

## **The Missionary Imperative In the Orthodox Tradition**

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### **Obstacles to Understanding the Orthodox Approach to Missions**

“It must be kept in mind that the Orthodox Church has never been challenged by an ecclesiological or doctrinal crisis comparable to the Reformation or Counter-Reformation.” (p. 196)

“Therefore, in the ecumenical encounter, the Orthodox Church had to face a Christian world with several centuries of autonomous theological and spiritual development behind it, with a mind and thought forms radically different than those of the East.” (p. 197)

“The Orthodox answers were classified according to Western patterns, reduced to categories familiar to the West, but hardly adequate to Orthodoxy.” (p. 197)

### **Orthodox Doctrine and Experience of the Church**

As Heaven on earth” ... One can rightly describe the church as an eschatological reality, for its essential function is to manifest and to actualize in this world the eschaton, the ultimate reality of salvation and redemption. In and through the church, the kingdom of God is made already present, is communicated to men.” (p. 197)

“The church as a whole is a means of grace, the sacrament of the kingdom ... “ (p. 198)

“The first aspect of the church as response is *God-centered* ... “ (p. 198)

“The second aspect of the church as response is *man – or world-centered*.” (p. 199)

“The eschatological nature of the church is not the negation of the world, but, on the contrary, its affirmation and acceptance as the object of divine love.” (p. 199)

“The church thus is not a self-centered community but precisely a missionary community of salvation not from, but of, the world.” (p. 199)

### **The Missionary Imperative**

“ the last and the crucial segment of the history of salvation” is “the proclamation and the communication of the eschaton, which is already the being of the church and indeed its only being.” (p. 199)

“There are two complementary movements in the Eucharistic rite: the movement of ascension and the movement of return.” (p. 200)

“The Eucharist is always the end, the sacrament of the Parousia; and yet it is always the beginning, the starting point: now the mission begins.” (p. 200)

“The Eucharist, transforming the church into what it is, transforms it into mission.” (p. 200)

### **The Object of Mission**

The objects and goals of mission “are man and the world.” (p. 200)

“The church, the sacrament of Christ, is not a religious society of converts, an organization to satisfy the religious needs of man. It is the new life and redeems therefore the whole life, the total being of man.” (p. 200)

“The kingdom is yet to come and the church is not of this world. And yet this kingdom to come is already present and the church is fulfilled in this world.” (p. 201)

“In the world of incarnation nothing neutral remains, nothing can be taken away from the Son of man.” (p. 201)

### **Potential Questions**

Why is mission so integral to the Gospel?

What does Fr. Schmemmann mean by the “eschatological” aspect of the Church? How is this realized and experienced in the Eucharist?

How does the Liturgy and Eucharist lead to mission?

How have we, as Orthodox, tried to restore this eschatological and Eucharistic dimension of the Church in our parishes today?

The inner meaning of tradition. Orthodox history is marked outwardly by a series of sudden breaks: the capture of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem by Arab Mohammedans; the burning of Kiev by the Mongols; the two sacks of Constantinople; the October Revolution in Russia. Yet these events, while they have transformed the external appearance of the Orthodox world, have never broken the inward continuity of the Orthodox Church. This idea of living continuity is summed up for the Orthodox in the one word Tradition. "We do not change the everlasting boundaries which our fathers have set," wrote John of Damascus, "but we keep the Tradition, just as we received it" (On Icons, II, 12 (P. G. XCIV, 1297B). Orthodox are always talking about Tradition. Mission remains God's mission;" 22 . In the frame of missio Dei LWF sees the missionary responsibility as an ecclesiastical partnership, the missio Dei paradigm receiving in this case an ecumenical dimension. See below: "individual Christians or families from different parts of the world may receive a call, from God through a sister church, to share mission responsibility with another church in a different geographical location or sociocultural situation. "The Missionary Imperative in the Orthodox Tradition," in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, Gerald H. Anderson, ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 250-257. "O poniatii pervenstva v pravoslavnoi eikleziologii," *Vestnik Russkogo studencheskogo khristianskogo dvizheniia* 60 (1961), 28-42; 62/63 (1961), 51-65.