Studii și Articole

History, identity and mission

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Abstract: *Beginning with the Apostolic Age, the missionary work of the Church had at its core the process of witnessing the divine-human identity of Our Saviour Jesus Christ. The Christian identity of each member of the Church is produced and developed hic et nunc, even in our times, based on this fundament. The unanimous ecclesial consciousness considers that God, Who created the time and later the visible world, also gave to the history the possibility to open itself toward eternity, as a fulfilment of the divine plan, and the capacity to receive and to be sanctified through the Incarnation of the Son of God and the descent of the transcendence into immanence. From that point, the time and the history are parted in two. Nothing from what is specific to the history is foreign to God and all that is the will of God, through Christ, is fulfilled missionary in the historical context. Our study aims to prove that the apostolic mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church and the unity of the Romanian nation were not foreign to the work and to the presence of the Holy Trinity, during the historical and missionary events and that the Christian and national identity are complementary on their path to eternity.*

Keywords: *identity, mission, faith, witnessing, time, history, nation, eternity.*

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1. The Christian identity – a premise for mission

The Christian identity is an actual missionary theme and a not too easy duty for those working in the missionary space of the communities. It is not easy to approach terms as Christian community, interpersonal relations, common responsibility, life in Christ, etc. Moreover, it is necessary to indicate the sense and the aim of the term '**Christian identity**', which ultimately desire to achieve the unity of all people in Christ (Jn. 17:11)

This missionary effort can be compared either with the folly of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18), for those desiring not this adhesion, or with the *scientia Crucis*, for those conjugating their human identity with the deified human nature from the unique divine Hypostasis of Our Saviour Jesus Christ.

There are still opinions according to which the church does not have a concrete missionary message to the beginning of the third millennium. As a response, we believe that the problem of the identity, in general and, especially the problem of the Christian identity can be a missionary challenge for the year 2018, dedicated to the **Centennial of the Great Union (1918-2018)**, when we ask ourselves objectively: which is the trajectory of our Romanian nation?

The model of the New Testament, from the first epistle addressed by Saint Paul to the Corinthians, can pull the first cord: the risk of division and the mentality deriving from it. The political world is divided and so are the structures of the liberal economy, the nations are searching for new geostrategic borders, dividing populations and ethnies, which used to live together for hundreds or thousands of years. The Church remains the only model of complete unity, because it does not produce by itself this unity, but it receives it as gift from her Head: Jesus Christ. *Una Sancta* is the desire for union of the entire world.

During the times of Saint Paul the world was divided in Jews and Pagans, slaves and free people, men and women. A new religious spectre corresponds to that division, one that is actual and syncretic. The religious identity is in this environment a prerogative almost impossible to avoid. “Inside the Church, and not only between churches, there is a break-up, a tendency for fractionation, threatening the spiritual and historical unity. The opposition between the progressive and the traditional sides, mentioned by various religious orientation and various leaders, impresses many times in order to revive the divided street inside the embryo of the young European community”¹.

The Christian identity is diversified in all its aspects and the social commitment rejects the spiritual problems due to the multitude of religious movements lacking a unitary aspect. “Why do I have to belong to a Christian identity if I am a religious person? I believe in something and this is enough”. This tendency of labelling refuses the authenticity of the Christian identity due to a competitive religious vision of syncretic nature.

Saint Paul presents two Corinthians of the worldly wisdom, in opposition with *sapientia Crucis*: the search for ideological prestige and the avidity for efficient power. These two aspects are the main barriers for the acceptance of the Christian identity. The first, as ideological structure, tends to substitute the Revelation, especially the precepts of the Gospel with human teachings aiming to manipulate the masses toward an autonomous finality. The second one admits only the human power and its value, excluding the providence and the presence of grace and power of the Holy Trinity in the created universe. In a cosmopolite world, Saint Paul searches and offers, in an exceptional missionary

¹ Rinaldo Fabris, *Identità cristiana. Prima lettera di Paolo ai corinzi (Cristian identity. Before Paul's letter to the Corinthian ones)* Torino, Elle Di Ci 10096 Leumann Publishing House, 2009, p. 189.

involvement, a common ground for the Corinthians: the Christian identity. He had the support of the Mosaic faith, already present in the basin of the Mediterranean Sea, through the monotheist faith, wonders and prophecies. He also had the support of a Pagan culture and philosophy aiming to be fulfilled through a revelation from above under the form of a Gospel. “The Pagans with a Greek formation had the tendency to put the equality sign between God and a system of belief pretending to explain and offer unity to various phenomena in the universe. We can recognise in this double tendency, suffocated by religious fanaticism and idolatry, the deep roots of the division corroding the ecclesial a social community. The people are divided and placed on adverse positions in the name of an absolute ideology, claiming the place of God and based on systems of power, with all the possible historical connotations, which become a surrogate related to the unique kingship of God”².

As visible expression of the Christian identity, the Holy Cross is the fundamental sours of salvation for the entire Christian world. Projected on a divided humanity, with branches reaching the Church, the Cross of Christ becomes the sign of universal unification through faith.

By identifying ontologically with the Christian spirituality, one admits to recognise Christ as the Head of the Church, of all the rational persons from the ecclesial community, who are in internal communion based on the common human inheritance restored by the same unique Saviour.

This feeling of community union cannot be offered by any human ideology or system of authoritarian or dictatorial power. The terms of Saint Paul for cross and faith, addressed to the Corinthians, does not exclude the possible divisions of the communities, because neither the Cross, nor the unique faith

² *Ibidem*, p. 190.

separated by the divine-human person of Jesus Christ is the decisive unifying factor (1 Cor. 3:4). “For Saint Paul, preaching the cross is not a religious theory or a spiritual system, but the coming of the crucified Christ (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2). A more concrete example for such Christian good news, resumed in a catechetical formula, is the one from the end of the epistle (1 Cor. 15: 3-5a): For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas...”³.

Only a resurrected Christ can be the unifying principle of the entire creation. Through sin and death, the world was deconstructed, decomposed through sin. This degrading sin cannot be restored by any human ideology or public power. The acquisition of the Christian identity through Baptism is the renewing beginning of the corrupted nature, exposed permanently to division and human tensions. By His death and Resurrection, Christ creates this fortifying and unifying nucleus of everybody, as fundament of the saviour Christian faith.

The history of the entire humanity until Christ is the pain history of the man lacking a Restorer. Beginning with the Resurrected Christ, the Christian people know the joy of the spiritual unity of the Easter, coming from the interior of the being, not in a declarative or constitutional way, but for each of them, at the historical moment chosen by God and fulfilled in the unanimous desire and confessing publicly the importance of the soteriological role in the formation of the unitary Christian and democratic state. “The resurrected Christ inaugurates the history of a renewed humanity, opposed to one referring to the old Adam (15:22). The victory against death, already fulfilled in the resurrected Christ, becomes the guarantee of the entire salvation

of those living under His shelter, through their pilgrimage of humiliation and sufferance”³.

The spiritual preparation for obtaining the Christian identity and the unity of nation, and especially the consciousness that this unity is necessary and according to the divine plan, involves the detachment from evil and sin and the promotion of a spiritual dynamism through the endorsement and the involvement of the Church as unique palpable model of unity with Christ and the fellow people, a model worthy of public credibility.

The missionary public purpose of the Church is not only to preach an inherited Christian identity or an impracticable unite, but the motivation to live as nation a new Christic way of living, expressed in all the fields of the contemporary society: culture, political affairs, economy, etc.

The unity in Christ and the unity of nation create new human relations. All the barriers of the division, from a spiritual point of view, were eradicated. If God is identified with the power and the success of each people, there are not anymore social and historical determinant reasons and we live marginalised one to the others, each man will be able to enlarge the spiritual horizon in the love for the Crucified Christ, and will be able to find again the complete human freedom and dignity. The cross, as a symbol of the authentic unity between the sky and the earth, remains for the contemporary society, the supreme revelation of the saving love of God, His wisdom and power giving unified ultimate meaning to the world and to the entire human history and rearranging the axiological axis of a nation.

Sapientia Crucis is the measure of the spiritual maturity for the being of a Christian nation. The Cross of Christ is the maximum manifestation of the saving love of God meeting the lack of unity and power and the absurdity of an infamous death.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 192.

This is not the fruit of the human consciousness, but a gift of the Holy Ghost, boosting the Christians with the same attitude and effect that joined Christ until His death. Thus, the unity of the nation means sacrifice in taking historical decisions for the good of the people.

The Christian identity compels us to a new way of life inside the Church of Christ. There is no cult of personality in the church, only *the person* is the determining factor. An ecclesial person determines, not controls, the other persons, respecting the Christian identity of each one in its various forms of manifestation. The Church does not recognise the individualist instrumentation to a level of human subjectivism. The content of the Gospel is the transparent and fundamental rule of the community, the rule of the cross as a way of living. Our history is a long row of passions, patience without complaining endless hope: a risk of one's own life for the other.

2. History – the environment of the divine Revelation

The Christian doctrine teaches us that God was the beginning and the history of the world later. What certifies this affirmation is the Revelation itself: the Holy Tradition and the Holy Scripture. We chose this order, of the Two Sources of the Holy Revelation, in order to highlight the fact that, before the Book of Genesis written by Moses, there was already an unwritten history of the creation, a history discovered by God, sheltered by human errors and subtleties. This is the way God desires the history of the world: clean, objective and full of His presence. “The Revelation is propagated only through the intimate relation between me and you, because this represents the

history and the creation untouched by sin, as coming from the hand of God”⁴.

From a theological point of view, there is no Aryan history. The presence of God was always highlighted in the history of a Christian nation in the historical events. Thus, there is no Romanian History and a History of the Romanian Orthodox Church separated one from another. There is juxtaposition between them, an almost perfect one, with events developed by the will of God and through the involvement of large masses. The historical beginning of the Romanian nation coincides with the beginning of a Christian identity confessed and lived on this territory.

From philosophical, sociological and theological point of view, the historical time is the most important thing for the human existence. The divine judgement could ask us at the end of times: *what have you done with your time, with your historical life?*

“In the ancient world, the time was connected to fate and the death of the man and, perhaps, of the divinity. In the classical metaphysics, starting with Parmenides, the time was considered as something apparent and the eternity without time was considered the real essence of the being. In the biblical tradition, the profound sense of time is not that of abstract eternity, but of *celebration time* (*la festa*, it.), for the entire creation, of the living and dead people. The Bible must be understood as a text intending to change the time of the world in a *celebration time* (liturgical). The celebration is the wholeness made from various times, a pure (*nunc stans*) or a chronological succession of past,

⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului* (Jesus Christ or the restoration of man) Craiova, Omniscop Publishing House, 1993, p. 34.

present and future. This is the place (*la festa*, it.) where it can be revealed the significance of the biblical name JHWH”⁵.

The time, when is not only a succession of moments, but a subjective reality, becomes history. There is no such perception in the contemporary society. On the contrary, the society insists on the opposition between time and eternity, due to the secular phenomenon. The first does not have unicity, while the second is emptied by any content. The consciousness of the dignity of the final, temporal, vulnerable existence, never impossible to define, appears where the humans and the life are not perceived as machines, meaning that the time tends to have spiritual value and dimension, because the man is a living creature.

The contemporary world tends to calculate everything. E.g.: the universe has almost 13.8 billion years and *homo sapiens* have 300 thousand years⁶. A human world reported temporally to the universe is almost insignificant and it is spatially void. The contemporary perspective of the secular world on life and the temporal nihilism, present in almost all non-Christian cultures, are more doubtful. The attitude of the pure immanence, totally autonomous, leads to a treatment of time and of the history with indifference. This is the Aryan history, with no cultural and spiritual memory. The past has no value, the future does not exist and the present is everything – some sort of *carpe diem*!

Desiring to control the reality as perpetual temporal present, the man created the *virtual reality*, where the present intends to be repetitive through the effort to archive the memory and through the initiative of cloning the living people. All these

⁵ Kurt Appel, *Tempo e Dio. Aperture contemporanee a partire da Hegel e Schelling* (Time and God. Contemporary openings beginning from Hegel and Schelling), Brescia, Queriniana Publishing House, 2018, p. 5.

⁶ Gabriele Veneziano, *Die Zeit vor dem Urknall*, in rev. *Spektrum der Wissenschaft*, n° 8/2004, p. 30-39 (*The time before the big bang*, in rev. *Spectrum of the Wissenschaft*, no 8/2004, p. 30-39).

aspects hide an unprecedented historical egoism. Without an altruist perspective, the contemporary man always lives with the illusion and the pretention of the total control of the present life, with no eschatological perspective. In exchange, “faith is not as throwing an electric wire in an empty space, but in God, as the plug from which the light and all wonders come. Even it is said that faith is a great force of the spirit and this force has an effect on the body; it cannot be born inside the man without the belief that it really connects with God”⁷.

The lack of eschatological interests of the secularised individual obstructs not only the concept of eternity, but also the term of evolutionary, not evolutionist, understanding, a term necessary to the linguistic expression in order to transform in reality the progress of the human kind toward a final target, the eastern Christianity never objected against the historical progress of the humanity⁸, in science, technique culture or economy, because God supports these dynamism and human capacities in the historical contexts. They confirm the human being as a rational being, always supported by the divine energies in the ascension to the transcendent threefold hypostatic reality. The linear dimension of time was never supported, because the

⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul evanghelic al lui Iisus Hristos (The Gospel age the face of Jesus Christ)*, Sibiu, The Publishing House of Mitropolitan Center 1991, p. 69.

⁸ “This ambiguity will be accompanied by an external confrontation at the end of the history, due to the fact that the human kind will progress in the knowledge of the cosmos and in its technical use or due to the fact that this knowledge will be used only to know the greatness of God and the reciprocal spiritual enrichment, but also to increase the lack of faith, because of the pride produced by the progress of the knowledge and of the technical mastering of the cosmos, and of the hate between nations. Especially the lack of believing in Christ will increase the evil, and will make the human kind to use for it the technique promoted by the progress in knowledge”, Dumitru Stăniloae, *op.cit.*, p. 136.

transcendence in Christianity is always personal and the movement is neither linear nor cyclic, but a helicoid ascension.

“Against the idea of historical tendency or against the concept of linear time, appearing in the chronological history, Metz connects the conception of time circumscribed by *éschaton* and not by *chrónos*, a second ‘where there is time for time’⁹. This claims a temporality of the time, where it does not function as spatial background of the events, but receives, through the passionate memory, an eschatological *print* whose narration contests the plausibility of the facts created by the power of the history”¹⁰.

Through Embodiment, the Son of God fulfils the *chrónos* (Gal. 4: 4) and, thus, the entire history of the world. This affirmation belonging to Saint Paul was developed by some philosophers at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century: Leibniz, Kant, Heidegger, Schelling and Hegel, a dialectic through which the time, related to eternity, was not just a simple time, but a *moment* in eternity, while the eternity was a *moment* of the time.

“Christ, as historical Person, was more than a man belonging to the history. He was also God higher than the history but living in history. He made not just things as the ordinary people, easy to believe, an also wonders higher than the forces of the nature. He, most of all,

He was resurrected, something hard to admit by the man accustomed to the law of the death, fallen due to the original sin. To impose His resurrection as undeniable historical fact, which is hard to believe, He chose 12 Apostles to witness credibly the

⁹ Johann Baptist Metz, *La fede, nella storia e nella società. Studi per una teologia fondamentale pratica (The faith, in the history in the society. Studies for a theology fundamental practice)*, Brescia, Queriniana Publishing House, 1978, p. 169.

¹⁰ Kurt Appel, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Resurrection, thus, His deification, manifested in His entire life in history and through the humanity He had assumed”¹¹.

Another proof for the historicity of the Son of God made man are the martyrs, who are, generally speaking, all those who had seen Him from His birth to his Ascension: the shepherds, the Magi, Simeon, Saint John the Baptist, the Holy Apostles, etc., and, especially all those who have died confessing that Jesus of Nazareth was a real man and the real God, the unique Saviour of the world. If Christ would have been just a man, a purely historical human person, the sacrifice of the martyrs would be in vain and illogical; because He was God and his descent in history was incomprehensible for some, the doubts related to his historicity were justified. Anyway, for those believing that the Son of God descended in history to sanctify it and to open the doors to eternity by compressing the time eschatologically, the only historical face of the Saviour remains the biblical image, present in the text of the four Gospels, as He wished to discover His Image as a complete revelation in relation to the history of the world. The chain of the historicity of Christ, through His martyrs, was interrupted until our times when, especially in the areas of the fundamentalist Islam, thus, an important frame and a special attention in the Universal History of the Christian Church is represented by the life of these confessors. “Each believer must not consider only the unity with some believers, but with all the believers in the past and the present. This is the Church”¹².

The end of the 2nd millennium and the beginning of the 3rd millennium relaunches the philosophical thinking of time and eternity through the vision of theology. E.g.: Giorgio

¹¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 238.

Agamben¹³ believes that the messianic time as paradigm of the historical time in the sense that the last is included in the first. All the representations of the historical subject (images, expressive modalities) must be inoperative. “The time is not anymore determined as flow of historical events, need for legitimacy, formation of identity and symbolistic representation of dominant subject”¹⁴. The revealed biblical text empowers the messianic time, especially the eschatological time, to become transparent for the entire humanity, while the human being wears the vestment of the Christian identity, starting the flow of this historical time in eternity and vice versa. The identity is the gate and the border between the historical time and the messianic time.

The historical time must be seen as Revelation used by God to communicate with the man. Still, the dialogue with the man starts in Christ, the embodied God. He makes Himself known to the man for the man to ask Him the salvation, but the discovery is gradual”¹⁵.

Conclusions

The Christian identity is an actual missionary theme and a difficult duty for those working in the missionary space of a pluralist religious society. It is not easy to approach terms as Christian community, the common responsibility, the interpersonal relations, the life in Christ, etc. A lot of courage is required, together with the relaunch of an ethical and spiritual profile of the contemporary missionary, to promote the Christian

¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (*The sacred man. The sovereign power and bare life*) Torino, Einaudi Publishing House, 1995.

¹⁴ Kurt Appel, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

ontology mirrored in what we call today Christian and ecclesial identity, proposed as meditation theme to a society that is more and more secularised.

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