism", of interreligious and inter-Christian dialogue at the concrete level of the parish. This issue is becoming more and more imposed due to the phenomena of globalization and migration. The aim is "mutual enrichment", because the relations with people of other religions should never degenerate into rivalry or controversy - pursuing any gain from the weaknesses of the other. Where relationships are positive, i.e. marked by tolerance and dialogue, there

will inevitably come to recognize what is good in other religions; at the same time, this will not encourage us to deepen our knowledge not only of other religions, but also of our own faith (in search of understanding the other as best as possible, we can get to know ourselves better). Of course, this dialogue should not be synonymous with the relativization of the Christian-Orthodox faith teachings, nor with the neglect the evangelical commandments.

The third part of this paper traces, starting from the realities and challenges of the post-modern world, which are the pastoral-missionary coordinates of the Orthodox ministry today.

The neo-testamentary and patristic tradition has always had as its foundation in the service through Word and Mystery. Thus, in the New Testament, *Gospel* is defined as the "good news" or revelation of God in the person and the saving work of Jesus Christ, the message or content of this discovery contained in His preaching and teaching, and the preaching of this message.

As a direct consequence, the whole ecclesial reality expresses the fullness of the saving life of Jesus Christ. The Church is the Body of Christ with many members belonging to the same Head and aimed entirely at His life, as a ecumenic and sacramental community full of the Spirit of Christ, in and through the Holy Sacraments (and especially in and through the Holy Eucharist)). The process is twofold: Christ dwells in us through the grace shared by the Holy Spirit in the Holy Sacraments of the Church, takes form (form) in us, and we are shaped by the image of Christ, aided by the same Holy Spirit. (But, as V. Lossky believed, without speaking of a "double icon" - one of the Son, of a community nature, and one of the Spirit, personal. On the contrary, the two aspects are indissoluble, as are the works of the People of the Holy Trinity.)

The priest's service cannot then be put out of spirituality. It is a process of educational excellence, (self) training. As a teacher in the Sacrament of Confession, the priest must first of all learn from others: from his confessor, from his family and daily life, from theological and secular literature, from his relations with his pastors. He must know particular aspects in the chair of confession: about the state of the penitent, about the truths and duties that the penitent must learn, about his disposition, about how the penitent must conform to his life with Christ, about the art of asking questions. It is also his duty to catechize the believers on the nature and qualities of Confession and to urge them to confess as often as possible. As a "doctor", the priest must know the

pathology of the soul, the forms of their diseases and cures, and the sources and causes of sins, which can be: the occasion of sin, the habit and the temptation. The means of correcting a believer's life is the epitaph or the canon. Its purpose is not a legal one, of criminal satisfaction compulsorily brought to the offended divine justice, but to heal the suffering and the moral wounds of the penitent who repent, to awaken the sorrow in the insensitive and sinful people, to reborn in the spiritual life, to sanctify and deify in Christ.

The priest-believer relationship must be understood in the light of the purpose of all human beings, deification. Karl Felmy spoke about the specificity of the orthodox eschatological vision: "presentist eschatology", and here I thought that Orthodoxy has an important word to say to the world from the perspective it gives to the issues related to suffering and death. Thus, the biblical conception of death, with its two aspects: curse and blessing, is concentrated in the theological thinking of Father Staniloae, who, by confronting the existentialist philosophy and the contemporary Western theology, receives a note of extreme actuality for the modern man. The mystery of death lies in its nature of *bridge*, which makes the transition from the fragmentary meaning of this life to its plenary sense; fullness is provided by a transcendent factor, God, the source of eternal life.

In terms of suffering, we remind that salvation is equivalent to expressing a commitment in the process of healing of the human existence (Holy Fathers called this process asceticism, which had not only an individual meaning, but fully community related). In such a perspective we can also adequately understand the community dimension of the Sacrament of the last unction, a dimension that is expressed in its liturgical ritual. We note the presence of the community next to the sick person for a long time. It is a reality that the contemporary man avoids "facing" suffering. The asylums are increasingly full of old and suffering people, viewed as a "ballast" even by the closest ones in the family, all the more so by the other members of the parish. From here comes the responsibility of the priest to remind the believers of their responsibility as "members of the Body of Christ" - the Church to all the others and especially to the sick people. The deep meaning of the prayer "Our Father" is that, together with the symbol of the Church as the Body of Christ, the New Testament imposed the image of the Church as a family.

The last part of the thesis highlighted some of the pastoral-missionary and liturgical-sacramental challenges of the priestly and philanthropic service. First of all,

in extending the considerations from the previous section, we have tried to give an answer to the "authority dilemma" in spiritual fatherhood. In other words, what is stature and the role of a confessor, and above all, which is the connection between spirituality and the grace received through ordination?

In history, two types of authority coexisted in the Church: on the one hand, the ascetic or charismatic authority specific to the ascets, and on the other hand, the hierarchical or ecclesiastical authority specific to the bishop or the priest. Between them there must be complementarity, an antagonism.

Further we stopped at a few liturgical issues and the answer to the priests should offer. These issues only concern the Saint Liturgy, "Mystery of Mysteries", Mystery par excellence of the Church. Our analysis followed those of important Orthodox liturgists from the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century : pr. A. Schmemmann (representative of the Russian diaspora tradition), pr. Ioannis Foundoulis (representative of the Greek tradition) and pr. Nicolae D. Necula (representative of the Romanian tradition). Among the topics and issues discussed are: understanding the concept of symbol in the Holy Liturgy, the relationship between Confession and the Eucharist - with the types of "spirituality" that they would imply, the revealing of the characteristic features of the Church's Mysteries, and especially of the Eucharist, saying with a loud voice of the "sacramental prayers", the "dense or rare" Communion, the place and ritual role of the Proskomidia, incensory during the Heruvic etc.

To overcome certain mentalities alienated from the Orthodox spirit and to find pastoral-missionary solutions, I must admit that some of them are due to the heterodox and secularizing influences that today's world exerts on the members of the Orthodox Church. For example, Father Schmemmann's description of the Eucharist and of the Eucharistic life and leaning the Liturgy as a source for theology are a direct challenge and counterbalance to modern secularism. In the Eucharist the person is placed in the world before God. Even outside the specific liturgical celebration, the person is called to present the Liturgy by living an Eucharistic life - a life of communion with God. Such a life places the human being in a position to accept his particular place and particular calling (seen and interpreted as gifts) that he has both in the world and before God.

It is precisely this responsibility that underpins the philanthropic work of the Orthodox in the world. The Orthodox Church is by definition an ecclesiastical,

communitarian Church, which manifests its life in the communion relationship through the confession of faith, the worship life and the diaconal ministry of the world. It is a church of serving God and people, as its inward expression in relation to the world and to the society. (Following the pertinent reflections of Mr. Sebastian Moldovan, I have marked the characteristic features of an "integral pastoral care" and its concrete implications.)

In this paper we have referred exclusively to two aspects: the involvement of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the media environment, in the army structures and in the penitentiaries. (These being less treated in relation to other philanthropic aspects, such as helping the poor, the disadvantaged people, etc.) These are aspects that do not exhaust the entire charitable and philanthropic activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Romanian society of today. It is worth noting that, after the fall of the communist regime, the representatives of the Church began to develop a system of social and philanthropic assistance at national level. Religious assistance has been restored in hospitals, asylums, orphanages and charitable actions take place on individual persons. In time, the charity becomes a public service offered by the Church as an improvement and completion of the services offered by the State, but never to replace them. For this reason the Church is accepted as a partner of the State in carrying out its medical and social assistance programs.

In conclusion, I have tried to outline a portrait of the Orthodox priest in the 21st century. Today the priest is no longer just a confessor, philanthropist, teacher, etc.; the priest must be a psychologist, psychotherapist, manager and opinion leader. Among other things, paradoxically, the Orthodox priest of the third millennium is fit to be a priest of "urban pateric". Why paradoxically? Because, as we have shown, analyzed in its essence, the pastoral-missionary service of the priest in the face of the challenges of the world in which the believers live is not a novelty, because the challenges that the Church faces today are not new. In fact, the Church has always been meant to resist ideological-physical injustices and totalitarianisms, and of the relativism, which has become common sense. At the same time, however, we must be very aware of the difficulties of spreading the Christian message in a world full of relativism and moral subjectivism, to people who are ambivalently on the verge of alienation, but driven by the hope of a terrestrial paradise brought by new technologies. The essential qualities that the priest should acquire in order to serve the church as a community of faith that is constantly exercising its mission cannot be resolved neither in abstract thought nor in

sterile pedagogy, but in effective service and relations. We are aware that the topics covered in this thesis only capture some of the major challenges that the Orthodox priest has to face in the context of today's world challenges. (It would be enough to mention here the problem of migration, as an example more than conclusive.) However, we believe that we have managed to provide the theological framework, the coordinates of the Orthodox pastoral-missionary service, that guide the members of the Orthodox Church in their liturgical, philanthropic and spiritual work.

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