Book Reviews

Cristian Sonea, *Ministry and responsibility. A Theological Vision on the Mission of the Laity [Apostolat și responsabilitate. O viziune teologică asupra misiunii laicatului]*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2015, 368p.

Ciprian Iulian Toroczkai*

The present book is the revised and enlarged edition of the doctoral thesis defended by the author in 2010, at the Department for Orthodox Theology within „Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, under the scientific supervision of fr. Valer Bel who is also signing the foreword of the book (pp. 9-14).

The research premise that grounds the author's research is the following: “The inceptive idea that initiated this volume was the fact that the meaning of the concept “God's mission” (*missio Dei*) –as expressed in the work of Jesus Christ, sent to the world for the redemption and the life of the world (*missio Filii*), in the church-founding work of the Holy Spirit and the initiation of the Christian mission (*missio Spiritus Sancti*) and the sending of the apostles and of the apostolic Church (*missio ecclesiae*) – should be also particularized for the mission of the members of the Church (*missio Hominis*)” (p.15). In what regards the grounds that had triggered the writing of the book, the author lists four reasons: 1) “there is no anthropological underpinning of the mission in Romanian missionary theology” (p.19); 2) the relatively new discipline of Missiology in Orthodox theology, which requires future close examination of certain themes; 3) the lack of similar works in the Romanian theological domain, since the most recent ones were written in the inter-war period: *Laypersons in the Church [Mirenii în Biserică]* was issued in 1939, by Liviu Stan, canon law professor at the Department for Orthodox Theology, Sibiu, and, also in Sibiu, Spiridon Căndea published in 1944 the book entitled *Lay Apostleship [Apostolatul laic]*. (Unquestionably, during the atheist communist period any attempt to address this theme would have been severely punished, in such a way that church ministry was quartered to the worship place alone, namely to liturgical ministry); 4) finally, the fact that “there is still an incorrect perception in communities of

* Ciprian Iulian Toroczkai, PhD Assistant Professor at the Andrei Șaguna Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania. Address: Str. Timotei Popovici nr. 12, Sibiu, RO-550164;; e-mail: torocipri@gmail.com.

believers and civil society, according to which missionary work is exclusively an attribute of Church hierarchy and its related structures” (p. 26).

The book is structured in five, larger, chapters. The first one presents biblical references for mission (p. 29-122). The text in Mt. 28, 16-20 is central among these, for being sent in mission was not meant only for the Apostles, but also for all Christians, taking on the model of Christ and the Apostles. Therefore, all those involved in mission are nothing else but “witnesses of Christ’s work” (Luke 24, 48; Acts: 10, 41). The gospel texts prove that the mission must be carried „in Christ’s way”, taking after an already famous phrasing of archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos. An assessment of Paul’s letters also attests the responsibility of missionary ministry of all Christians (p. 104).

The second chapter deals with patristic references for mission (p. 123-170). The apostolic Fathers, the Cappadocian Fathers and saint Maximus the Confessor are gradually presented – probably considered paradigmatic by the author for the way in which the mission of Christians worldwide was understood. The analyses – from a missionary point of view – of the five Maximian syntheses are extremely interesting: between man and woman, paradise and inhabited world, heaven and earth, intelligible and sensible world, God and His creation. St. Maximus’ perspective was actually universal: *each person* has as existence goal the accomplishment of these syntheses. Even more so, this mission must be undertaken by *all Christians*, with the awareness that they have to follow The One that undertook the ministry of the world through the Incarnation, the eternal Son of God.

The third chapter addresses contemporary Orthodox mission theology through three of its most influential representatives: Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993), Ion Bria (1929-2002) and archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos (b. 1929). Without going into further details, I mention here some of the contributions they made to the development of orthodox missionary theology through themes such as: mission through the sanctity of life, „the Liturgy after the Liturgy”, mission *in Christ’s way* etc.

The last two chapters present the anthropological and theological premises of the missionary calling (p. 2011), namely its actualization in the contemporary word (p. 255). These are two chapters of doctrinal synthesis in which the mission fundamentals are presented, from a Christian Orthodox point of view. To be Christian is, essentially, to be a missionary. Created in the image of a Trinitary God and aspiring to His likeness, the human person is called, by his or her very structure, to communion and holiness. The Father’s sending of the Son in the world is the condition for the apostleship of all Christians, who are, at their turn, sent in the world, under the work of

the Holy Spirit, so that they announce the Good News. In other words, by means of the graces bestowed through the initiation sacraments (Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist), the Christian – be it a cleric or a layman – has as duty missionary work. In the words of the author, “taking upon oneself the cross of Christ in the mission of the Church” represents a “responsibility for all Christians” (p. 276).

What does such a mission consist of? First of all, in announcing the Good News; secondly, in the transmission of true faith along the centuries; third of all, in the sacramental embodiment of the whole creation within the Church, the “living body of Christ”; fourthly, by testifying through the holiness of life; fifthly, by demonstrating responsibility towards the whole of creation whose calling is to celebrate a “cosmic Liturgy” as continuation of the Eucharistic Liturgy.

Such a book compensates the lack of Romanian theological writings on the subject of the role of laypersons within the Church. This is indeed a theme that enjoys an increasing interest.¹ The merit of the author is that he accomplished an excellent biblical and theological underpinning of the role of laypersons in mission. Nevertheless, I should also mention a few deficiencies which could be remedied in case of an English version. First of all, references to concrete, pastoral solutions for the revival of laypersons in parishes are missing. Nor is the situation in Romanian theological education, especially university education, dealt with, in which relatively many laypersons are teaching: what role could they have in the act of “declericalizing theology”, to quote an expression by Alexander Schmemmann? It may also be useful to highlight also the role of the intellectual elite in forming a critical-prophetic ethos that regards the Church, more exactly the role that laypersons could undertake in accomplishing the external mission of the Orthodox Church. There is also no differentiation made between the roles that laypersons had within different Orthodox Churches: a completely different situation was met in south-eastern Orthodox churches, which had atheist communist regimes, as compared to Greece or the Orthodox diaspora from Western Europe or the Americas.

¹ In this sense I mention here the publication in German of the already “classic” book by Liviu Stan: *Die Laien in der Kirche, eine historisch-kirchenrechtliche Studie zur Beteiligung der Laien an der Ausübung der Kirchengewalt*, trans. Hermann Pitters, Würzburg 2011. I also mention: Fr. Ion Vicovan and Emilian-Iustinian Roman (eds.), *Laicii și misiunea creștină. Realitate istorică, vocație personală, necesitate eclesială* [*Laypersons and the Christian Mission. Historical reality, personal calling, ecclesiastical necessity*], Iași 2014. This volume comprises of papers presented at the international symposium „Laicii și misiunea creștină: realitate istorică, vocație personală, necesitate eclesială”, [“Laypersons and the Christian Mission. Historical reality, personal calling, ecclesiastical necessity”], organized by the Faculty for Orthodox Theology, Iași, May 23-25, 2013.

Finally, knowing the interests of Fr. Cristian Sonea, the lack of a section that illustrates the missionary role of women in an orthodox parish is forthright surprising. Just as the author has dedicated his book to his wife, Ioana – certainly as an acknowledgement of the positive influence she has had upon his academic and priestly ministry – there should be, I think, more emphasis placed on the pastoral and missionary ministry within the Orthodox Church. It is a delicate matter in nowadays Orthodox theology, and it is very little touched upon (many misconnecting it with the issue of women ordination). Still, it cannot be by any means neglected, from a missionary point of view. And just as an illustrating example: at a conference held in Iasi, in 2013, dr. Pavel Chirilă, extremely involved in philanthropic activities in Romania, director of the *Christiana* association, was asked by the undersigned what he would do without women to support him. His answer left no room for interpretations: “Nothing! Except for me and the driver, all other collaborators – around 30 persons – are women...”