
New challenges for the Orthodox mission after the Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete (2016)

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Zusammenfassung

Im Jahr 2016 beging die Orthodoxe Kirche auf Kreta das »Heilige und Große Konzil«, bei dem ein neuer und ganzheitlicher Ansatz von Mission und Evangelisierung bekräftigt wurde, wie er den Herausforderungen der modernen pluralistischen und globalisierten Gesellschaften entspricht. Das Konzil erklärte, die Mission sei in erster Linie die Proklamation des *Eschaton* in der Geschichte, sie sei sowohl ein sichtbares Zeichen des Reiches Gottes als auch die Teilnahme an diesem. Die Mission spiegelt Gottes *hypostasis*, die Weise, wie er als vollkommene Einheit und Communio von Personen existiert. Gemäß dieser theologischen Wahrheit nimmt die Kirche das sakrifizielle und diakonale *Ethos* Christi an, der in sich das gesamte menschliche Geschlecht versöhnt hat; dies impliziert, dass »die anderen« und »die draußen« Partner und nicht einfach Objekte der Evangelisierung sind. Diese universale Strahlung der *missio Dei* bedeutet, dass die Gaben, die er der Menschheit geschenkt hat (Frieden, Gerechtigkeit, Recht-schaffenheit), die menschliche Synergie und die Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Orthodoxen und den Gläubigen anderer Kirchen und Religionen, ja aller »Menschen gute Willens« verlangen.

Schlüsselbegriffe

→ Orthodoxe Mission
→ Panorthodoxes Konzil von Kreta (2016)
→ Neuevangelisierung

Abstract

The Orthodox Church celebrated in Crete (2016) the »Holy and Great Council« in which a renewed and holistic approach on mission and evangelism was confirmed, in accordance to the challenges of the modern pluralistic and globalized societies. The Council declared solemnly that the mission is in the first place the proclamation in history of the *eschaton*, which in its turn is a visible sign of and a participation in the Kingdom of God. Mission reflects God's *hypostasis* – the way in He exists as a perfect unity and communion of Persons. Along with this theological truth, the Church embraces the sacrificial and diaconal *ethos* of Christ who reconciled in Himself the whole human gender, which implies that the »others« and »those outside« are partners, and not simply objects, of the evangelism. Such universal breath of the *missio Dei* means that the gifts that He offered to humanity (peace, justice, righteousness) need the human synergy and the collaboration between the Orthodox and the faithful of different church traditions and religions, and even with all »people of good will«.

Keywords

→ Orthodox mission
→ Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete (2016)
→ re-evangelization

Sumario

En 2016 la Iglesia ortodoxa celebró en Kreta el »Santo y gran Sínodo«, en el que se acentuó una visión nueva e integral de la misión y la evangelización, como corresponde a los desafíos de las sociedades modernas y globalizadas. De manera solemne, el Sínodo declaró que la misión en primer lugar consiste en la proclamación del *Eschaton* en la historia; es tanto un signo visible del Reino de Dios como también la participación en él. La misión refleja la *hipostasis* de Dios, la manera como él es la unidad y comunión perfecta de personas. Según esta verdad teológica, la Iglesia acepta el ethos sacrificial y diaconal de Cristo, que ha reconciliado en sí a todo el género humano. Esto implica que »los otros« y »los de afuera« son socios y no meros objetos de la evangelización. Esta irradiación universal de la *missio Dei* significa que los dones, que él ha regalado a la humanidad (paz y justicia, integridad), exigen la sinergia humana y la colaboración entre los ortodoxos y los fieles de diferentes tradiciones eclesiales y religiones, incluso de todos »los hombres de buena voluntad«.

Palabras clave

→ misión ortodoxa
→ Sínodo Panortodoxo de Kreta (2016)
→ nueva evangelización

1 Is Orthodoxy uninterested to mission?

Until a generation ago Eastern Orthodoxy was considered as indifferent to evangelization and attracted only by dogmatic confessionalism and by the ascetic, that is the inner and spiritual, dimension of the Kingdom of God (Lk 17,21: »The Kingdom of God is *within you*«, instead of the much more communal version of the Kingdom which is »in *your midst*«)¹. In fact, David Bosch in his *Transforming Mission* commented that »in the Eastern tradition [...] the emphasis was on conservation and restoration, rather than on embarking on a journey into the unknown. The key words were tradition, orthodoxy, and the Fathers, and the church became the bulwark of right doctrine. Orthodox churches tended to become ingrown, excessively nationalistic, and without a concern for those outside«².

However, the ecumenical achievements of the past century, as well as the missionary awakening of many local Orthodox Churches (especially in Africa and in Asia) and the efforts of inspired missiologists (such as the Greek-Orthodox Archbishop of Albania, Anastasios Yannoulatos, and the late Romanian theologian, Fr. Ion Bria) brought Orthodoxy closer to – or, in some cases, *in the centre of* – the wider Christian missiological community. Orthodox are now willing to react more positively to the challenges of the third millennium (globalism, cultural pluralism, economic instability, ecological crisis, acceptance that all religions are able to promote coexistence among peoples) and to offer their own perspective to contemporary theological discussions, especially in fields, like: the Trinitarian and Pneumatological basis of mission (creation belongs to God's Trinitarian way of being, while the Economy of Christ goes side-by-side with the economy of the Holy Spirit); the dimension of *martyria* as an opposite to arrogance or confessional (or even national) triumphalism and denominational antagonism; the liturgical importance of Christian witness in the form of »the liturgy after the Liturgy«³. Thus, Orthodox involvement in the global mission movement is now seen in a much constructive manner.

Today, the approximately 260 million Orthodox Christian lie in »national«, mainly Orthodox-majority States in which Christian faith is considered solid and important for public and social life⁴. Still, religious observance is low among Orthodox in Eastern Europe (that is former USSR Republics), while it's slightly higher in South-European countries (Balkans). According to recent data, baptism is universal (almost 100%) among Orthodox Christians in Balkans (Greece, Romania, Serbia etc.) and very high in Eastern Europe (Russia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Kazakhstan etc.). Yet, the rate of weekly attendance of Church service (Eucharist) is moderate or low (21% in Romania, 17% in Georgia and Greece,

1 Cf. Petros VASSILIADIS, Introductory remarks, in: ID. (ed.), *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, Oxford 2013, 2-3.

2 David BOSCH, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll 1991, 212-213.

3 Cf. Petros VASSILIADIS, *Together Towards Life: An Orthodox Assessment*, in: Kenneth ROSS/Jooseop KEUM/Kyriaki AVTZI/Roderick R. HEWITT (ed.), *Ecumenical Missiology. Changing Landscapes and New Conceptions of Mission*, Oxford 2016.

4 The Orthodox Church is a family of local, independent, self-governing (Autocephalous) Churches held together by a triple bond: (a) unity in the faith, (b) communion in the sacraments and (c) unity in a common canonical tradition. Each local Orthodox Church is in full agreement with the rest on all matters of doctrine. They all share the same Apostolic faith and the teachings of the Seven Ecumenical Councils which they accept as normative. Faith is a *conditio sine qua non* for sacramental communion. At present, the 14 Autocephalous Orthodox Churches are: a) The four ancient Patriarchates of: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem;

b) The ten Autocephalous Churches of: Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Albania, Czech lands and Slovakia. Geographically, the areas where the Orthodox Churches are present lie in Eastern Europe (Russia, Poland, Czech Lands & Slovakia), the Balkan peninsula (Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania) and along the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea (North Africa and Middle East – Cyprus, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem). Cf. Timothy WARE, *The Orthodox Church. An Introduction to Eastern Orthodoxy*, London 2015.

12% in Ukraine, 6% in Russia and Serbia), though 61% of Orthodox in Balkans believe in God with absolute certainty (compared to the 33% of ex-USSR countries)⁵.

One could say that while Orthodoxy apparently seems to preserve its influence on traditional Christian territories, on the other hand the new ecumenical understanding of mission is not any more limited to terms such as »Christianization«, »conversion« etc. – at least in their literal and exclusive sense – but it applies more inclusive ideas, like witness/*martyria*, and interreligious/intercultural dialogue. The Orthodox Church had formally endorsed this goal since the 2008 Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches which stated that: »Efforts to distance religion from societal life constitute the common tendency of many modern states. The principle of a secular state can be preserved; however, it is unacceptable to interpret this principle as a radical marginalization of religion from all spheres of public life«⁶.

In this paper we will question if Orthodoxy is ready to accomplish the transition from the traditional model of »national orthodoxies« to the one in which the vocation to announce the Gospel can embrace a more inclusive – i.e. more universal – attitude in the post-modern, post-nationalistic, and pluralistic world situations⁷.

2 Gospel, service and prophetism

The 2008 Synaxis of the Orthodox Primates had endorsed the view that »the Church of Christ today fulfils its ministry in a rapidly developing world, which has now become interconnected through means of communication and the development of means of transportation and technology«⁸.

The awareness that the present global world experiences profound and rapid changes had inevitably raised the demand for the updating of the traditional – or »national« – orthodox missionary models in order to challenge those cultures and ideologies that live in a condition of life »without Christ« or that can be defined as »post« or even as »not any more« Christian⁹.

This growing sensibility of Orthodoxy to mission was confirmed by the convocation of the »Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church« (Crete, June 2016) and by the approval of the latter of the document »The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World«¹⁰. This Statement, together with the conciliar Encyclical, the conciliar Message and the document »Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World« concern Orthodoxy *vis à vis* the others. Previously, the 5th Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (2015) had edited the document issued by the 3rd Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (1986) entitled »The contribution of the Orthodox Church to the realization of peace, justice, liberty,

5 PEW RESEARCH CENTER, Nov. 8, 2017, »Orthodox Christianity in the 21st century«, in: <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/> (25.3.2018).

6 Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches, in: <http://www.ec-patr.org/docdisplay.php?lang=en&id=995&tla=en> (20.3.2018).

7 It must be said that the concept of »national Church« is not the centre or the starting point of orthodox ecclesiology, but rather a »modern«, so to say, deviation of the Eucharistic ecclesiology. According to the latter, it is the Eucharist, and not the nation, that constitutes the true nature and purpose of the Church. By celebrating the supper of Christ, the Church anticipates by grace the Kingdom of God – a Kingdom of perfect communion among the people that reflects the unity and communion of the Divine

Persons. Thus, neither the mission nor the kerygma are the realization of the Kingdom, but rather its proclamation.

8 Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches (fn. 6), §4.

9 By saying that I do not mean to underestimate the great contribution of the Orthodox Church and its courageous missionaries to the proclamation of the Gospel in the Roman and Greek-speaking world, in Egypt and Near East, among the Slavs, and in the vast lands of the Russian Empire, from Kiev to Siberia and the Alaska.

fraternity and love among peoples, and the elimination of racial discrimination and other forms of discrimination« – the first, so to say, pan-Orthodox missiological Statement. This attitude was also confirmed by the fact that the topic of »mission« was listed first in the order among the pre-conciliar texts and that the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in His inaugural discourse reminded that »the meeting of the Church in Council makes it by extension also a missionary meeting, that is, one turning outwards and going forth unto all nations (cf. Matt. 28,19) in order to transmit the love of Christ to every person, sharing in the vicissitudes of history, as a sign for the nations (Is. 11,12)«¹¹.

Not accidentally, the Council desired to address its final message »to the Orthodox people and to all people of good will« and to open the horizon of Orthodoxy to »the contemporary diverse and multifarious world«, namely the problems and opportunities of the 21st century, in order to emphasize the pastoral responsibility of the Orthodox Churches to witness the truth about God and to overcome the pain and the anguishes that threaten the integrity of human existence. This task, Patriarch Bartholomew said, derives from the consideration that »in more recent years, new challenges have appeared that demand the articulation of a common direction and position among the individual Orthodox Churches«¹².

On the other hand, the expectation of the »new earth« announced by Christ reveals the need to re-direct ecclesial action from old priorities to current world needs. On the basis of this auspice, the Council of Crete explain that »the Church lives not for herself. She offers herself for the whole of humanity in order to raise up and renew the world into new heavens and a new earth (cf. Rev 21,1)«. The centrality of mission concerns the *pleroma* (= the totality of faithful, clergy, monks and laity) of the body of the Church and, as such, it must be integrated in the events and the pressing needs of our century.

The mission document recalls in its Prologue, not incidentally, the eschatological nature of the Church: »The Church of Christ exists in the world, but is not of the world (cf. Jn 17,11.14-15). The Church as the Body of the incarnate *Logos* of God (John Chrysostom, *Homily before Exile*, 2 PG 52, 429) constitutes the living »presence« as the sign and image of the Kingdom of the Triune God in history, proclaims the good news of a new creation (2 Cor 5,17)«¹³. The Good News of the transformation of the world, the Statement explains, is experienced in the Eucharistic *synaxis*, where Gods dispersed children are gathered together in the same place without distinction of race, gender, age or social origin, as well as in the life of the saints who, by practicing Christian virtues, have witnessed that the transfigured world is not a *utopia*, but an authentic and tangible reality. In this sense, Christian mission becomes truly a »heaven on earth«; mission is mainly not what the Church *does* but what she *is* and *proclaims*, i.e. an ongoing *Pentecost*, a perpetual divine *parousia*. In this way, the apostolate becomes an *anamnesis* of the Lord's »second and glorious coming«, as the *anaphora* of the Byzantine liturgy reminds us.

10 The convocation of the Council was an important historical moment for Eastern Orthodoxy as a whole, as it sealed 40 years of a preparatory, pre-conciliar process. The gathering's purpose was to promote inter-Orthodox cooperation, to renew Orthodoxy's common voice to contemporary global problems and to witness the unity of the 14 canonical local Autocephalous Churches. The agenda of the Council regarded six points: 1) The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world; 2) The

Orthodox Diaspora; 3) Autonomy and its manner of proclamation; 4) The sacrament of Marriage and its impediments; 5) The importance of Fasting and its application today; and 6) Relations of the Orthodox Church to the rest of the Christian world. Unfortunately, four Churches (Patriarchates of Antioch, Moscow, Bulgaria, Georgia) did not participate in the proceedings of Crete.

11 Opening Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Inaugural Session of the Holy and Great Council, in: https://www.holycouncil.org/-/opening-ecumenical-patriarch?_101_INSTANCE_oOILsDUAGY7C_languageId=en_US (10.3.2018).

12 Ibid.

13 The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World (from now on: *The Mission*), in: <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world>, Prologue.

From this follows the indispensable imperative to [re]-evangelize »God's people in contemporary secularized societies«, as well »those who have not yet come to know Christ« is an »unceasing duty of the Church«¹⁴. Orthodox faithful are and *must be* apostles in the world, and they *must* participate in this missionary journey which consists in¹⁵:

- 1 The announcement of God's plan for the humankind and the creation¹⁶.
- 2 The evangelisation of the world in the mystery of Holy Trinity and the distribution of the gifts of the new creation that God has offered to us (God's righteousness, peace and will for reconciliation)¹⁷.
- 3 The participation in the divine Eucharist and to the so-called »liturgy after the Liturgy«¹⁸.

The exhortation to »live« the new creation means primarily to offer the Gospel to the whole world as a guide and to accompany the humanity in her earthly pilgrimage with love, patience, and prayer. The love of which the Gospel speaks is not an attitude of diplomatic courtesy, nor a conventional philanthropy, but an invitation to welcome and embrace the diaconal *hypostasis* of the Trinity, towards an ascetic *exodus* from the narrow limits of the »I«, and to trust the meaning of the relationship with the Triune God. »The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is a divine-human communion in the image of the Holy Trinity, a foretaste and experience of the *eschaton* in the holy Eucharist and a revelation of the glory of the things to come, and, as a continuous Pentecost, the Church raises her prophetic voice in this world that cannot be silenced, the presence and witness of Gods Kingdom »that has come with power« (cf. Mark 9,1)«¹⁹.

Thus, the *eschaton* has a central role in the *missio ecclesiae*, for the Church announces *a new way of being* that has been revealed to her and which does not belong to the world of this century. Therefrom, comes out the belief that the celebration of the Divine Liturgy »constitutes the innermost core also of the conciliar functioning of the ecclesial body«²⁰. The document notes that the Orthodox Church, based on the experience and the teaching of the »patristic, liturgical, and ascetical tradition, the Orthodox Church«, shares »the concern and anxiety of contemporary humanity with regard to fundamental existential questions that preoccupy the world today«, allowing »the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding (Phil 4,7), reconciliation, and love to prevail in the world«²¹. The *missio ecclesiae* in such an eschatological and therefore liturgical perspective does not by any means contradicts the primary *missio Dei* theology, which in its Trinitarian understanding leads to the same relational missionary attitude.

It is beyond any doubt that the Council's main intent was to reconcile the (apparent or effective) dialectic tension between prophecy and social commitment towards a truly *evangelical historical prophetism*. Evangelical life is for Christians a promise and a hope, i.e. an event that we live by grace (in the Eucharist, and in the holiness of the saints). However, Church mission is realized through the proclamation of the »already« of the *eschaton* to the »not yet« of history. Thus, the inevitable tension between living in the world and not being of this world is overcome by the *ethos* and sacrificial example of Christ that leads everyone to the participation in His Resurrection, in which every trace of death and pain disappears. If mission is not engaged in social life, she does not follow the traces of Christ's Incarnation, she does not breathe the sanctifying breath of the Holy Spirit, and she does

14 Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, Crete, June 2016, 6.

15 Cf. Encyclical, 6; cf. The Mission (fn. 13), B.3.

16 Cf. The Mission (fn. 13), I.1, VI.1, VI.4; Encyclical, II.

17 Cf. The Mission (fn. 13), Prologue, III.1, VI.9; Encyclical, II.6.

18 Cf. Encyclical, Epilogue, I.3, II.6, VII.20.

19 Encyclical, 1.

20 Encyclical, 20.

21 The Mission (fn. 13), Prologue.

not defeat our *old* way of being. The mission document explains that the eschatological nature of Christianity does not lead to any kind of exodus *from* history, but invites us to project the Kingdom *within* it.

Therefore, Christian peace has a »mystical« power since it is based on the peace of Christ, that is to say:

- 1 The *reconciliation* of all things in Him.
- 2 The manifestation of the *organic unity* of humankind.
- 3 The *universality of the ideals* of peace, liberty and social justice.

Such universal gifts, although of divine origin, need human synergy and arise where Christians »strive for the work of faith, love, and hope in our Lord Jesus Christ«, and where peace, justice, fraternity and love is achieved »among all children of the one heavenly Father, as well as between all peoples who make up the one human family«. Interreligious (or inter-faith) cooperation can offer a concrete support to those who in various parts of the world »are deprived of the benefits of peace and justice« (*The Mission*, III, 3-5). Repression and persecution of Christians and of faithful of other religious communities threatens »existing interfaith and international relations«. The proximity of Christians with the rest of humanity is inspired not only by the principle of universal dignity of mankind, but also by the ethical and practical effects of Christian faith and of the abolition of »all barriers erected by enmity and prejudice« (*The Mission*, V.2).

The conciliar Message insists that »sober inter-religious dialogue helps significantly to promote mutual trust, peace and reconciliation [...] The truth, however, is that fundamentalism, as »zeal not based on knowledge (Rom 10,2), constitutes an expression of morbid religiosity. A true Christian, following the example of the crucified Lord, sacrifices himself and does not sacrifice others, and for this reason is the most stringent critic of fundamentalism of whatever provenance. Honest interfaith dialogue contributes to the development of mutual trust and to the promotion of peace and reconciliation« (4.17).

Finally, in the Mission Statement it is stated that: »The various local Orthodox Churches can contribute to inter-religious understanding and co-operation for the peaceful co-existence and harmonious living together in society, without this involving any religious syncretism« (A3); and later: »The Orthodox Church resolutely condemns the multifaceted conflicts and wars provoked by fanaticism that derives from religious principles [...] Existing interfaith and international relations are threatened, while many Christians are forced to abandon their homes« (D.3).

The commitment of [re-]evangelization must not ignore the fact that the Gospel of Christ is offered to all, not in an aggressive manner, nor in the sense of a forced conversion to Christian faith, but as a guide in order to redeem the world from its sufferings. Inter-faith-dialogue from an Orthodox Christian point of view aims to make the »other« a real partner in, and not just an »object« of, mission.

In this sense, the profile of ecclesial mission becomes a continuous »witness of love through service«, as the title of paragraph VI reiterates, which conclusion summarizes the focal point of the Council:

In our times, just as throughout history, the prophetic and pastoral voice of the Church, the redeeming word of the Cross and of the Resurrection, appeals to the heart of humankind, calling us, with the Apostle Paul, to embrace and experience whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report (Phil 4,8) – namely, the sacrificial love of Her Crucified Lord, the only way to a world of peace, justice, freedom, and love among peoples and between nations.

3 The challenge of re-evangelization

The Council reminded us that Christians are concerned not only of the evangelization of those who do not yet know Christ, but also of the re-evangelization of the people of God in the present secularized societies, as a result of secularization. The commitment of re-evangelization must not ignore the fact that the Gospel of Christ is offered to all, not in an aggressive manner, nor in the sense of a forced conversion to Christian faith, but as a guide in order to redeem the world from its sufferings.

The Gospel is given to the whole world in order to re-build it spiritually and in this sense has a strong and irreversible ideal that tends to welcome and not to divide humanity. The witness of the Gospel must share and not hide the gifts of God, especially the reconciliation and the sacrificial *ethos* (= the way of being) of the Crucified Lord.

This could lead one to presume that in the post-Constantinian world, Christianity from an institution belonging to the civil apparatus becomes a post-institution with the task to integrate history into the eternity, the biblical reality of »kairos« beyond the illusory »now« of the secular ideologies and the goal of the institutional prevalence of Christianity. The divine [»not of the world« (John 18,36)] character of the Church is incompatible with any conformation to the world (cf. Rom 12,2)²². Therefore, one can argue that the topic of re-evangelization moves us from the institutional to the prophetic Christianity in which we re-discover our charismatic vocation to accompany the world, also with its post-Christian or pluralistic characteristics, to the spiritual safeness of Christ.

In other words, re-evangelization means the moving from the model of the State-guarantor of a dominant religion towards the one in which the Church is a post-institution which reveals the diaconal and relational way of existence with the others. Christian mission doesn't legitimize or ideologize the current Church-State model, nor the development of an apologetic attitudes towards the world; Christians are called to announce the hope of Resurrection! That is why the Council wanted to underline the responsibility of the members of the Church to overcome the »Christian by birth« model with that of »Christian by vocation or by free choice«²³.

The need of an articulation of an Orthodox »theology of the others« much focus on the following aspects:

- 1 Participation in the inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue does not mean acceptance that all religions are the same.
- 2 The universality of the truth of the Church cannot be undermined, nor the faith that Christ is »the way, the truth and the life« (Jn 14,6) must be reversed, notand even the apostles« belief that »there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved« (Acts 4,12).

²² Encyclical, 10.

²³ Archbishop of Albania, Anastasios, defined egocentrism as the »major heresy« and the »mother of all heresies«, as a »poison of human relationships and of all forms of harmonious and creative coexistence«. Ego-centrism of people, States and groups is »the opposite to peace«. Anastasios [YANNOULATOS], »Discourse at the opening ceremony of the Holy and Great Council« (in Greek), in: <https://www.holycouncil.org>.

²⁴ Having said all the above, I do not insist, together with other Orthodox missiologists, that the Orthodox mission statement (*The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*) is the perfect mission document, but a Statement that opens new avenues in a traditional Church, like the Eastern Orthodox one. See recommendations in <https://public.orthodoxy.org/2016/05/09/some-comments-on-the-mission-document-by-orthodox-missiologists/> (20.3.2018).

²⁵ Encyclical, 3.

²⁶ Opening Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Inaugural Session of the Holy and Great Council (fn. 11).

- 3 Inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue does not lead to syncretism, it is not an academic dialogue, neither it's related to a »comparative religion«; it is a dialogue with the faithful of the other living religions (inter-faith dialogue), and, as such, it should not lead to an anti-modern front.
- 4 The Kingdom of God does not assume institutional forms, but it reveals a new way of being which doesn't aim at the propagation or transmission of intellectual and logical convictions, »religious« doctrines and moral commands, but at the transmission of the life of *communion* that exists in God and guides the whole human gender in various ways and at different levels towards the Life of the Trinity.

4 Conclusions

The Council of Crete exposed its teaching with coherence to the ecumenical openness of Orthodoxy. It invited the Orthodox *pleroma* to welcome the charismatic and *exodic* character of the Gospel, to embrace the sacrificial and diaconal love of God, and to engage our neighbours to the life of the Kingdom. Such participation does not imply any kind of coercion or forced attachment to Christian dogmas, but it relates the announcement of Gospel with the *eschaton*, with the life of the Paraclete which we already live in the Eucharist. The task of the Church is to turn history into a space where salvation can be – or is – realized. Bringing the *eschaton* into history means to announce the coming of the Kingdom, to denounce the dominion of secularization (and do not identify Christian identity with any form of secular ideology) and to live the dialogic tense with the world, seeking the abundance of goodness, even where sin seems to prevail.

Thus, the conciliar documents adopted a prophetic logic at the basis of which stands the organic unity of humanity and the recapitulation of all things in Christ, which brings us dynamically to the option of cooperation with the so-called »heterodox« and with not Christians.²⁴ Those who are engaged in mission are no longer subject to the divisional tensions of history (confessional, cultural or even ethnic); they rather have the task to discover the signs of God beyond all social, racial, confessional and religious differences, as ethno-phyletism is as an »ecclesiological heresy«²⁵. The texts help us to assert that the ideal of the Christian mission is far from legitimizing the politicization of faith that schematizes a Christianity in history, namely a »party« Christianity, accustomed to fight ideological or national battles, without offering to the humankind the holistic prospect of Christian message. As Patriarch Bartholomew pointed out »without synodality, the unity of the Church is severed, the sanctity of its members is reduced to mere individual morality and articulation about virtue, catholicity is sacrificed in favor of particular individual, collective, national and other secular interests or intentions, and the apostolic message falls prey to various heresies and ruses of human reason«²⁶. ♦