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**PhD THESIS**

**Fructum dabit – Mission and Interreligious Dialogue from an Orthodox and a  
Roman Catholic Perspective: Archbishops Anastasios Yannoulatos and  
Michael L. Fitzgerald**

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Introduction 4

I. Archbishop Anastasius Yannoulatos's theological missionary activity 10

I.1. Life 10

I.2. Work 12

I.3. The Orthodox Church, between history and actuality: mission and dialogue 21

II. Biblical and theological principles of the Orthodox mission and interreligious dialogue 26

II.1. Biblical and theological sources of the Orthodox mission and interreligious dialogue 26

II.2. The Sacred Trinity - the basis and purpose of the mission 37

II.3. Global vision of Gospel proclamation 42

II.4. Testimony and dialogue 63

II.5. Christianity dialogue with Islam: past and present 71

II.6. Evaluation 79

III. Cardinal Michael L. Fitzgerald's theological and missionary activity 82

III.1. Life 82

III.2. Work 83

III. The Roman Catholic Church, between integralism and opening 92

IV. Roman Catholic principles for mission and interreligious dialogue 115

IV.1. Roman Catholic Church and interreligious dialogue 115

IV.2. Interreligious dialogue expressions 118

IV.3. Globalization, religious pluralism and the role of the parish 126

IV.4. The mission and role of the laity 135

IV.5. Testimony of monotheistic religions 137

IV.6. Obstacles to dialogue: modern religious fundamentalism 145

IV.7. Christians and Muslims relationships - a Catholic perspective 153

*Excursus.* Christianity and Islam - doctrinal and ethical convergences and divergences 163

IV.8. “Dialogue prophecies”: examples for future interreligious dialogue 184

IV.9. Evaluation 194

Conclusions 198

List of acronyms 204

General bibliography 205

Curriculum Vitae

Honesty statement

***Fructum dabit* – Mission and Interreligious Dialogue from an Orthodox and a Roman Catholic Perspective: Archbishops Anastasios Yannoulatos and Michael L. Fitzgerald**

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**This theme presentness.** Nowadays, under the influence of globalization and massive population movements, the interreligious dialogue issue arises more acutely than ever. Mircea Eliade highlighted one aspect: he questioned the presentness of the famous quotation belonging to A. N. Whitehead. According to him, the history of the Western philosophy is, in fact, only a long series of footnotes to Plato's philosophy. This "splendid isolation", as the alleged superiority of the European civilization in the world, is in the west: the western mentality had already begun to meet (face?) other types of civilization, such as the Asian cultures' one. Thus, a phenomenon began, that continues to this day, sometimes with dramatic results - human cultural horizon is broader than it was believed until recently, and "after all, the meeting - or clash - of civilizations is always a meeting of spiritualities, even of different religions". Consequently, "the cultural creation of extra-Western peoples should be examined in itself being expected that the researchers try to understand it with the same intellectual passion with which they study Homer's world, the prophets of Israel, Meister Eckhart's mystical philosophy".

Of course, the specific of the contexts in which Christians live today raises a variety of issues. For example, the position of the Christians cannot be overlooked

– even if they represent a minority - in predominantly Muslim countries, in which, unfortunately, they were often involved in conflicts and persecutions that lead us to the situation of the martyrs in the first Christian centuries. Actually, the common Christian-Islamic history was frequently marked by conflicts more or less open, more or less bloody. Therefore, current foundations of the interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims are like a chain with enough weak links resulting in inherent difficulties, which must be overcome in the future.

The problem of Christian identity in Europe, respectively the problem of the Christians' attitude in European countries where Christians are the majority, rephrases for the whole Christianity the question of the interreligious dialogue and of its mission in the world. That is why we proposed, in the PhD research theme, to emphasize the missionary principles, and the principles of the interreligious dialogue in the two great Christian traditions, the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic traditions. I also used the work of two of the most famous theologians, missionaries from each of the Christian traditions mentioned: on the one hand, Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, on the other hand, Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald. In fact, their bio-bibliographies include amazing similarities. Both were involved, since their early life in missionary activities. They were in mission in countries outside Europe; they coordinated missionary centres or organizations. They became bishops within the churches they belong to; they were and are involved in a dialogue with other religions, especially with Islam; they have an intense journalistic activity focused on the current mission and interreligious dialogue, etc. All this made us choose the two as subjects in this PhD research, with the intention to highlight some common points, but also specific elements that contribute to a greater communion between the two traditional churches, namely to

the development of a common Christian position facing challenges that today's world brings in terms of culture and religion.

**Research limitations.** It is difficult today to approach topics such as mission, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Religious and cultural dynamics due to globalization, relativism, secularization and integralist spirit spreading, make it hard to set in a rigid background, the cultural-religious reality of humanity. Furthermore, the encounters between different religions and beliefs, even Christian, unfortunately, was and is, quite often marked by conflict, and not by dialogue, by fanaticism and not by tolerance. As far as we are concerned, we tried to emphasize positive, not negative aspects, the successes, not the failures of the dialogue. That is why I used syntagm "fructum dabit" in the title, meaning "yielding fruit", which is found in Psalm 1. Here, the first three verses speaks about the faithful man: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers; But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Somehow, the missionary theologian's work involved in dialogue with others is the same: working day and night, fulfilling divine will and law, he will drink from the faith fountains until the tree, which he planted, will bear fruit. It is a painstaking work, sometimes difficult, but otherwise he cannot fulfil his mission. We hope that fruition time is here convinced that only through the life and work of theologians like Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos and Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, the dialogue of faith and love will yield fruit, under the grace of the Holy Spirit. For only the divine will decides when "Its time will come" ...

**Research method.** In our paper, we aim to achieve an interdisciplinary theological analysis, which is why we use more research methods. We mention three of them: the historical, comparative and analytical methods.

The historical method will help us evoke the most important stages in the missionary history of the Orthodox Church going from the apostolic age to the present. This historical excursus is necessary to identify the fundamental principles and the results that defined the Orthodox mission, namely the relationship with members of other religions and especially with the Islam. In addition, the historical method is necessary in the case of both Archbishop Yannoulatos and Monsignor Fitzgerald to understand better the steps that can be identified in the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church relation with other religions. For example, Yannoulatos identifies four main stages in the Orthodoxy-Islam relationship, going from conflict to peaceful dialogue, without which the main lines to enhance and develop this relation in the future cannot be traced.

The comparative method will also contribute to a better understanding of what defines the specificity of the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic missions: common and special points, as they appear exposed in Archbishop Anastasios's and Cardinal Michael L. Fitzgerald's works. Of course, this mission was based and is based on socio-historical conditions, but we should always keep in mind the ecclesiological principles underlying the mission. These principles cannot change. Consequently, every place and historical period cause malfunctions, however, without altering the essence of the mission of the church. For example, it is more than obvious that somehow "the theology of religions" in Catholicism before and after the Second Vatican Council was outlined. It was a change without which we cannot properly understand some Catholic missionary theologians' work, among which we can include Michael L. Fitzgerald too.

The analytical method allows us to identify and analyze the levels where the Orthodox and Catholic missions are performed, from the perspective of the two authors mentioned. It also provides data to signal "strengths and weaknesses" of this paper as well as possible ways to improve and develop it in the future. It is the method used especially in the final chapter of our paper, which is an assessment of fundamentals and characteristics specific to the mission, from the two perspectives Orthodox (Yannoulatos) and Catholic (Fitzgerald), with implications regarding the interreligious dialogue.

**Research stage.** Both in the case of Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos and Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, we consider that the reception of the paper is still at an early stage. Somehow, it is obvious, considering that we speak about two theologians who are still alive. On the other hand, especially in the case of the former, the influence of the Orthodox Church and not only - is visibly increasing.

In our research, the spotlight is directed especially to the study of the two theologians' work. If the activity performed in Albania by Archbishop Anastasios was described by some authors, see especially Lukas Veronis, other aspects of his work especially in Africa - remain to be evaluated by future generations. In Romanian theology, we can mention only several studies, followed by episodic quotations or specific reviews and bibliographic notes due to translation into Romanian of two of his books. (See for example: "Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, Contribution to the development of orthodox missionary theology", in *International Journal of Orthodox Theology*, 6 (2015), number 1, pp. 63-86; Cristian Sonea, "Orthodox Christian testimony in an ethnic, confessional and religious heterogeneous context, in the vision of Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos", in Stefan Iloaie (coordinator), *Ethos and ethnos. Theological and social aspects of Christian testimony. International conference collection of*



documents "Ethics - ethnicity – religion", Cluj University Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 270-282).

In the case of Michael L. Fitzgerald the situation is even more precarious. Thus, there is a study of his, translated into Romanian and a review of the homage volume detailing the most precisely the landmarks of his life and activity as missionary theologian. (see: Michael L. Fitzgerald, "Panorama of interreligious dialogue", in the Romanian theology magazine No. 1 (1995), p. 11-18, respectively the review published by Ciprian Iulian Toroczka in the theological review, 23 (2013) , No. 1, p. 284-287).

**Thesis structure.** The thesis has the aspect of an analysis "in the mirror", of the life and work of Anastasios Yannoulatos, respectively Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald. Thus, after the introduction that shows "typical" elements (theme presentness, methods, research stage etc), the first part contains the bio-bibliography of the Orthodox missionary theologian, followed by the most important directions of his work. It is the orthodox church between history and actuality : mission and dialogue; biblical and theological principles of Orthodox mission and interreligious dialogue; biblical and theological sources of the Orthodox mission and interreligious dialogue; Sacred Trinity – mission essence and purpose; global vision of the Gospel proclamation; testimony and dialogue; Christianity dialogue with Islam: past and present.

As it can be seen, the first thematic approaches of Anastasios Yannoulatos's work focuses on the missionary work of the Church, and then we move on, to approach the interreligious dialogue, and especially the dialogue with the Islam. The structure of the second major part of our work is the same: after exposing the bio-bibliography of Michael L. Fitzgerald, we analyze the most significant themes

of his thought - starting with the principles of a missionary work and ending with the interreligious dialogue, emphasizing the dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Unlike the first part of the thesis, this part includes as an absolute necessity the social, historical and religious background of the Christian catholic tradition in the twentieth century, because without changes occurred in the Second Vatican Council we would not understand the life and work of a theologian like Fitzgerald.

The paper ends with conclusions where we provide an assessment of both theological and missionary visions, one Orthodox and one Roman-Catholic, focusing especially on common elements, but without neglecting the specific points of each Christian tradition separately.

In terms of content analysis of the missionary, ecumenical and interreligious vision of Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos and Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, the following common points should be highlighted:

1) the threefold character of the entire ecclesial and human existence. The Sacred Trinity is the eternal source of communion. "God is love" (I, Jn. 4.8). Thus, God is the perfect and absolute goal of human life, the apex and the model of perfection. The Christian mission is to reveal the great importance of the Trinitarian dogma on the fate of Christians in particular and of all the people and all the creation in general.

2) the Christological character of the humanity and of the mission of the Church, because it is nothing but a confession of the Logos centrality in the entire creation. Understanding Christ as the Logos of God was doubled by rediscovering the "cosmic" Logos doctrine. Jesus Christ is "the central Man", through whom everything is understood, the unifying basis of all the humanity. This

Christological character is doubled by the pneumatologic one: the presence of Christ is one in permanent dynamics, and this dynamism is possible through the Holy Spirit. Thus, He is present through hearing in the words of Scripture, spoken by Himself in His messianic ministry. These words are repeated liturgically and in sacramental manner and with the same effective evangelization that penetrates the heart and converts to the divine mystery, but also in the words of the prayer as a human response in love to the affectionate and Saviour divine interpellation.

3) The evangelism project of the Church - founded by the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost, and by sending the Saint Apostles to the peoples - is but the work of proclaiming the person and the salvation work of Jesus Christ. The Gospel possesses a universal character, and evangelism is a relentless requirement of the members of the Church in any time and space. The evangelizing activity is essential for *building* the Church, the Body of Christ in history; the Church extension is the goal itself of the Christian mission. The relentless Holy Spirit presence in the Church since its foundation reveals another dimension that it possesses: the eschatological dimension. It is the sign, the parable and the anticipated presence of the Kingdom of God. The testimony by the quality and sanctity of life is the most effective means of mission, as it is the most favourable means to show the living presence of God in people's lives.

4) The mission coincides with the Church "extension" - Christ's mysterious body. Although apostolicity is reflected most strongly in the succession of the Apostles in the sacramental hierarchy of the three-stage clergy, laity should not miss the missionary work. Thus, in contemporary Orthodox theology, a key issue is "the laity apostolate". Especially in and through the Liturgy, the Church expresses its sacramental role, role that the state cannot separate from its condition of being "God's people".

5) In relation to other religions, Orthodoxy must promote dialogue and not fanaticism or isolation. However, this openness does not mean relativism or syncretism - abandoning the fundamental doctrine of faith or mixing them with others. Orthodox position, although open, must be critical to both the other religions, and cultural and scientific achievements of the contemporary society. (One possible model to be followed is the history of the Orthodoxy relation with the Islam.)

6) The trend of the world today is global. Apparently, the unity of humanity is greater than ever, but we are dealing with a temptation: as it can be seen, it is an outer unity. Therefore, Orthodoxy has the mission of promoting its universal dimension, the ecclesial-community of the Body of Christ and the Sacred Trinity icon.

7) From the same perspective, we should view as well, the extremely current issue of human rights. A fundamental question for everyone is how not to confine to developing and perfecting our own personality, but also to create a communion with other human beings and with the Supreme Reality. Only within this movement, the true fulfilment of the human personality is conceivable (accomplishment that requires above all personal asceticism and then appropriate action outwards, towards God, other people and the environment).

8) Gospel and culture are not presented in a relationship of opposition. The main task of theology is how to express eternity in the new conditions of existence, how to create a dialogue between the message of the revelation and the new modern sciences like medicine, anthropology, sociology, psychology and psychotherapy. Theological and scientific organizations must be founded, through which the Church receives proper perspective on the contemporary world and selects the best

means to enhance the effectiveness of its work from social and educational point of view for example.

9) Characteristic features of the Orthodox mission are set taking into account two aspects: on the one hand, the Orthodox mission is not proselytising, and on the other hand, it extracts attributes from the ethos of the Church itself. Thus, the external mission is as necessary as the internal mission is. Its goals remain valid for today's Church and for the church in the apostolic and patristic era. They are preaching the Gospel, not as a proclamation of principles or ethical truths, but as the beginning of the transfiguration inaugurated by "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 4.4) and building "local churches" with sincere respect for the identity of each people. This identity is represented by language and specific customs; finally, reintegration into Christ as the starting point of an active participation in the work of God.

10) Regarding the interreligious dialogue, one should always consider the quality of all the people to be Heavenly Father's "children", His personal love's creations. It is a quality that determines a particular Christian ethos. It ought to be always shown to members of other religions, especially the monotheistic ones. Openness and dialogue are indispensable conditions for the position of Orthodoxy in the world today, but these elements do not lead to a compromise from the dogmatic or ethical point of view. On the other hand, some non-Christian teaching methods, used by Christians in the past prove that any testimony made by means different from the Gospel is harmful. Especially in dialogue with the Muslims, this is obvious. Thus, the Orthodox mission in relation to other religions may be a new starting point in the interreligious dialogue, especially in those regions of the world where members of other religions meet: Christian, Hebrew, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu etc.

As a conclusion through the missionary activity and through the theological work, both Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, and Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald became models of missionary theologians in the two great traditions of Christianity, the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic one. In both cases, we talk about fulfilling a missionary vocation plus endeavours of unity. Words in Ps. 1, with that tree meant to grow continually, watered by "faithful men", highlight the vigour and openness to the grace of the Holy Spirit work. We are sure that here comes the power of the two theologians' work and words, which we researched in this PhD project.