"The Urbanization of Society – a Complex Postmodern Phenomenon with Ample Implications in the Life of the Contemporary Christian"

Contents:

Key words: The Urbanization of Society, Postmodern Phenomenon, Theological Hermeneutics, Globalization, Urban Mission, Missionary Diagnosis, Contemporan Crisis, Gospel and Culture.

Summary of the PhD Paper:

1. The religious life of the members of contemporary society has radically changed. Mutations occurring at all levels of everyday existence require not only structural or organizational changes in the life of the Church, but also the implementation of new pastoral-missionary strategies to respond to the perspectives and needs of contemporary man.

One of the most confusing and controversial philosophical, ethical, literary and aesthetic debate of the late twentieth century emerged around the theme of modernity / postmodernity. The term *postmodernity* is a generic term that expresses the identity crisis that has led to a paradigm shift in traditional thinking and morality, a crisis that has also affected Theology.

On the one hand, we are witnessing the logo-centrism challenge, of rationality, the modern rationalist conception decomposition, on the other hand, within in postmodernity, we are witnessing "a return of the religious", religion being seen as a crucial element in the emergence of the public sphere and in the organization of the tolerant civil society, but it has no place in defining personal identity.

From a philosophical point of view, the concept of postmodernity is characterized primarily by the demarcation of the modern, of the epoch defined by a type of Cartesian rationalism, by the Enlightenment and materialism.

Around this concept, the real philosophical debate plan is launched in the early 80s, especially by identifying certain developments in the present Western society, which no longer subject altogether to the rules of "modernity".

The starting point of postmodern criticism lies, according to Rev. Ion Bria between the years 1960 - 1970, but is crystallized in the geo-political changes that occurred between the years 1989 - 1990, caused by the fall of the Soviet Communist regime, by the failure of totalitarianism and atheism, by the end of the "cold war", the globalization of the economy and of the means of communication, by the "end of history", and religious pluralism.

At the beginning of the third millennium, human civilization and Christianity itself are facing a challenge of unprecedented proportions both in size and in implications, such as globalization or, more accurately, the globalization of all existence, now in progress. "A total social phenomenon, globalization has no analogy to anything in the past and is a reality that defies all social and mental paradigms known until now, a giant civilization mutation that traumatizes companies and intimidates intelligences, manifesting itself through an increasingly obvious rift, both with hierarchies of values of traditional cultures and with

traditional values of Western modernity, appearing as an unsettling and unclassifiable post-modernity "(Ioan Ică Jr., „Globalizarea – mutații și provocări", in *Gândirea socială a Bisericii. Fundamente – documente – analize – perspective*, Sibiu: Deisis, 2002, p.481)

This new reality has led to a number of fractures and dislocations considered irrefutable and irreversible: the alteration of the traditional paradigms, the disassembly of dogmas, the deconstruction of philosophical systems imposed by logical arguments, the rejection of metaphysical analogies and of the transcendence of divine authority. This new state, new condition, postmodernity cannot be analyzed and interpreted with the tools and research methods used in the past. Postmodernity seeks to suggest new paradigms, but does not intend to retain a final typology. It cannot be described, therefore, as philosophically and culturally structured. Postmodern critique would thus fall – Father Ion Bria says – to an internal questioning of modernity itself, postmodernism being seen more and more as a powerful configuration of new feelings and thoughts. (according to Bria Ion, *Hermeneutica Teologică. Dinamica ei în interpretarea şi înnoirea Tradiţiei*, Sibiu: 1999 pp. 3-13).

Like many contemporaries, David Harvey also interrogates this contemporary "current". Regarding the significance of this concept, he says, it has only been agreed on the fact that "postmodernism" is a reaction to, or is the next evolutionary stage of "modernism".

Immediately accepted, and most widespread, the notion of modern derives from its chronological essence. Adrian Marino claims that everything falling under *actuality, immediate recent, present* should be called modern (...). All these approximate meanings become clear only through their opposition to the idea of *antique, classic, old*, improper to the current state. Therefore, hasty assimilation of the idea of *modern* with the *contemporary* cannot be accepted without some essential distinctions: the modern phenomenon is contemporary, but not any modern phenomenon must be contemporary. Therefore we can be contemporary with different manifestations: delayed, retrograde, classicizing, with anachronistic appearances and conservative movements, etc., with a whole range of issues that can be called anything but "modern". (Adrian Marino, *Modern, modernism, modernitate.* București: Editura pentru Literatură Universală, 1969. p. 40).

Morally speaking, the disappearance of the concept of "norm" provides place for the installation of confusion and disorder, immorality and cynicism, a deep and incurable anxiety. These are strong decisive reasons for the modern man to consider himself frustrated, alienated, victim, without the certainty and the possibility of salvation. Thereby the negative impulse towards revolt, with a very modern term: "challenging". Modern man indulges in opposition, refusal and contesting.

The idea of "modernity" is treated naturally with the "spirit of time" due to the dynamic nature of the concept of "modern". This notion evolves based on the history coordinates. "Every age comes with its own "modern" formula, to be located in time and space, without any superficial generalizations (...). These steadily becoming realities (...) make the modern idea to regularly specify its content, not to stiffen, always remaining active, alive."

In postmodernism there appears the unconditional acceptance of transience, fragmentation, discontinuity and chaos, which made up half of Baudelaire's conception of modernity. This acceptance of fragmentation, together with the acceptance of pluralism and authenticity of "other voices and other worlds," raise the acute problem of communication and the means for exercising power.

In postmodernism the theory concerning the significance of language and communication also tends to modify. If modernism assumed the premise that there was a strong and demonstrable link between what is said – the message / meaning – and the manner of expression – core / signifier, in postmodernism, all these appear "as destroying it and reassembling themselves constantly as new constructions". This way, "deconstructionism" enters the scene "as a powerful stimulus of postmodern manner of thinking." In this sense, Derrida considers the collage / montage as the primary form of postmodern discourse. Both consumers and producers of "texts" and "cultural artifacts," as they are called by David Harvey, get involved in the production of significances and meanings.

Given the existence of these concepts, in postmodernism we cannot define the individual alienation in the classic sense of the concept, as being alienated requires a consciousness of the self that is coherent rather than fragmented, to be alienated from.

This reduction of experience to a "series of pure and independent presents" implies that this experience is overwhelming for postmodern man. The news event, sensationalism of any kind (political, cultural, scientific) becomes the "matter that conscience is created from." By using media and multimedia, by cultural producers, there emerged the highlighting and celebrating of the ephemeral aspects of modern life. (see David Harvey, *Condiția postmodernității* pp.59-69.)

Father Professor Ion Bria, spiritually summarizes the effects of cultural evolution that occurring after the years 1960 - 1970, stressing that "postmodernism is within the process of modernization, as a transition to a new social and cultural order with different organizing principles, caused by the recent geopolitical changes, and their consequences: economic globalization, modernization of communication (internet), ideological chaos and confusion of

moral values. It appears to be the critic / evolution of conventional certainties and paradigms opf a universalist nature, which means disorder of the philosophical systems and religious foundations, deployment and destructuralization of traditional institutions, converting theological concepts (e.g. feminist theology), language and the philosophical and cultural symbol. "(Ion Bria, *Hermeneutica Teologică*. pp. 8-12)

In this new cultural context must be considered the present condition of Christianity, a condition which is – according to Father Ion Bria – defined by some critics as "post-Christian". Postmodernism attempts to achieve the fragmentation of reasonable consensus, "the disappearance of constraints implicitly allowed", as well as the denial of institutions, regardless of their modern or traditional character. Postmodernity is "the crisis of the public place and of everything that can organize a space of recognition and arbitrations. The religious is caught in this confusion (diverse decompositions: from religious pluralism to the return of the esoteric) with their effects on traditional Christian churches: the retreat to self-centered confessions, a lack of credibility of the central statements, risks of internal sect appearance. "(Ibidem)

Postmodernity refuses philosophical systems with universalist claims, it refuses totalitarian ideologies and, on a theological level, it denies the doctrines with universal value, unique paradigms, ready-made beliefs, language and symbol imposed by a unique core. Postmodernity "rejects transcendence and the absoluteness of God, as well as the contingency the neutrality of the world." There is a discontinuity in the divine-human relationship, which causes "religious pluralism, contextuality, diversity, subjectivity of individual experiences, individualistic spirituality, popular religiosity, meaning – personal sensibility of faith, transcendence, ecclesial and social context", and finally privatization of religion. All these phenomena question the belief in absolute moral and religious values.

Another feature of postmodernity is "highlighting the various forms of pluralism: religious, political, cultural; there is even talk about moral pluralism, about a civic religion, civil society, etc. Some experts in the field of sociology of religion even talk about a new religiosity, which is characterized as: post-colonial, post-Enlightenment, post-Christian, post-religious and post-secular. This new religiosity, which corresponds to the individualism of Western society and is no longer reconciled with the traditional type of religiosity, especially advantages sects and new religious movements. "(Nicolae Preot Conferențiar Doctor Moșoiu, *Hermeneutica Ortodoxă ca dezvoltare teologică în Tradiție*, Sibiu: ASTRA Museum, 2013, p. 87)

Both the revival of Christian traditions and the reinterpretation of metaphysics are imposed by postmodernity. Theology's role is to identify religion and the religious, within the environment where they occur, to recognize the testimony and position of the religious under its cultural, imaginary, social and symbolic form.

The starting point of contemporary theology must be the social and cultural context in which religion manifests itself as a historical reality, where can be discerned diverse personal identities and cultural fragmentations. The mission of the Christian Church, the affirmation of religion and the religious in various cultures raises the question of the relationship between religious faith and public ethics, between religion and politics.

In contemporary society, more and more voices are insistently asking the Church to modernize, keeping up with contemporary culture and science departments, in order to become more active and to respond to the expectations of secular society. Enlightenment contributed significantly to the scientific progress, giving rise to modern and prosperous civilizations, representing targets for many peoples. Culture itself has both positive and negative aspects, but "from this point to the point in which the Church is asked to modernize, there is a distance as from earth to heaven, because modernity brought about by the Enlightenment involves issues that fundamentally contradict God's will, discovered in Christ and recorded in the Holy Scripture."

Modernity is the one that causes the anthropocentrism. The focus is shifted from God to man, the latter considering himself independent of God, and the divine will is perceived as an attack on their freedom. In this anthropocentric design, man has to become accomplished in an individualist way, without God's help. Contemporary man comes to feel that "the sacred is the main obstacle to his freedom, and he feels free only to the extent to which he eliminates the sacred in nature. He will not obey God's will and the laws that God laid at the foundation of creation, thinking that all reality may be governed by the laws developed by man. And, although these laws cause disaster in the spiritual and moral lives of individuals and their families, as sins against nature, it is important for man to feel free and to forge life, individually and socially, according to his own of discernment and law. The conscience of sin is lost and moral conscience is weakened to such an extent that it does not distinguish between right and wrong, sensuality, aggression, hatred and violence making increasingly more space in the life of contemporary man.

Modernity is responsible for implementing an unnatural separation between the public and private sectors, manifested in "the tendency to eliminate religion from social life and transform society into an area reserved especially to economic concerns. These concerns lead

man to forget about the spiritual values, which rose him to the likeness of God, forcing him to embark on a desperate search for material goods of this world that will never be plentiful for human lust after eternity. "(Dumitru Popescu, „Omul fără rădăcini.", in *Ştiinţă şi teologie: preliminarii pentru dialog.*, Bucureşti: XXI: Eonul Dogmatic, 2001 p.291).

In every age, the new generations of theologians have the duty to reassume the living sources of faith within the ecclesial tradition, contributing – through the process of reception and then the inculturation of the Gospel message – to the dynamic manifestation of the Christian Tradition.

Globalization is a complex phenomenon, defining and characteristic of postmodernism, a phenomenon that manifests itself in different areas of life. Although it is often associated with the economy, globalization is not a purely economic phenomenon, but extends to all levels of human life. Globalization has most diverse social consequences, such as the violence internationalization, the increasing discrepancy between the "multibillionaire" and the "bankrupt", the exploitation of the weakest and the extermination of the undesirable. On the environment level, the bad use of the environment is abusive, consistent with "the strong" following their personal interest, of any nature this may be, detrimental to the interest for the world.

As a complex phenomenon, globalization can have multiple definitions consistent with the aspects that illustrate this paradigm. It is noted, however, that the dominant theme of this paradigm is the "dynamics as the spirit of the world." This dynamics is perceptible in its very contradiction between the irrefutable effects of globalization. Thus, the dynamics *individualizes* and *centralizes* simultaneously, crucially undermining the sense of belonging to the "national communities" and "state sovereignty" and centralizes power in 'transnational economic organizations ". (according to Ioan Ică Jr., „Globalizarea – mutaţii şi provocări", p. 482)

The postmodern phenomenon of urbanization is seen increasingly as a consequence of globalization. "The adventures of comprehensive city planning", along with the trend of fragmentation of contemporary architecture and "exclusive design" are analyzed by Zigmunt Bauman in terms of stages "of modern warfare to conquer the right to define and apply the space the sense of common space." As a consequence of these globalization-related phenomena, there appears the "bifurcation and polarization of human experience, in which the common cultural signs facilitate two distinct interpretations." All these interpretations are put in relation to mobility. Thus, the phrase "being in motion" has different meanings depending on how it is applied to those at the top or at the bottom of the new global

hierarchy. In these circumstances, the new middle class is leading "the brunt of the uprising" which suffers from anxiety, fear and existential uncertainty. (Zygmunt Bauman, *Globarizarea și efectele ei sociale*, Prahova: Antet. pp.33-100.)

The "total social phenomenon" – globalization is an unprecedented reality that "defies all social and mental paradigms known to date, a giant civilization mutation that traumatizes societies and intimidates intelligences, manifesting itself through an increasingly obvious rift in hierarchies of values of traditional cultures and in the values of "classical" Western modernity compared to which it appears as disturbing and inaccessible post-modernity." Globalization thus tends to become the agent of the "end of history "and the "tilting human civilization by creating the "last man: the "global man" pure *homo economicus* – the atomized man who lives just for production and consumption – devoid of culture, politics, sense, conscience, religion and any transcendence."

The post-communist period is increasingly revealed as "post-Christian" or even "post-humanism". During this period, "there emerges a 'recreated' man, perfectly secular, while also devoid of any transcendence ("heaven") and uprooted from his natural and cultural identity ("earth"), reduced to the production and consumption flows, caught between instincts, techno-economic manipulation and mass-media and virtual universes hypnosis."

The concerns of man recreated as such are entirely metamorphosed compared to traditional human concerns. Thus, in contemporary human life, consumerism replaces thought and prayer. The fate of traditions and religions in the modern globalized world is significant. Today we are witnessing a new reality of the religious, where "popular traditions become subject for ethnocentric essayist speculation or folklore, or object of ethnographic science, or commodity and spectacle, degrading in the form of handicrafts, folk tourism or folk shows destined for private consumption or a community that sees in them a guarantee of its ethno-historical consensus."

Globalized world religions collapse, becoming more or less collective cults or feelings, dissolve into "integrated collectivist-fundamentalist folding or individual nebulae, esoteric mystical, magical or therapeutic." Under the effect of globalization, Western societies go through a "nihilistic mutation of the religious characterized by the emergence of the "religions without God." (Ioan Ică Jr. art.cit., p.489)

In this context, the place of the Orthodox Church is again uncertain. The Church cannot save its members expelling them from the world, but together with the world, which Christians are called to populate and enlighten with the breath of faith and the light of Revelation of God's Love manifested in Jesus Christ and in the Tradition of the Church.

Starting from the assumption that man was created in the Image of God and called to likeness with God, which is carried out fully in the divine-human person of Jesus, we can say that in the Christian view, man is called to communion. In this way, one can understand the human desire for closeness and communion worldwide, with his peers.

Religious syncretism, proposed by New Age, often promoted by Christians, questions the truth of the human person on a theological level. Through the dissolution, relativization of Christianity, and by trying to mix it with other religions in contemporary society, all these religions are perceived and addressed as " means for human psychological adjustment," as stated by G. Mantzaridis. Simultaneously with this relativism of the person on a religious – theological level, globalization threatens the truth of the person on the anthropological level, through this current, in terms of which the world is seen as a " homogenizing material", where the peculiarities, principles and values are overlooked and replaced with non-value, while only the "rule of money" matters. The reality of the contemporary world is all about money; all that is needed by man or even man himself is appreciated and bought with money. The "financial spirit" has the power to paralyze moral man, making man the "passive recipient of external developments".

In the reality of the contemporary world, man is in a deadlock which can be overcome by reference to the Church, within which the truth of the person can be rediscovered and asserted. The challenge of globalization can be for the church "the strongest motivation for self-criticism and relocation of the conscience of believers." By its very being, the Church calls every believer to experience universality. The "universality" proposed by the Church is founded on the truth of the human person, and "is deeply human, authentic, ecumenical and perpetual." The Universality of the Church is not limited to the human person but extends to the whole of creation, and the Person of Jesus Christ – the "Universal person "- extends beyond creation "towards what is inaccessible and eternal."(Georgios Mantzaridis, *Globalizare şi Universalitate: Himeră şi Adevăr,* Bucureşti: Bizantină, 2002, pp.9-13)

Approaching in a positive way the aspect of facilitating inter-human relations achieved by the phenomenon of globalization , to the extent that this process manages to eliminate ethnic divisions, social, political, national or other arrangements, globalization is not only accepted but is also entirely necessary. In the Christian view, says G. Mantzaridis, the division or separation, are characteristic to the condition of the "fallen" man, states that need to be overcome in order to restore the natural state of mankind.

According to Georgios Mantzaridis, it is crucial that global society is not built by "homogenizing men, but by raising their dignity", since any other attempt would lead not only to disappointment but rather cause "painful abnormalities."

From the formal point of view, universality and globalization are related concepts, but in their depth, these two concepts are antagonistic.

Globalization designates the authoritarian unification and homogenization of society, while universality indicates the process of spiritual unity, while maintaining the diversity of individuals.

Christian universality prevails through its struggle against the passions, the annihilation of selfishness, not through oppression of others or by conquering the world. Through this fight or this process of shunning of passions, "forgiveness" may be shared by each person, thus the twinning of the world. Universality does not "build up by denying the peculiarities of others, but by meeting all at some higher spiritual level." This spiritual level is offered by the Church of Jesus Christ, in which selfishness is overcome by sacrificial love, defending the universal person with his / her unrepeatable particularities. In order to overcome fragmentation and discrimination occurring in all areas of human life, people need to rise to this level.

If we look from the perspective of the intention of the action, both the way followed by our proto-parents Adam and Eve falling into sin of disobedience and the way that the Church calls us to perfection on regard issues of deification, of perfection, being in this respect the same. In reality, these two are diametrically opposed ways: the first "is based on human strength and is therefore the path to self-divinization, while the second is based on God's gift and is the way to deification by grace." (G . Mantzaridis, *op.cit*, pp.22-24).

Universality is described by G. Mantzaridis as the result of familiarity with the divine life and human perfection, as the creature called to likeness with the creator. Universality is not a luxury, but for man it is "his salvation." The more humanity presents fragmentation, the less, "is he truly really saved", he does not reflect in himself the integrity of his Archetype, Jesus Christ. The calling to the likeness of God is not personal, but universal. Not only Adam, the First-Called, was called to likeness, but each of us are called to this likeness as well.

Since Universality is achieved in history, inside the world, we should take into consideration the appropriate aspect according to which "all things that exist and are offered in the world and in history, can and should be initially obtained, owned and used by believers" in the direction or towards universality. Thus, believers must not disregard or defame the positive means and elements of globalization, but must use them as a means of

promoting universality. In other words, Christians must and need to assume and "Christianize" many of the elements of globalization.

The Church rejects any form of discrimination and fragmentation, as it respects human rights, the quality of creature created in the Image and Likeness of God, respecting cultural and traditional elements of everyone, as the elements of their creative power.

Universality has as its starting premise the denial selfishness, which is the one that removes man away from God and from others. By His chenosis, Christ is the one who begins the process of universalization. He opposes Adam's primordial egoism the humble thought. In view of this, we note that we can contribute to Universality only if we approach in terms of attitude the Universal Man, who is essentially Jesus Christ. Only when we are like Him, through humility and forgiving love towards all mankind, can we help build Universality. Universality is achieved on two levels: the personal level – on which each member of Christendom, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, is made partaker of the universality of Christ, the Christian remaining in the Church through the Holy Spirit. The collective plan, of the institution, is the second level at which the universality is performed, as outside the institution of the Church, the person cannot acquire and maintain the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In order to help the human person and to provide the gracious framework necessary for human deification, implicitly achieving universality, it is necessary that the Church itself remain charismatic. If the Church "leaves this charismatic foundation and secularizes itself, it is normal to also drop its members, throwing them into secularization." As such, the religious institution itself losing its spiritual content can fall away to a level of an institution covered by globalization. (G. Mantzaridis, *op.cit*, p.28).

Jesus Christ is therefore the only universal person, who can help us overcome or get out of the roller leveler that Globalization imposes. The exit from this phenomenon is done in and through the Church, through the missionary vocation of the Church.

Within the reality emerging as a result of freeing the Orthodox civilization from under the atheism and state socialism regime, the Orthodox civilization is beset to change paradigms and accept modern values, such as the separation between State and Church, between religion, culture and faith, the humanist balance between Christian morality and human rights, the disclaim of historical rights and dignity, religious and cultural pluralism etc.

According to Father Ion Bria, all major "religious families" were reinforced in recent decades, their global, regional and national structures starting from the idea that religious

identity must be recognized and validated in any ecumenical project. In this context there is a trend of increasing division "sources", in that many of the moral issues (abortion, contraception, sexual orientation, etc.) are treated as matters of faith, doctrinal or ecclesiological.

In the face of totalitarianism, Orthodox Eastern Europe "hesitated regarding an *aggiornamento spontano*, did not accept the disturbance of the normative dogmatic theology nor the sudden reform of traditional institutions. Tradition often held on its back a minor church history, when it was the only form of social liberation and survival "(Bria, *Hermeneutica Teologică*, p.18).

Regarding the aspect of experiencing modernity in Romania, it appears that in our country, the cultural context has multiple mutations from the second half of the twentieth century, although these things are not critically presented by the contemporary interpretations and analyses.

Talking about the modern era of Romanian theology (1925-1948), Father Bria says that Romanian theology played an important role in the intellectual life of the country during this period, and vice versa, intellectuals helped the thematic development of theology.

During the period of Patriarch Miron Cristea (1925-1938), in our country there emerged the Orthodox political culture, based on a "traditional" political practice, that of the "symphony" between Church and State. This, as well as the restrictions imposed by the "Religious Law" determined, however, a number of major inconsistencies resulting in changing the distance between the Synod of the Church and State, in certain periods. Among these inconsistencies, Father Bria reminds "the annihilation of liaison agencies between Church and State, the total neutralization of the Department of the Cults by the communist Party leadership; enhancing external Pan-Orthodox relations, (through the membership in the Ecumenical Council of Churches, at the General Assembly in New Delhi in 1961); the expansion of nationalism abroad and the intensification of patriotism through the Church." All these inconsistencies are perceived by contemporary society as "the readiness to cooperate with the security agencies," "the compromise of the Church and the members of the Council", "the complicity of the clergy", "pastoral adaptation " social responsibility, dissent etc. We must however see that "the Church required that its priests and faithful have a point of resistance: their personal faith and public worship, avoiding at all costs alienation and violence." (Bria, *Biserica istorică pe căile Împărăţiei lui Dumnezeu. Misiologia Ortodoxă 2000.*, Geneva, 2000 pp.12-13.)

Since 1948, Patriarch Justinian (1948-1977) sought to develop a missionary strategy of the Church, with the assumed risk to be in conflict with the political factors.

Thus, in 1948, the Faculty of Theology enters the structure of the Church, and it creates a favorable framework for the expression and development of Romanian theology. In the midst of the communist period, the Romanian Orthodox Church had scholar theologians, a theological library at European standards for academic works and studies, which was reflected in the higher theological and pastoral education of Romanian priests, which was unique in European Orthodoxy at that moment.

The situation is changing by the end of 1948, the theology suffering from the "practical and legal consequences of Marxist, materialist and atheist ideology: denying transcendence of institutions and scientists, limiting religion to personal conscience and piety, without the right to express faith publicly; the institutional separation of Church and State."(Bria, *Hermeneutica Teologică*, p.20)

The Orthodox Church has never accepted secularization, as did Western Protestantism, but denounced it as "the antechamber of atheism"

Within the Church there appears the option of "social apostolate" that should be understood in the context of the national reality of social and economic injustice and the imposition by the communism of a new social order and justice for all citizens of the Socialist Republic.

The social apostolate is part of the pastoral strategy undertaken by Patriarch Justinian in order to prevent the social schism between the Church and the Orthodox people during the five decades of political crisis.

According to Father Bria, the Romanian Patriarchate had at that time a group of professors of outstanding academic competence recognized in the country and abroad, present in the two theological institutes in Bucharest and Sibiu, the other faculties of theology being abolished.

The Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate decided a series of research fields for these elites. First it is the teaching research field that forced teachers to propagate and publish their courses.

Another aspect or course of action of the social apostolate was the concern for the constant training of priests in postgraduate courses of pastoral-missionary guidance; the participation of teachers in preparing the Pan-Orthodox Synod, the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches. All these measures of social apostolate,

could be put to practice in view of the fact that Patriarch Justinian was aware of the importance of priests and monks within the Church.

Since 1950 it appears that the Church had a large number of priests with a "very serious cultural and pastoral practice" as stated by Rev. Prof. Ion Bria, PhD, who says in this context that the priests were among these there were famous names of preachers, apologists, scholars, writers and philosophers who bring great service to the Church through their activity.

All directors of theological seminaries already held doctoral degrees in theology. Moreover, the Patriarchy depended on a large number of theologians who expressed themselves in public, in the ministry or administration. The Patriarch also encouraged the theological education of the monks, so that all abbots and superior nuns were licensed in theology. The social apostolate was a way of manifestation for the group of Romanian theologians who insist on the rapport priest – parish - society, who believed that the role of the theological faculty was to assist theology students in identifying the 'sense of history', and in the correct identification of the problems they would face in ministry.

In the public education and culture, there emerges Atheism, but it remains fragile and non-integrated as a cultural orientation, since it lacked the base of secularization, which would have been, in fact, the only "possible dialogue" between Atheism and Christianity. In Romania, the confrontation between Christianity and atheism did not lead to cultural political or structural pluralism.

In the decade 1948-1958, the Communist regime adopted a hostile anti-clerical policy manifested both through repression against priests and restrictions imposed to priestesses and children by priests; Father Ion Bria, argues that it is one of the reasons why priests have reacted strongly against insinuation expressed after 1989, namely that they collaborated with political bodies.

In this decade, the Church will retire in cultic practice "small but active, keeping intact the means to evangelize, to celebrate Mass, to convey Tradition through the parishes and monasteries.

The mission of the Church had to be limited, therefore, to cultic acts, to restrict Deaconess to philanthropy in the small framework of parishes.

In this new political and social context, access to pastoral people was mainly the "Philokalic spirituality" entering the parish piety, giving the spiritual motivation necessary for "social apostolate", so that it does not become "a political version" of Christian social ethics .

Of major importance in this respect is the work of Rev. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, PhD, who during 1941-1992, translated and annotated Philocalia in 12 volumes

During the prewar and wartime the political regime in our country "appealed to influencing religious institutions and the Christian culture, but it altered the fundamental principle of the autonomy of the Church in matters of religion. (...) The communist dictatorship forced the Church to accommodate the regime in terms of repression, persecution and tyranny, but it relied on national legitimacy that this adaptation offered. In particular, the regime ensured that the Church does not hold dissident groups and protest movements. "(Bria, *Hermeneutica Teologică*, p.21) In this case, the testimony of the Church in politics was prudent since the communist regime will not accept another powerhouse or authority than the political one.

During this turbulent period there were other forms of "dialogue" with modern shapes that have resulted in many writings which had the theme monasticism, Christianity and technology, humanity, social ethics, and ecumenism.

Father Ion Bria detects another important aspect of this period, an issue whose repercussions we can easily see in contemporary society. Thus, Father Bria finds aspect Marxist critique which, in Romania, praised the concept of aggiornamento and denigrated Orthodoxy. Frequently, the Romanian public space is the idea that no Western culture, "the only universal culture" Orthodox theology will disappear. But this was contradicted by the reality of the time, whereas in the period 1925-1991, the best theological works with social and ethical issues, were the work of Romanian theologians.

The activity Patriarch Justinian was continued and completed by Patriarch Justin (1977-1986), who by his actions exemplified the "modern" theology of the time, focusing on the specificity of Romanian Orthodoxy.

After 1980, the Romanian Orthodox fathers realized that the country was under an unusual dictatorship that pushed the Church to the tacit but real break. In fact, says Father Bria, Patriarch Justin explicitly rejected the Religious Department control. He never approved the demolition of churches across the capital city, churches were allowed to move, but not assigned or alienated church property. In the face of the dictator, the cause of Christians because was tacitly defended.

2. Contemporary society suffered under the influence of modernism and postmodernism, multiple mutations on different levels of existence. One of these mutations can be considered the transformation of postmodern society in a society characterized by the existence of prevailing urban communities.

Urbanization is a complex social phenomenon with the characteristics of a global phenomenon, as it affects all areas of life and all parts of the globe, having a major influence on the human. In analyzing this phenomenon we should consider the transformations favored by the technological revolution; the social and spatial restructuring occurred in both the urban, rural and regional urban crisis; inter-regional and interstate interdependence.

Urbanization is a process that is associated with "industrialization" that determines the development and "modernization" of social mobility and migration of the population. Along with the expansion of cities and as a result of this process, rural community members appear in migration to cities, increasing relentless urban communities. Under these conditions the newly created immigrant population tends to adapt its behavior to that of the urban population, with this effect behavioral and psychological transformation and growth of the city entails intricate relations within it, facing us with major changes on the level of these relationships that translate through urbanization of the entire society.

It can be said therefore that the twentieth century was "the century of urbanization." Global demographic transition of the XXI century is the critical factor involved in the pace of urban development and global change. Based on the work of Dr. Paul R. Ehrlich, "The Population Bomb" in 1968, republished in 1971, in his sociological debates focused on the consequences of rapid population growth and the need to moderate fertility rates, these discussions aimed to ensure that the population does not exceed the capacity of the planet. As a result of these policy debates, the State imposed birth control and reduced population growth rates, especially in developed areas of the world.

At the population level there are also other major changes. Globally, the regional distribution of the population is changing, in certain states aging population and rural-urban balance tends toward the cities. Thus, even during this millennium, global population tends to a historic high, yet meet the deeper imbalances and changes in the population distribution and population profile. These changes have massive impact on the social, economic capacity and socio-political relations at the international level between nation-states and ethnic groups, these changes resulting from changes in the size and shape of different populations of the big cities of the world.

Aging is not the only factor leading to weakening and low stability of families and households. A major change in the pattern of marriage formation represented by D. Thorns, increasing number of marriages "led" by women. This change reflects, he says, the changing of the nature of family relations. Another example is represented by the increasing number of marriages performed after the previous divorces. In this case he raises the question of the influence of both the stability of marriages and the possibilities of accumulation of goods, being directly related to family formation, land administration, property and inheritance. All these factors have been important throughout history to maintain position and social status in the middle class of various societies.

A characteristic of many cities is the very fluid nature of relationships within families and the fragmentation of relations with relatives.

Low birth rate and aging are two significant urban impact factors within the countries in which these conditions are present.

Consumerism in contemporary society is regarded as one of the driving forces of economic processes, political and social life. The global nature of the world requires us to see changes in urban as interdependent processes. Industrial activity has been relocated to other cities and regions, growth and decline intervening, thus changing demographic and social structures.

The urban lifestyle involves a number of features that overwhelmingly affects thinking, human personality and social relations of the members of urban communities. Everyday life in urban areas is tenser than in rural areas. Members of urban communities are in a hurry and time does not depend on them directly, its use being timed. Anonymity is emerging in urban agglomeration due to demographic and occupational and cultural heterogeneity.

Human relations act in the urban fragmentation, each individual acting in a fragment of roles. These relationships are often impersonal, strictly professional. Neighborly relations found predominantly in rural areas are not common in urban areas, but urban community members share spatial proximity. Spacing between members of urban communities comes from socio-cultural and psychological factors.

In urban communities we observe that there are conflicting characteristics in the urban lifestyle. Compared to rural areas, the rate of deviant behavior is considerably higher in the cities. Such phenomena such as suicide and divorce are more common crime in urban areas. The feeling of insecurity increases inevitably leading to increased emotional tension townspeople. The roles of fragmentation in causing human relations lead to "role conflicts"

and difficulties establishing personality. In this way it may partly explain the fact that in urban communities there are the most common mental illnesses. In cities we encounter the phenomenon of isolation of the individual, "the fragmentation of his personality and social contacts, increased boredom, frustration and the sense of uselessness."

In contemporary society, the postmodern sense of insecurity associated with fear, is frequently met, given the multitude of applications in the field of security systems. Regarding the fear and insecurity it should be noted here and appearance protection of personal data stored by service providers.

"Pragmatism" and "profaneness" are two elements of the urban lifestyle. Apparently you can find some contradiction between urban lifestyles and traditional belief as a townhouse person is not interested in the "ultimate mystery" of life but in solving tangible, pragmatic problems. In this context "pragmatism and profaneness in anonymity and mobility are not obstacles but opportunities for access to modern man." These should be used by the Church for the efficient transmission of the Gospel message.

Another feature of the urban lifestyle is mobility. In contemporary society we are all moving, but movement does not involve leaving the house every time. Some members of society thereby change homes and often end up living in environments that are unfamiliar to them. For others, however, "posting" them in front of a "device", a "gadget" connected to the internet is sufficient, and they are able to move and can be reached via internet networks anywhere in the world and even in space or ocean abyss.

Phrases such as "loss of identity" or "extinction of personality" are common in relation to society urbanization phenomenon in contemporary society are often surprised in the "fear of anonymity". We have not considered the fact that unlike the individuality found in rural communities, anonymity offers in some respects liberty opportunity while protecting personal privacy is an essential factor of human existence.

This mobility is not only manifested in the people but also influences goods, goods and services. Contemporary industry is increasingly prepared to offer consumers attractions and temptations. "Because only tempt attractions as long as it is placed in the future and temptations "survive" only shortly after the corruption, we are tempted to see in the times we live in "desire". Contemporary man gives up too easily on what until now was for him the target of existence. In this way the strain, the phenomenon of consumerism, being present society. Thus, the failure to push contemporary man desires in crisis, a crisis which man draws the whole society and the whole world. (Zygmunt Bauman, Globarizarea si efectele sale sociale, p. 78)

Another aspect that characterizes modern man is individualism, which we must understand as "the denial of any higher principle of individuality and as a result, reducing civilization in all fields, from exclusively human elements; Revival is what is designated by "humanism" (...), and what characterizes very precisely "layman terms". Also says R. Guénon the "profane" spirit merges with the "antitraditional" spirit, specific to the Western world and "summarizes" all the trends of the modern world.

The antitraditional spirit is strictly anti-religious because religion is primarily a form of tradition. R. Guénon accentuates the antireligious saying that those who "continue to believe" Christians ", but not even admit the divinity of Christ, are placed without realizing perhaps closer to a complete denial of religion than true Christianity. However, such contradictions should not surprise us unduly because they are, in any field of manifestation, one of the symptoms of the disorder and confusion of our age; so, dividing constant Protestantism is but one of many facets of the ubiquitous multiplicity dispersion (...) of life as a modern science. "(René Guénon, The crisis of the modern world, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993, p. 113)

Today we have a very special situation within the perception of society members on their faith. Thus, many consider themselves to be "religious" but, in reality, they do not know and, even less, do not meet the rules of religion whose followers they have declared to be; many statements released as "traditionalist" although do not know authentic traditional spirit. There is a new mood that minimizes religion, giving them more than an insignificant role but may have an influence on contemporary society. Another charge brought to religion is to be anachronistic and contemporary isolated. Many Orthodox Christians in particular and Christians in general, think and behave in everyday life worse than non-Christians.

Doctrinal ignorance and ignorance of the Church teaching makes many contemporaries to adopt and promote the idea that religion is a matter of personal "practice" that has no place in the public space, has no meaning in educational institutions, so called "state". This attitude is seconded by relativization dogmas which human conception of "modern", "should" put in line with the "needs" of society.

The doctrine overshadowed the pretext that it is understood by contemporary society pate, leaving the place in the foreground morality. Religion is for the contemporary man simply "moralism", or at least want to see it as modern humans, who refuse to know its deep reality of an entirely different order.

The fight that "defenders" of dogma must hold is the fact of the individual and temporal action plan. This is however frustrated, modern society no longer recognizes

spiritual authority, and any "legitimate power" in a time sequence. "Nothing and no longer today has its rightful place; (...) "Laymen" can afford to discuss the sacred things, and to challenge the very existence; came inferior to the superior judge, ignorance imposes limits to wisdom, truth overcomes error, human replaces divine, earth has more importance than the sky, the individual proclaims himself as the measure of all things and pretends to dictate the laws of the universe formed, by his own reasoning, a weak and subject error. (...) Today we see only the blind leading the blind that the weather will not stop. "(Ibid, p. 121) Due to this attitude, modern man comes to feel the existential "crisis".

Upon a closer analysis, holding total responsibility for his own history which suggests a secular man proves a hidden desire as old as the world, more correctly called of the fallen forefathers, to be like God, absolutely sovereign of his own existence. How could he reconcile, this trend seeming to a point justified, as revealed that the man is the image of God, created for eternal likeness to Him?

Man wants to be like God solely by his forces and often stands in opposition to the purpose of God. The authentic Christian perspective regarding the acquired likeness to God is antagonistic to this secular view.

Today the word crisis is heard more than ever, becoming a leitmotif of contemporary society, the extent to which each of us claims that we "face" what the word means. René Guénon says in turn that the etymology of the word "crisis" provides ways that we usually lose sight of when we use this word. The etymology of the word, he says, makes him partially synonymous with "judgment" and "discrimination". In any order of things, the play which can rightly be called "critical" is what leads immediately to a solution, favorable or unfavorable, where there is a decision one way or another; it therefore becomes possible when judging the results obtained, weighing the "pros" and "cons" and the operation of separation between positive and negative results to see which side balance is inclined, after all. "(ibid)

In a secular world, marked by selfishness, individualism, of anthropocentrism, man sees in the phenomenon of postmodern crisis God's desire to lead the world towards perfection, and as such knows how to find the way out of the "crisis". Postmodern man has forgotten that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14.6), and that He is the one who gives the answer to the problem of the crisis in the Sermon on the Mount of Beatitudes: "So do not take any care, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? That after all are what nations struggling for; Only your heavenly Father knows that

you need them. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these shall be added unto you. "(Mt 6, 31-33)

In today's society, things are happening exactly the opposite, in that man seeks all material facilities, considering that they will bring peace of mind. Man hijacked the normal sense of becoming, to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, then to get to the likeness of Christ. Placing himself in the center of the process, not the man tends to perfection in and through Christ, but he becomes the center of his own universe and so he wants the utopia to reach a completely "in" and "through" self. From this is born selfish desire for the material to the detriment of gaining spiritual treasures. In contemporary society, man drew away from God so much that he no longer has a mark to refer to and to strive to get to, therefore lives in chaos.

The crisis is in all its dramatic scale and it is human crisis itself, not just some or other of his achievements and goals, not just some or other of the areas of human activity.

3 The Church is being faced today with a new historical reality and therefore it needs adequate analyses and exegeses, which would be helpful in perceiving this reality and in establishing a relation with this new state of affairs.

Understanding the phenomenon of postmodernism from the Eastern European Orthodox perspective is essential for effective missionary practice. In this sense, theological Hermeneutics aims at answering a series of questions raised by the new socio-cultural and political context. Among these questions there are the following: "How can one monitor and direct the tension between tradition and modernity / postmodernity, caused by the transition from one culture to another? What are the themes and methods which are most exposed to this crisis? What is the meeting point between heritage pedagogy, historical memory, continuity and transmission (in-culturation) and reception (contextualization) in a new context? What value does the interpretation of postmodernity (implicit or explicit) hold in the dogmatic development of theological topics or the hermeneutics of contemporary religious, moral, cultural experiences?" (Ion Pr. Prof. Dr. Bria, *Teologia Ortodoxă între Tradiţie şi Modernitate. Stridenţe, rupturi şi conexiuni posibile*, p. 26)

In the light of Orthodox Tradition, hermeneutics implies a lengthy theological reflection and a deep spiritual discernment to train the critical, public, ecclesial reception of everything that is proposed as renewal, reform program. (Bria, Ion Preot Profesor *Hermenutica teologică…* p. 6)

Thus, within the spiritual life of Christians, there may be stages which would necessarily require clarification, explanation, hermeneutics, so that the synchronic aspect of tradition could be highlighted.

In this respect, the Theology of Father Professor Ion Bria offers us numerous points of reference for theological hermeneutics in the sense of providing principles and rules of interpretation.

Orthodox theology is perceived by the Romanian theologian "as a church ministry with the purpose to explain and deepen the dogmas or the plan of salvation and to revive the work of the Church." (Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, București: Institutul Biblic de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2003, vol. I, pp. 92-110). The authority and the hermeneutical function of Theology, on the one hand, and its competence to explain and deepen the soteriological plan are thus emphasized. "According to patristic Theology, theological explanations are in fact explanations of dogma – and, as such, they fall within the general and permanent preaching of the Church, namely they are comprised in the wider teaching of the Church." (Moșoiu Nicolae Preot Conferențiar Doctor, *Hermeneutica Ortodoxă ca dezvoltare teologică în Tradiție*, Sibiu: ASTRA Museum, 2013. p 89).

The starting point of theological Hermeneutics is "the reality of human history in which faith perceives history (salvation) introduced by the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Within this dual history of God and man, Jesus is the Lord who assumes it and transforms it, thus urging the human towards ontological communication with God through synergistic action." (Bria Ion Pr. Prof. Dr., *Hermeneutica Teologică...* p.34).

The role of theological hermeneutics in the conception of Father Professor Ion Bria, is to identify areas where mutations have occurred which require the change of civilization and culture. In this sense, "the intervention of Orthodox theology is necessary especially where modernity empties "the history of salvation" of any meaning and where the dynamic of Tradition is denied." (*Ibidem*)

Apparently, the contemporary conceptual and structural changes would have nothing to do with the logic of salvation history, but mutations have occurred in human history ever since Pentecost. Faith, however, does not represent either the replacement of reality or its subjecting to an established order, but "the freedom to reveal the presence of God among men – Emanuel, to proclaim the immanent incarnation which paved the way for a new heaven and a new earth. The only new reality occurred at Pentecost is of a sacramental nature: the

ecclesiastic of God." (*Ibidem* p.35). This dynamics of the history of salvation is viable and visible through Tradition.

From the perspective of this aspect of Tradition, "theological hermeneutics is the dogmatic regularization of reception, namely methodology – the discipline for the transmission–communication of Tradition through the path of an ecclesial community, in other words, the perenniality (diachronic) of Tradition implies its readiness to be updated, interpreted, contextualized from a missionary, pastoral, ecumenical point of view, in line with the requirements of the local and universal church life." (*Ibidem* p.39)

If we approach theological hermeneutics from the perspective of the definition offered by Father Professor Ion Bria, one can identify a set of fundamental principles of this Hermeneutics.

First of all, one should be aware that the cultural transition from modernity to postmodernity does not imply the loss of identity *ipso-facto*. Tradition does not automatically lose, simultaneously with the change of environment or society, but it acquires a new context, a new force of "initiative and attraction."

Given the fact that Tradition "is not a passive memory", Hermeneutics does not only have an anamnetic character, it is also prophetic and prospective. Thus it is noted that "in the explanation and development of the apostolic faith there is consistency between what was received, what was retained and what is transmitted. In the process of continuity and unity of faith, the consistent development of doctrine is thus ensured, not by overlapping views but by accents and ramifications that make sense for the future of people's faith." (*Ibidem*) In this sense, exegesis aims at isolating heterogeneous elements and dominant trends which have "slipped" into tradition.

Another fundamental principle of hermeneutics is the reception of contemporaneity, which is "a critical, renewing, creative meeting between the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the contemporary culture of ecclesial community." (*Ibidem*) Within this "evangelizing meeting" Tradition is pursuing a transformation which involves, on the one hand, waiving certain new aspects and on the other, the assimilation of others.

On the one hand, reception recognizes and validates the institutions and traditions of the Church, on the other hand it is concerned with "the hunger and thirst for God, the spirituality of recipients that can be manifested in new forms, unknown or ignored by the Church in the past." (*Ibidem*) Reception should not be understood only in terms of the return to the sources of Tradition; a critical reception should also consider other forms of religious reminiscences outside the Church, wherever they discuss moral issues of dignity, freedom

and future, throughout humanity. Reception in time and space of the apostolic faith implies a receiving community "ecclesial form due to which the message is saved in crisis. Community receives through that *sensus fidelium* - has its own cultural, liturgical and social identity." (*Ibidem*) Theological hermeneutics is the one which can suggest forms of "universal ecclesial conciliarity", able to overthrow the globalization subservient to financial interests.

On a pan-Orthodox level, neither the local auto-cephalism, nor the supra-territorial one are sufficient for maintaining the council. The lack of conciliarity does a disservice to all Christians and all religions which should denounce "the globalization hegemony reserved only to some privileged." (*Ibidem*) An unfortunate aspect, according to Father Professor Ion Bria is the fact that, in order to save their own territorial and jurisdictional auto-cephalism, churches refuse or restrain from developing ecumenical relations or practicing ecumenism.

Another aspect that fundaments hermeneutics refers to the assumption of the recent history of churches. Today, the Church carries "stigmata of history and human experience" accumulated over the past decades. In this situation one must admit, not omit the responsibility of the church institutions. However, most of the times "the intervention of church authorities in clarifying moral themes (family, the place of women in the Church, sexual behaviors) and in approaching social issues (the economic and democratic reform in the country) does not erase the impression that the Church itself eludes its liability in terms of the country's economic and moral catastrophe at the end of the Cold War." (*Ibidem* p. 41).

Another issue that must be the basis of hermeneutics is the reactivation of anti-ecumenism, in integratist circles, whose members are obsessed with the categorical separation between orthodoxy and heresy. This attitude proves that the ecumenical dimension of the Orthodox Tradition, "its role as a privileged witness" of the undivided ecumenical Church are ignored.

Father Professor Ion Bria, believes that "without theological exegesis of tradition (canonical, liturgical), without ecumenical formation, without practicing ecumenical worship and common Christian confession, without local ecumenism, canonists and interpreters cannot meet" the challenges that the world is facing today. (*Ibidem* p.42)

The fact that each generation and each society have their own "Ambigua" must also be taken into consideration. In this context we must acknowledge the fact that "the present generation seeks "non-dogmatic" religious feeling, based upon a series of universal values unrelated to the Judeo-Christian tradition, which is not included in the vision of salvation history. The post-communist world has its own disruptions and harshness: the growth of the

secular to the detriment of the religious (...) The Church cannot obscure this tension caused by the transition from one culture to another, especially since the Church itself is part of the problem of this crisis." (*Ibidem*) Theology, has either not addressed the themes of this "inculturation" crisis, or it has approached them improperly.

A final aspect underlying theological hermeneutics is, according to Father Professor Ion Bria, the presence of certain "confusion" in the contemporary society. This confusion resides in the fact that the weaknesses of the church people are considered as being the weaknesses of the Church itself, believers being unable to accept the moral breach between the institution and priests.

In contemporary society one may observe an abuse of the term "Tradition". Often this term is assigned various "popular "beliefs, pietistic traditions and practices and rites which have no relation to the true faith.

Father Professor Ion Bria believes that "the Exegesis of Tradition – of the Christian traditions – is often made, especially in religious programs on TV either in a syncretistic, or in a pietistic way."(Idem. *Misiologia 2000.*, p.70.) The Exegesis of Tradition does not imply a justification of Tradition and it does not claim the submission to contemporary ideology or morality either, but "it has the purpose to always make the gospel clear and present it as a viable and verifiable guide for the current generation. The tradition transmitted and received includes a structural part and an uncertain, unique, improvised one: a gate open to those who seek God in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate."(*Ibidem)*

Within the study entitled "Spirituality for Our Time"(Idem. „Spiritualitate pentru timpul nostru" în *Studii Teologice* nr. 3-4 / 1992 p. 12), Father Professor Ion Bria emphasizes the meaning of the *Christian tradition* from the recital that Christianity uses the word "tradition" to express both the content of Christian Revelation received from Christ – through the Apostles and their successors – and the transmission and interpretation of this revelation in the history of the church. Every Christian – says Father Ion Bria – enters an explicit tradition of the Church which precedes him / her, not only as a receiver, but as a transmitter, as well.

Within the current terminology, Tradition means Faith. Nevertheless, it is necessary to distinguish between "faith in terms of its dogmatic content, and the faith in terms of the experience of this content. According to its content, faith is God's Revelation sent through the prophets in the Old Testament, and then made known personally in Jesus Christ, being witnessed by the Apostles and the New Testament, by divine inspiration. The Confession of Faith circulates within Tradition either under its elaborate form as dogmas of the ecumenical

councils, or under its doxological, liturgical, iconographic, hymnographic form. The Orthodox Church did not necessarily insist on making ultimate definitions of the divine revelation, nor did it design theology as a "science" of dogma (...). As a religious experience, faith is the mystery of personal freedom, the freedom to have, beyond natural knowledge, a different vision of creation and history.(Bria Ion Preot Profesor Doctor, „Ortodoxia şi semnificaţia ei azi", *Studii Teologice*, 1992. p. 5)

Thus, Christians have learned that tradition received is both tradition transmitted, and tradition to transmit further on, Tradition holding a dynamic character. "It involves, first of all, an element of storage and defense of the faith that was received. This implies fidelity to events in the history of Christianity, when the Church made definitive ecumenical Decisions regarding the canon of Scripture and the rule of faith (Acts 15, 28-29) (...). Second of all, there is the "perception" of tradition, namely its approach and update by every generation, according to its own understanding, culture and ethos. Sometimes, the reception is done in a context of confrontation, either in the Church, or outside the Church, within various interpretations and cultures. Tradition is not a passive observance of dogma, but a deepening development of it, and taking into account the present experience of the Church.

Third of all, received tradition must be passed on. In this process, the tradition may be interpreted incorrectly, or may be presented in forms that belong to another era. It must be free from any restrictions such cases as such to be played contemporary and future generations as their own tradition. Church tradition connects so not only past but also the future. Christians are called not only to keep what they got, but to assimilate in their lives received tradition and transmit their experience to others." (Idem, „Spiritualitate pentru timpul nostru", *Studii Teologice*, nr. 3-4, 1992. p 13)

The situation of acceptance of secularization in the West as a natural development of the religious phenomenon transforms, coming towards Eastern Europe, in an attitude of "radical and destructive" rejection of religion, taking the form of materialistic atheism. In this context we cannot compare postmodernity specific to churches from the secularized Western world, with postmodernity specific to post-communist cultural environment.

Father Ion Bria considers that in the conditions of postmodernity, religion is impossible to remain outside interrogations and criticism. Postmodernity perceive religion as part of the intellectual legacy as a "stock of human knowledge" but having a life as auxiliary contemporaries. The Church is thus reduced to an anamnetic role, which is limited to individual life, having a soteriological role. This conception of religion is common to both Marxism and capitalism.

The phenomenon of "the return of the religious", the "hunger and thirst for God," the spiritual quest is visible in contemporary society, especially among young people. Opening for the "religious" – if only out of educational, cultural or religious interest – is "explored, and exploited by various centers and missionary stands that have developed specific programs."

The contemporary world is transformed continuously in accordance with the needs and internal reasoning, without considering the will, the wisdom or the "prophetic voice" of Churches and religious institutions. At the same time, "as the dominant global culture, postmodernism refuses values considered to be divine or divine authority binding, such as: Holy Tradition, Sola Scriptura, ex opere operato. This cannot hear and accept the call to metanoia: on the contrary, it has its own idioms and symbols."

The phenomenon of "the return of the religious" reveals the desire of believers to express and manifest their religion freely after decades of restrictions or hostilities. Despite prohibitions and aversion supported for five decades at the parish liturgical piety, it remained and survived both in urban and rural areas, "Christianity is a form of social proof, at a popular national level."(Idem, „Misiunea urbană - în prezent și în viitor, condiții și exigențe", p. 50)

Under the false impression of positive statistics on the Orthodox in Romania, there was the conception that ecclesial body would have undergone radical changes and religious institutions, and the conduct of priests and bishops, remained unbroken and infallible, maintaining their status as "supreme authority, and above all." Therefore, says Father Bria, awaiting for "the hypothetical restoration of the situation before 1944", priests and bishops continue their mission in the same way, "as if nothing happened." One consequence of this neutral interpretation was the return to the forefront of practice jobs, the popularization and dissemination of public rites.

The Church needs clarifications and explanations of theology, to respond to the challenge of modernity. There arises the need for the distinction between "the Christian instruction, religious culture, catechesis, theological education, ecumenical formation".(*Ibidem*, p.67)

The relationship between the Gospel, culture, mission and ecclesial community is expressed in contemporary theology by several terms. Therefore, in order to define this syntax we frequently encounter the term "inculturation" often accompanied by "acculturation", a terminology used in Catholic theology, designating the adaptation and conformation to the local culture and ethos. "Contextualization" is another concept that defines this inter-relationship, and is especially common in Protestant theology with the

meaning of interpreting the sacred text according to the socio-cultural context. The term used by Orthodox theology is "reception", designating "the critical and creative approach" of Tradition. (Bria,Ion Pr. Prof. Dr. *Hermeneutica Teologică.* p. 43)

On the whole, religion is the way of unconditionally looking at the absolute while culture is the form of religion and religion is the substance of culture. Starting from this consideration, Rev. Mihai Himcinschi proposes a dual perspective from which to analyze the relationship between theology and culture. Firstly, one must take into account the reality of the fact that, as a human experience, faith is, in this respect, always preceded by a "language of the moment". Secondly, one must consider "the dialectical relationship between theology and culture, within which the word, being inferior to faith, does not become abstract speech. In theology the Word becomes flesh (John 1:14)."(Himcinschi Mihai Pr., *Misiune şi dialog: ontologia misionară a Bisericii din perspectiva dialogului interreligios.*, Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2003, p.141)

In this context, the cultural dimension of faith should be perceived bilaterally. On the one hand, culture is circumscribed to the religious experience as, in the early stage, faith is modeled by means of culture, which will further also assimilate it, by virtue of the religious experience taking place within a specific cultural and ethnic framework. On the other hand, culture is contingent from the historical perspective. In this respect, Rev. Mihai Himcinschi, argues that "if faith does not want to die becoming – as Heidegger says – a vision of the world (ein Wilt bild), it is necessary for it to lose its purely cultural primitive print in order to be drained through a print resorting to the first, under-determining it. (...) Faith is the message of life, not a conceptual language."(Ibidem. p. 142)

In the process of "inoculating the seed" of the Gospel in a particular socio-cultural framework, cultural elements of this new context are used, ontologically restored elements, as "it is a process of divine inspiration and unifying force, having faith as the norm which transforms and recreates the culture. (...) The Gospel is the origin of a new creation, faith cannot exist without a cultural substratum."(Ibidem. p. 143)

In the introduction of Rev. Prof. Dumitru Popescu to the work "Theology and Culture", he states that, in contemporary society, theology faces a number of cultural factors that represent a real contempt towards it, these factors being determined by the magnitude of the secular.(Popescu Dumitru Pr. Prof. Dr., *Teologie şi cultură.* Bucureşti: Ed. Institutului Biblic şi de misiune al BOR., 1993. p5)

Mission, as evangelical event, involves communicating a message, the Good News, to the human community, and for this purpose it uses cultural elements and values specific to a socially defined, historical context.

The encounter between Christ and the Old Testament culture highlights two issues. First of all we must notice that, together with His Incarnation as a human, from Virgin Mary, Christ also assumed the culture that he was born in. Thus, "Christ revealed the undisputed value of the local or national culture for salvation. This salvation disregards the local cultural context given by a spiritualist salvation that loses touch with reality and gains an abstract and illusory character. Through His as a true Man, Christ was closely linked to the culture of His people."(Idem „Hristos și misiunea Bisericii în societatea contemporană” în vol *Hristos – Biserică – Societate,* București:Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al BOR 1998 p11) On the other hand, Christ was not only a true Man, He was also a True God, as such "He did not remain a prisoner of the culture that He was born as a man in, but transfigured this culture through the power of His Godliness, through His Cross."(Ibidem)

In all His work, Christ has shown us that the Gospel cannot be preached to peoples, ignoring the cultural context that remains representative of each nation. Therefore, says Fr. Dumitru Popescu, "our Saviour preached His Gospel by means of parables which are based on social and cultural realities of the Hebrew people, on their suffering, problems and aspirations. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, the Lord starts from the drinking water, so necessary to the material existence of man, in order to talk about the water of life, so much needed for the spiritual existence of man. In other words, the Lord has taught us to preach the Gospel both by virtue of an action that starts from God to man, and by virtue of a movement that starts from man to God. If you do not take into consideration the cultural context of the audience, their mentality and their problems, it might not be possible for the message of the Gospel to find the proper echo in the minds and hearts of his hearers."(Idem., *Teologie și cultură.* p. 43)

The encounter between the Gospel and culture entails, therefore, a double action. First, the Gospel preserves its Revelation integrity, but in order to communicate the message revealed, the Church must not ignore the culture of the new preaching context, nor should it impose a foreign privileged culture, with which it is historically associated. "Faith germinates and grows within the core of a certain culture. It assumes culture in a creative way, while respecting the identity and particularity of each person and human community."(Nifon Mitropolit Profesor Doctor Mihăiță, *Misiunea Bisericii și deschiderea ecumenică în mileniul III - Suport de curs* Târgoviște 2010. p. 21)

Secondly, preaching the Gospel will always remain a "sign of contradiction", questioning the absolute nature of any culture, religion or ideology. "The mission remains true to the identity of the Gospel, to its unique character, subjecting culture to a process of" transcendence", according to the incarnation pattern. Therefore, neither should it be a alienation from the existing ethical, cultural and ideological values, nor a syncretistic juxtaposition, but a critical assumption, advancing a new identity, with historical, cultural particularity." (Ibidem. p. 22)

From this point of view, the Church appears as an inclusive community, open to all peoples, precisely because of the inculturation and acculturation of the Gospel. Without destroying the cultural and ethnic identity of individuals and nations, the Church gives them another dimension and identity, that of their ontological unity in Christ (Gal. 3, 28).

Christ can be found in a real and personal way only in His Church, which, through its mission, has the calling, duty and opportunity to bring the whole world to the likeness of Christ.

Within the dialogue between theology and culture it should be considered that theology needs culture in order to gain knowledge and to formulate responses to issues that concern man in a particular age. Theology, having as fundament the Divine Revelation, remains constant in essence over the centuries, thus making possible the unbroken continuity of life and apostolic faith. We should keep in mind, however, the reality of change – from one historical epoch to another, from one geographical and social area to another –, of cultural contexts. This represents "a strong reason for theology not to reach self-sufficiency, since, having to preach the Gospel to all nations, it must make an effort to take into account the cultural issues, the changing human mentalities to achieve effective dialogue and to meet the challenges of culture (which reflect human concerns at a given time)."(Popescu,Dumitru Pr. Prof. Dr. „Biserica și cultura", în *Pastorație și Misiune în Biserica Ortodoxă.* Galați : Episcopia Dunării de Jos, 2001. p.44.)

The dialogue between Theology and culture requires effort in the theological interpretation of culture, in hermeneutics, since "what can give consistency to culture, as the fruit of the human mind and sensibility, is not human reason alone – able to perform good and bad state, wherein the ambivalence of culture – but the divine-human reason that theology is built on." (Idem, „Teologie, cultură, știință - o întâlnire necesară", în *Știință și teologie: preliminarii pentru dialog.*, p.8) Every culture involves therefore positive and negative aspects. Eastern theology has developed in very different socio-cultural contexts, but

this has not determined it, at any one time, to identify the Gospel with culture, nor did it operate a separation of the two.

Culture should not be demonized, says Fr. Dumitru Popescu, and the theologian has the duty to also fly low, as the bee, only to certain flowers to pick only what it is useful. Therefore, he says, "a theology that does not distinguish the positive from the negative aspects of culture, may put huge barriers in the path of Christian spirituality and may also miss the chance to open culture towards the skyline of imperishable values. However, the Church Fathers, being especially employed in a cultural environment that was tributary to Platonism and Neo-Platonism, made a distinction between the positive aspect of aspiration to the perfect world of ideas, and the erotic momentum when the soul wants to unite with God, and the negative aspect of ontological pessimism which causes the old culture to repudiate the body and matter."(Ibidem p.9). The Church Fathers emphasize the positive aspects of culture, while also showing that the purpose of man in Christ is to transform the created body and matter. To achieve this, they undertook a comprehensive redefinition of the ancient concept referring to the relationship between the intelligible and the sensitive, between spirit and matter, beyond the antagonism between these categories, from an integrative perspective based on the reality of the incarnation of Christ .

The positive aspects of culture, according to Fr. Dumitru Popescu, "help spirituality and theology to show man the way to God; the role of theology is to purify and transform culture, liberating it from its negative aspects. (...) Interestingly, debuting with a sharp refusal to the proposals of theology, modern science has come – mainly because of the astounding discoveries of contemporary physics – to a more nuanced attitude, knocking on the door of the transcendent.

Neutral in itself, morally speaking, science remains dependent on how it is used. With use, it can be equally good, constructive, engaged in the service of life, and also bad, destructive engaged in the service of death. If it does not wish to stay circumscribed to the road that led it to Hiroshima, science should no longer ignore theology. Through dialogue, science would reorient to a different way, that of Tabor, of the transfiguration of creation, in the light of life."(Ibidem)

Postmodern critique, Father Professor Ion Bria says, understands tradition as a "hermeneutical tool" in the process of contextualization or inculturation and acculturation of the Gospel message. Any age, any generation or spatial cultural environment, where the Good News of salvation is preached, influences – from a cultural, epistemological, sociological point of view – the act of reception and transmission of Tradition.

Based on the meaning of "reception" as a critical act that encompasses alternating aspects of continuity and discontinuity, the Romanian theologian proposes taking into consideration this aspect of reception, acknowledging the opposition between Tradition and traditionalism, which "insists on the content of canonical heritage, in a literal historical sense, hence the regulatory immutable aspect – akrivos – of tradition." (Bria, Ion Pr. Prof. Dr. *Teologia Ortodoxă între Tradiţie şi Modernitate. Stridenţe, rupturi şi conexiuni posibile*, Teologia Ortodoxă între Tradiţie şi Modernitate. Sibiu 1997. p. 26.)

In order to reach this awareness of the real sense of Tradition, some distinctions need to be made.

First of all, it should be said that the Apostolic Tradition of the Church – as an extension of the verbal transmission of the Gospel, on the one hand, and the written recording of the New Testament books by the witnesses of Christ – is the fundamental source of the Christian doctrine revealed, or the "Apostolic Faith". The Apostolic Tradition was however recorded, developed and expressed in dogmatic formulas with a conciliar, Catholic and ecumenical character. In this regard, Father Professor Ion Bria states that "within this conciliar process, the ecumenical council made a distinction between the Apostolic Tradition, namely the permanent and common canonical heritage on the one hand, and the history of the Church, influenced by various cultural and political factors, on the other hand." (Ibidem) Simultaneously, the recognition, but without validation, of certain theological options or theses regarding the theme of councils was also achieved.

Another aspect that is necessary to understanding Tradition is to expose – through synchronization – within reception (through the rapport continuity – response – rejection) – the whole cultural and sociological implication, and of all "so-called church" traditions – specific to a particular era. In this context, it should be borne in mind that the Church is not the transmitter of a double canonical inheritance, but by overlapping these so-called "church" traditions on the canonical ecclesial tradition of the Church, it can create the necessary framework for the emergence of "a dominant theological current to meet the hegemony of a schismatic, heretic or para-church group."(Ibidem p.26)

In Orthodoxy, Tradition is an "area of freedom in university". This is manifested by putting together, within Tradition, catholicity and contextuality; that is why "the Church is not opposed to diversity, plurality, but rejects pluralism that makes particularity absolute, to the detriment of catholicity. The response of the recipient of the Gospel message through personal faith is just as important as the preaching of the transmitter of the faith given to the saints once and for all."(Ibidem)

Therefore, Tradition is not a collection of canons and a deposit of doctrines, but "the result of Pentecostal mutations and of the horizontal development resulting from the permeation of the Gospel into a new cultural context."(Idem., *Hermeneutica Teologică*. p.43) The issue of inculturation represents a complex action, as the transfer of the Gospel message to a new cultural context has sporadically acquired schismatic directions, accompanied by pseudo-Christian or even heretical interpretations.

Theological hermeneutics, therefore, has the mission to "accredit language and concept, legitimate, that is recorded into the conversation of the Church with the faithful and the outside world"(Ibidem), thereby preparing the elements and tools of inculturation.

Another role of inculturation is to fight proselytism in that its intervention occurs "where the pedagogy of heritage, of memory and historical continuity unifies with the pedagogy of perception, of memory purification. Theology, similarly to philosophy, must stay in this critical place of passage where the divine mystery meets the spirit and the human condition, thereby to witness to God Whom all men are looking for to feel and to find (...). In the history of Christ's Gospel Tradition, the Spirit is to give new forms to the Truth of Christ, perfectly accomplishing everything that was confessed in the Scripture." (Ibidem p.44) In the radical dialogue held with the heretics, the type of Tradition exegesis is essential. In this regard we should consider the aspect one you cannot resort to the Tradition of the Fathers without demonstrating that its principles stem from the Holy Scriptures.

The argument of steadiness or keeping unaltered the Patristic Tradition cannot be used, however, to the detriment of inner development of Tradition. This aspect is illustrated in the duty to reformulate doctrines in terms of the contemporary language, the terms being employed in a specific cultural context. (Ibidem p.45)

Father Professor Ion Bria noticed that in the last decades there appeared a series of writings: catechisms, guides, dogmatic textbooks, in which the "illustration of Orthodoxy as the tradition of the true Church, is focused on defending doctrines, in their "classic", on the delimitation of the Orthodox faith against heterodox confessions without describing the historicity of these doctrines, namely their thematic development."(Idem, *Teologia Ortodoxă între Tradiție și Modernitate*. p. 27)

The specificity of Orthodoxy consists in the conception it has of Tradition, which is perceived as historical and cultural closeness and openness of the Church, as well as "the path to overcome any doctrine compulsion, even "sola Scriptura" through vertical (mystagogical) hermeneutics of the biblical text." (Ibidem. p. 28)

In the process of reception of the biblical text, the Evangelist and the interpreter have a common perception of the theological unity of written revelation; thus, both Scripture and Tradition contribute to the "polyphonic" perception of divine revelation. Reception and perception should to be regarded as "a hermeneutic operation within which the consciousness of the Church (phronema, sensus fidelium) appropriates the memory of the Apostles, the Gospel of Christ, as the path to salvation. It is the self-critical mechanism – self-judgment – that maintains the synthesis metamorphosis function of Tradition."(Idem., *Hermeneutica Teologică.* p. 45)

Along the historicity of Tradition, the Church has remained faithful relative to the memory of the Apostles.

Within the context of the historicity of Tradition, Rev. Prof. Ion Bria speaks about two "pedagogies", saying that diachronic Tradition is transmitted and developed through synchronous Tradition. In this process, Hermeneutics aims to provide self-critical action of the Church. (Ibidem).

The steadfastness of Tradition is "its moving and updating to different missionary, cultural and social contexts." (Idem., *Teologia Ortodoxă între Tradiţie şi Modernitate.* p. 28) Thus we can say that "the concrete, human, ecclesial validity" of Tradition and its spatial-temporal fixation can only be ensured by contextual hermeneutics.

The two "teachings" are complementary, if sometimes antagonistically manifested, being understood as the "pedagogy of heritage preservation, of historical memory and the pedagogy of its transmission and renewal." (Ibidem) If it were directed to return to a "spirituality cultivated in the past," modern man would hardly discover a persistent relationship between Tradition and secular society and the current technological civilization. Therefore, the "heritage apology should not preclude the prophetic opening, leaving towards renewal and the future." (Ibidem)

According to Father Professor Ion Bria, the pedagogy of continuity is specific exclusively to the clergy, and is reflected in their duty to teach Tradition, while the hermeneutical pedagogy of reception is addressed to the whole ecclesial body, including the younger generation, and "the `consensus ecleziae` is not limited to "the aspect of the ecclesiastical authority of the hierarchy." (Ibidem)

In the hermeneutic transmission of Tradition in a new cultural environment it is "normal" to generate "dispute, controversy, controversy that can become para-church movements and schismatic groups. Controversy may disrupt the consensus established in the past, so it should not be trivialized, but until its component elements are identified and

assessed, it should not be automatically dismissed as dogmatic heresy." (Idem, *Hermeneutica Teologică.* p.45)

The importance of Hermeneutics to perception comes from the fact that within it, there is always a "conciliar mechanism activated and regulated in all its directions." If this were not done, "the received canonical Tradition would crystallize in final formulas that could block the future course and mission"(Ibidem), in various forms, such as emphasizing historical differences; avoiding contradictory dialogue, the transgression of exegetical rules, or forcing the dominant patterns of the past.

The tradition must be understood as "an area of freedom and unity in diversity. It holds together catholicity and contextuality, that is why the Church is not opposed to diversity, plurality, but rejects pluralism absolutizing particularity to the detriment of catholicity. The response of the recipient of the Gospel through personal faith is essential, just as the preaching of the one transmitting the faith given to the saints once and for all."(Stăniloae Dumitru, Pr. Prof., *Dogmatica Teologică***.** vol.II, p. 284)

Speaking about inculturation, the acculturation of Tradition within the Romanian Orthodox space, Father Ion Bria reminded that "the ethos of Romanian Orthodox, its way of being, is grafted in the matrix of the ethnic, a religious anthropological quality, therefore, so as far as ethnic tracks (...) are brought to light, in the same proportion, contour, shape, culture of the Church are more authentic." (Bria, Ion Pr. Prof. Dr. *Hermeneutica Teologică.*. p. 46) Based on these considerations, the Romanian theologian warns that Christianity is not an empirical religion based on ethnic, historical and cultural elements; its "Christianization" represents a restoration of the fallen man.

The "ethnic affinity" of Romanian Orthodoxy is resumed in contemporaneity rather with the intention to bring to memory the past of Romanian Orthodox culture, but not impose it to a theology for the future. Since the twentieth century, "hermeneutics has had to take into account the tension between the theological and ideological interpretation of ethnicity. The objections of modernity against the ethnic deserve a theological, not ideological, answer. (Ibidem. p. 47)

In the contemporary period, the religious contours of rural communities are given by the rural public who, while remaining nostalgic to the "Mioritic" space, also remains Christian in name only, or in public social occasions. Mioritic Space "could not stop the ravages of unemployment, drugs, prostitution, pedophilia, crime and corruption. The gap between the rich and the poor in villages is growing. Civilization sown in soil ethnically gave negative consequences of a blind urbanization, which led to the displacement of traditional

values to a new relationship between citizens and public institutions including the Church. "In this new context, the role of theological hermeneutics is to analyze phenomenon of perception of traditions and to determine if progress towards a true Christian civilization was not prevented by an increase in the dependency tradition, culture ethnographic conservation. Another task of hermeneutics is the analysis of the ratio of "ethnic and religious affiliation" on the one hand, and membership in an organized society marked by technological progress and modern information. In this respect Bria father says that "inculturation here means removing the tradition of captivity context, it loose the ultraconservative area who refuse criticism and change methods of pastoral and parish and diocesan structures. An ethnographic culture is viable only if it allows freedom of structural reforms, economic and political, that enable a Christian civilization to the present time."

Acquiring universality in Jesus Christ, reaching the state closer to Him, requires an effort from human effort, on the one hand is accompanied and strengthened by prayer and asceticism, on the other hand, can not be separated from a specific way of life of contemporary civilization believer who is in the ascent of the spiritual life. Mysticism, asceticism and Filocalia be incorporated into the mission, the ministry, and the diaconate, to change the present political and economic models as "how social presence and action of the Church, Christian civilization is not only a sociological model but falls the horizontal Pentecostal mutations (Acts 2)" (Ibidem)

Another dimension is the dynamic reception Mass Tradition mission in social diaconate in the presence of the Church in society. In this context Father Ion Bria says that by virtue of the call and the Liturgy of the Eucharist Parish meeting and dinner mystical, it is "prepared and submitted to be between two Sundays, a movement of evangelism and Christian witness among those who are indifferent foreign hostile or remove (...), off society. "Mass manifests as an invitation output side of contemporary society and the shadow of death (Matthew 16) to become truly ecclesial communion, chosen generation, a royal priesthood and holy nation (1 Peter 2, 5-9). Mass indoor or focus on "inner church" (characterized by hesychasm, ascetic and mystical) are essential in view of the fact that partaking of the Holy Mysteries, Christians call mystics, says pr. Ion Bria. Yet though "liturgy " beyond the churchyard, off society where moral compromises occur and conversions, is as important for Christians, especially since the" altar outside "will meet Christians of all denominations . Christians to convert society participation in public life changing as witnesses and deacons of Christ (liturgy after the liturgy) is not a struggle for political power and prestige that would

cancel nationalist tension between the city of God and city of the world, but current creator and prophetic in the evolution of society. "(Ibidem. p. 49)

Due to the socio-economic and cultural changes occurring in contemporary life by expanding businesses and industrial areas, conurbations have continuously developed to the detriment of rural areas.

Father Ion Bria concisely describes the space of urban mission "The urban parish or urban parish center (the center of the neighborhood parish) is the result of mutations in physical geography, surveying, demography, and the lifestyle and behavior of citizens and urban dwellers. The administrative framework and the typology were changed in this period of transition, cities do not have a blind urban balance, demographic and social, the parish is the first to find adverse effects of an urbanization: indifference to traditional values, breaking the continuity of Christian culture, the emergence of a new type of relationships between people and institutions, and between citizens. Public citizen virtues are not well articulated and do not resurface because of public vices. In this chaotic relentless world, no personal conversion or structural change can be achieved by a continuous pedagogy, but in a fragmented way, by improvisation. "(Bria Ion „Misiunea urbană – în prezent și în viitor, condiții și exigențe" în *Relevanța operei Părintelui Profesor Ion Bria pentru viața bisericească și socială actuală,* Sibiu: Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga", 2010)

In older areas of cities, commercial complexes and administrative reserved criterion is inappropriate in defining territorial parish. Because of this, the attachment to the parish church, hidden among the blocks moves in the background. Contemporary believers refer to the parish they are subordinated to only during public occasions or collective services. Thus, we are witnessing the weakening of integration force of the urban parish compared to the rural parish where this force is strongly manifested.

Intense activity carried out in favor of the philokalic spirituality determines modern man to believe that "the issue of Orthodox Christianity would be a personal, existential, faith experience whose expression is" lifestyle ", spirituality, mysticism. Orthodoxy is "a way of life". Perhaps the most important shift is the very alternation between the ecclesial liturgical practice and the personal experience of faith.

The shift from a Christianity centered on the ecclesial community, in fidelity to liturgical and cultic traditions to an open Christianity, allotting more importance to the personality of the faithful and its spiritual, intellectual, educational dimension is obvious."

The mission and pastoral care is oriented towards particular subjects in many cities, priests and places of worship are for groups or communities who need a special pastoral care

youth, students, the elderly, women, children, sick, military, disabled, hipo-accoustic etc. The Urban Mission is very broad and is open to a wide variety of forms among which are mentioned the "conversion to Christianity of those who do not believe in God and the Holy Trinity, the personal confession of the Creed, which precedes baptism, the rite of incorporation into the Church ; baptized Christians returning to the Church who have departed this life and parish (nominal Christians), through participation in the liturgy and sacramental life; Readmission to the Church of those who left it formally (abjuration, retraction of Baptism, switching to another religion, mixed marriages), the Sacrament of Anointing with Chrism; Raising canon to refrain from receiving communion (or excommunication), a canon imposed in cases of serious sins through the Sacrament of Penance (absolution of sins). "(Ion Bria, „Regenerarea misiunii creştine în contextul urban", in *Relevanţa operei Părintelui Profesor Ion Bria pentru viaţa bisericească şi socială actuală,* Sibiu: Universitatea „Lucian Blaga", 2010, p. 37)

The Christian life should be regarded primarily in terms of individual and social community, and then through the parochial institution. Losing faith with growing religious indifference and deleting church institutions represent facts in relation to which priests cannot count the passage of time that would stop the current move.

The challenge of the urban mission is not only to identify "residual" Orthodoxy or the basic patrimony of the parish, but especially transmission of this treasure to the younger generation through continuous evangelism and through explicit communication.

The priest must, above all, learn again to evangelize, that is to bring truth, love and joy of Christ in the life and history of mankind. The Church is a living structure that builds and expands continuously, only continuous and credible testimony of the Gospel of Christ. "The expansion and penetration of Christianity in a society desecrated by religious instruction and catechesis of children, moral and spiritual formation of young people, Christian culture intellectuals, journalists and politicians, these are crucial issues involving real reform. Without the radical conversion of schools, faculties, culture, the de-christianisation of society is assured. There are pseudo-religious philosophical and cultural literature and propaganda, which put Christianity on the same level with mythology and popular attitudes, degrading "Byzantine Orthodoxy" compared to Western religions, more easily understood and accepted. The Orthodox Church underestimated the ignorance among identifiable social and intellectual groups (sociologists, journalists, politicians) as a result of a non-systematic catechesis and a theological education lacking professional teaching staff. "(Ibid)

4. Along the academic path that I followed and which resulted in the present research, I have realized that many times in the missionary- pastoral work of priest, especially in urban areas, it is particularly important to obtain feedback from the believers.

Due to the relatively short period of doctoral studies, I have not focused my attention on this issue, I preferred to spend only a limited time of 3 months, achieving a case study based on a feedback questionnaire.

In the period after the conclusion of the academic cycle of the doctoral studies, with the support of the Center for Academic Research of the Doctoral School in Sibiu and of the Archdiocesan Centre for Diagnosis and Catechumen and Homiletics Research and Pedagogy and Methodology of Religion "Metropolitan Andrei Saguna" (CADCO) in Sibiu, whose member and collaborator I am, I intend to achieve an exhaustive analysis within which to propose a series of missionary-pastoral programs, as a response of the Church to the socio-cultural and religious-moral problems of contemporary society members, proposals which will be published together with the final interpretation of the case study.

Some of the solutions drawn from the preliminary analysis of the study will be found among the general conclusions of the present academic paper.

In order for the study to be relevant, and because of the challenge of modern means brought to all of us, I proposed that the production and distribution of the feedback questionnaire to be achieved exclusively in the online environment. We have done so out of a desire to include among the respondents in this study those people who devote much time to online activities and whom we often do not meet, or if we do meet, might not be available to respond to a questionnaire. Aspects regarding the respondents' profile and some of the answers they have given to the questions in the feedback form on the socio-cultural and religious-moral problems of contemporary society can be found in the form of graphs and tables in Annexes attached to this work.

CONCLUSIONS

During the postmodern period traditional rural society gradually disappears – along with its grid values – and we find that, together with the transfer of contemporary man towards the urban environment, he creates his own value system in which most of the times non-value replaces true value. The religious life of the urban population is radically changed in the context of the de-Christianized society, of the religious ignorance, the secularization of morals, the lack of Christian civilization.

Religion and traditional morality are no longer ubiquitous. Contemporary society may be compared more and more to the "sheep without a shepherd." Modern society requires religious values only as a factor of culture and morality without the obligation of conversion.

Many Christians educated in cities have a passive general religious spirituality, without any reference to the memory of the ancestors and the Church. Intellectuals aspire to a religious culture, a metaphysical baggage, unlabeled in a Christian manner, with humanistic values belonging to all religions: transcendence, simplicity, nonviolence, solidarity, brotherhood, universal harmony.

I will present below the findings of the present research, illustrating my personal view to contributing to the mission of the Church in our contemporary society. The findings resulted from this research will be grouped into two categories. The first category is directly concerned with "opinion formers" presenting missionary solutions to improve the quality of the Church mission, while the second group is concerned with the missionary solutions that the church needs to support the members of the contemporary urban society (but not exclusively   ).

In terms of improving the quality of urban mission the following missionary measures are envisaged:

1. Restructuring the religious education system

• Focus on competitive society. Individuals who graduate a stage of education in an Orthodox religious institutional framework must be prepared to interact with society, not isolate from it, nor live in a parallel reality.

• Review of educational curricula (at all levels of schooling) to identify or eliminate the need to introduce certain subjects / curriculum areas.

• Adaptability / flexibility of educational curricula according to the demand for "workforce". In this regard, theology faculties must adapt their educational offer according to the areas where they can place their graduates in the labor force, as the whole society needs good Christians. Thus, it would be beneficial to establish a department of journalism, disease psychology, palliative medicine, counseling of people at risk (domestic violence, alcohol and drug addiction, institutionalized people, etc.)

2. Implementation of a national program for training / continuing theological education.

• Organizing national conferences and workshops in all theological areas or of interference with theology: Church History, Spirituality, Missiology (Ecumenism, Urban Mission, Rural

Mission, Sectology), Dogmatic, Catechetical, Homiletics, Christian Education, Pastoral, Christian Psychotherapy counseling to individuals at risk, Romanian Church History, Universal Church History, Biblical Archaeology, the New Testament, the Old Testament (there can be for example a symposium dedicated to each book of the NT / OT), History of Religions, Patrology, Orthodox Literature, Christian Art, Church Canon Law, Church Administration, Eligibility in accessing European funds in the parishes, Parish Sustainability – identifying and exploiting sources of cash flow in parishes, Theology and Science, pastoral and mission of the church in contemporaneity etc.

• Location for the organization of these scientific manifestations: Episcopal / metropolitan centers, universities, monasteries, etc.

• Scientific approach to topics of increasing current importance.

• Extended good response: possible participation and presentation of reports (on sections) by the students at bachelor / master / doctorate, clergy, teachers of Religion, academics etc.

• Specialized commission to support the selection and approval of scientific papers presented at these events.

• During the breaks of these scientific events there can be editorial presentations, selling religious objects, presentations of products made in metropolitan workshops, church vestments, presentation of the theological education offer in schools etc.

• It creates a space of "socialization" among theologians – if we knew each other better and we could talk more, the relationship between priests would definitely be more fruitful within the missionary-pastoral plan.

• Additional Training – intensive courses for the clergy and teachers of Religion: psychology / psychiatry / pedagogy.

3. Reprinting all religious books, straightening and correcting the spelling of the liturgical text.

• Identify the means by which these books can reach every parish. (Sponsorship for print, donations to poor parishes, discounts on the purchase of certain "packages" of religious books.

• Avoid perpetuating influences promoting discriminating, racist, xenophobic or anti-Semitic attitudes.

4. Preparing students and priests to counsel members of society:

• Good cooperation with the ProVita (which should not address only certain aspects of ethics

but be truly pro-life and pro-birth)

• Family counseling. (Christian alternative to family planning centers).

• Advising teenagers and women who become pregnant out of wedlock; advising young people to take responsibility (the Church should not point the finger at sin, but must help out of it, counseling HIV-positive patients, drug addicts and alcohol addicts.

Further we will be present missionary solutions meant to improve the mission of the Church in contemporary society:

5. Establishing within each Archbishop center (and then within every deanery) a permanent mission station which:

• to hold a chapel, a Christian psychotherapy practice, a social canteen, space for temporary housing, a Christian counseling center (youth, families, people at risk) etc.

• to be built in an area accessible to as many members of contemporary society as possible.

• to be open daily for 8 hours (9 am – 5 pm);

• to be served continuously by missionary priests, deacons, Orthodox psychotherapy specialists, social workers, physicians who are helped by theology students or other faculty.

• to become a space where every man at a loss can obtain expert advice of a priest, a doctor or therapist.

• to provide jobs to graduates of theology and beyond.

6. Organizing liturgical services specific to various social categories in the permanent missionary center:

• to organize the Divine Liturgy and catechesis dedicated to children – one day per week, another day to be dedicated to young people, another one to older people, another day dedicated to people with disabilities;

• to assure transportation for seniors who cannot get to the church;

7. Creation of a Christian cultural leisure center.

• Bookstore - Cafe / Tearoom, study tables and internet access (Wi-Fi)

• Submit an extensive editorial offer covering all scientific fields present in the respective academic center.

• Organization of events for young people (editorial presentations, conferences and debates of interest, book fairs)

8. Organizing information campaigns on current phenomena and issues within contemporary society

• Accurate information of society on Ecumenism, as the lack of accurate information pushes society members to extremes.

• Information on innovations in science (Biosciences) human chips implemented recently in USA, issues of (Bioengineering, bio-hacking, cyborgs, restoring Active Memory Program);

9. Establishing a Media-On-line office in each deanery:

• Create a portal / an official Facebook page, where employees of the office could post information regarding the day Synaxar, liturgical and pastoral missionary events held in the deanery / city in question, answer questions on-line to other members (answers should reflect the official position of the Orthodox Church);

10. Developing programs / platforms for the Christian education of children:

• Interactive games for PC / Tablet

• Christian Songs and Poems

• Coloring Books

11. The involvement of the Church in the rehabilitation of hospitals and educational institutions.

12. Courage to sanction sin in all levels of society, not just from the pulpit.

• Taking firm action in the context of promoting legislation that facilitates sin (legalization of abortion, prostitution, homosexuality, etc.)

13. The promotion and protection of national values

• Involving the Church through information campaigns in the deanery and parishes in matters of national interest: Rosia Montana, shale gas, etc.

14. Building and organizing housing units:

• Housing for young families (alternative ANL- National Agency of Locative spaces) – possibility to rent / purchase

• Homes for the elderly

• Housing for the families of retired priests

• Housing for young people who leave care after 18 years of institutionalization

• Family housing for abandoned children / orphans.