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**MAN, THE IMAGE OF CHRIST.  
HIS SENDING AND HIS RESPONSIBILITY IN THE WORLD**

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The paper entitled „Man, the Image of Christ. His Sending and his Responsibility in the World” is an attempt to theologially ground the quality of man as a missionary being and to identify the essential coordinates within which the Christian makes use of this vocation concretely.

The paper is divided into four main parts, it is preceded by an *Introduction* and followed by *Conclusions*. Each part is organized into several chapters and subchapters.

The Introduction presents the research topic, showing that the main purpose of the paper is to ground theologially the statement according to which man is a missionary being, who, by getting incorporated into the Church of Christ, has the duty to undertake his missionary vocation and manifest it in a concrete manner. The synthetic version of the thesis may be stated as follows: Man is a theologial being, sent into the world as a *Misionarius Christi*. In the introductory part, we mention some of the reasons for choosing this research topic:

a. In Romanian missionary theology there is no anthropological grounding for mission that approaches its implications at a personal level. This void has a double explanation. The first would be that “for a long time, mission was perceived as a means of expansion for the Christian religion by planting Churches in non-Christian spaces.”, and the missionaries were the actors that performed this expansion “in the sense of a conquista, of domination, expressed in ecclesial and cultural categories”, a reason enough for the Orthodox theology “to use the missionary terminology belonging to the western Christianity with precaution and even with suspicion , in the past centuries”<sup>1</sup>. Another reason would be that “Misiology as an academic subject is relatively new; its origins can be found in the second half of the XIXth century in the protestant theology”. In the Romanian Orthodox Church, missiology as an academic subject becomes part of the university theologial studies between the two world wars. Vasile Ispir, with the work entitled *Îndrumarea misionară a Bisericii ortodoxe*, published in Bucharest, in 1929, makes the first systematic attempt towards achieving this. During the communist dictatorship, due o the censorship, on one hand, and to the understanding of mission as a way of protecting the Church against the proselytism of new sects, on the other hand, the

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<sup>1</sup> Valer Bel, *Misiunea Bisericii în lumea contemporană. 1 Premise teologice*, PUC, 2004, p. 7.

Orthodox missionary theology encountered the risk of excessively developing as *Sectology* (p. 10) After 1990, the orthodox missiology began understanding mission less as a way of fighting against the threat of religious sects, and more as the sending of the Church into the world in order to universalize the Gospel and to incorporate all in the Kingdom of God. At the present state, the research in the field finds the theological grounding for Christian mission in the Trinitarian theology, in the sending of the Son, of the Holy Spirit, of the Apostles and of the Church into the world for its redemption and deification. However, it limits itself to the mission of the Church as a divine-human institution, as a space for redemption, without specifying or particularizing the essential coordinates of missionary activity of its members.

**b.** A certain lack of coherence can be noticed, at a national level, in what concerns the strategy of involving the laity in the mission of our Church. That is maybe because there is no theological grounding for the *missionary vocation* of all Christians, adapted to the expectations of the contemporary world. The only major work approaching the role of the laity within the Church belongs to father Liviu Stan: *Mireni în Biserică. Importanța elementului mirean în Biserică și participarea lui la exercitarea puterii bisericești. Studiu canonic-istoric*, published in Sibiu, in 1939. His considerations over the role played by the laity in exercising the sacramental, teaching or jurisdictional powers of the Church are still quite interesting today.

**c.** A third reason would be the fact that there is a common misperception at the level of the communities of Christians and at the level of the civil society that the missionary work is exclusively an attribute of the Church hierarchy and of its structures,

Besides the reasons for choosing this topic, the Introduction speaks about the objectives of this paper, as well: the research has as a starting point the Christological, biblical and patristic anthropology and it means to ground theologically man's quality of being a missionary and his special missionary vocations; also it intends to show the fact that mission does not exclusively belong to the clergy and to point out the limits within which the laymen, members of the people of God, are sent to mission, to identify the coordinates of the mission of the laity and to reaffirm the responsibility that man has for the creation and for the society .

De asemenea, sunt amintite și metodele de cercetare utilizate în demersul științific:

a) *Metoda exegetico-hermeneutică*, prin care s-au interpretat în perspectivă misionară, hristologică și eclesială textul revelat al Sfintei Scripturi și textele Sfintei Tradiții; b) *Metoda teologico-speculativă*, pe care se fundamentează și se structurează întreg sistemul teologiei misionare, în general (p. 14).

The first part, “Man as the image of Christ”, makes an analysis of man’s quality of being the image of Christ, from a missionary perspective. The first chapter entitled *Anthropological premises* tries to prove that it is necessary for all the people to assume their missionary vocation and this is made possible mainly because of the missionary constitution and ontology in potentiality of all Christians.

The argumentation starts from the idea that man is created by the image of the Holy Trinity, and due to that, he is open for communication and communion. He is called to help the other and to surpass the natural. Next, the quality of man as an image of the embodied Logos is analyzed. In the view of the missionary anthropology, the Christological anthropology developed by the Holy Fathers of the Church, based on the revealed biblical truth, discovered the fact that the ontological truth of man can’t be found in his natural features, neither in his soul, nor in the superior part of his soul, in his mind or reason, exclusively in himself as a person, but in his Archetype. So, the protology of man can be found in Christ and it cannot be truly recognized but in the eschatological figure of Jesus Christ.

In order to use the Christological anthropology in the missionary discourse, we discuss another notion that can be found in the corpus of the biblical anthropogenesis (Genesis 1, 26), that of likeness (ὁμοίωσις). Based on the theological thinking of Saint Maximus the Confessor, we show that the process of achieving likeness with God, of walking the distance between the image and the likeness can be named man’s *original mission*, while fulfilling the work makes man a missionary *ab initio*. Thus, the image of God in man, discovered in a patristic synthesis as the image of Christ makes the fulfillment of the mission possible, as in the dynamics of acquiring likeness, man, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, gathers all within himself, by the image of the Archetype, in order to give himself in, completed by them, to Christ the Thelos.

The second chapter of the first part analyzes the *missionary premises* that the quality of man as a missionary being is based upon. The Christian mission is presented as the work of the Holy Trinity and, at the same time, the contemporary missionary paradigm *missio Dei* is analyzed from the point of view of the orthodox theology. We show that the doctrine *missio Dei* is not entirely strange to eastern theology. A more profound approach is necessary, however, in the sense of emphasizing the Trinitarian, Christological and pneumatological groundings of the mission, as God’s being revealed

as a Trinity points to the fact that God is in Himself a life of communion<sup>2</sup> and through His work in the world He attracts creation and the entire humanity to this communion of true life with Himself (p. 37). We noticed as well that, unfortunately, “together with the reevaluation of the missionary discourse, the Western world did not perform a correction of the teachings about the Church. Due to this, the doctrine *missio Dei* opens the possibility for a misunderstanding of the act and purpose of mission. For the Protestant theology, the true Church is unseen and the visible Church is represented by the society of the believers who share the same faith. Therefore, *missio Dei* can be carried out outside the Church, too. The ultimate source of mission is God, so His work can be performed outside the missionary institution or society .

In the subchapters entitled *The sending of the Son in the world* and *The sending of the Church as a perpetuation of the sending of Christ*, we present, in the context of the paradigm *missio Dei*, the sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in the world, understood as conditions for the mission of all Christians, while the sub-chapter *The layman, a missionary in the Church* finishes the first part of the paper and, implicitly, the chapter dedicated to the missionary premises.

The second part of the paper is entitled *The missionary vocation of man – biblical and patristic references*. The first chapter deals with *New Testament references for the “sending” of Christians to mission*, starting with the writings of the Evangelists and finishing with Paul’s missionary theology.

The subchapter dedicated to the Gospel of Matthew talks about the *Man and the mission*, emphasizing the fact that disciples from all around, of a different ethnical background or social status, are called to mission. And although Saint Evangelist Matthew does not use the syntagm “by the image of God” or “by the image of Christ” to define the ontology of the disciple sent to mission, he uses a different notion, that emphasizes a quality of the human being that corresponds to his theological ontology, that of the *son of God* (υἱος θεοῦ) (Mt 5, 9). The content of the *Sermon on the Mount* is analyzed, a text that reflects the qualities of man as the son of God. The missionary discourse from Matthew 10 is seen as a paradigm of the mission carried out by the first Christians and the section finishes with the interpretation of the *great commission* (Mt 28, 16 -20). We stress here the connection between the community of the disciples of Jesus and that of the disciples from the time of the Saint Matthew the Evangelist, established through the common use of the imperative μαθητεύσατε, “make disciples” (Mt

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<sup>2</sup> *Go Forth in Peace*, p. 3; Valer Bel, „*Missio Dei*”, în *Misiunea Bisericii în Sfânta Scriptură și în istorie*, coordonator Ioan Chirilă, Ed. Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, pp. 10-11.

28, 19). It is a proof that for Saint Matthew the Evangelist there is no discontinuity between the historicity of Christ the Savior and that of the Church. All those that follow Christ, coming from “all nations” (*Mt* 28, 19) and all historical times are the Disciples of Christ.

Saint Mark the Evangelist defines, in Christological terms, the Christian’s true quality of being a disciple and, implicitly, a missionary through the acceptance and undertaking of the cross of Christ.

After first presenting *the typology of Christ’s disciple* (Mark 1: 16-20) the conditions of the missionary discipleship are discovered (Mark 8: 34). The first would be the ability to renounce your old self, who, in the present state, is outside the rebirth through grace. A person who is willing to deny the fact that he is the measure of his own existence, may give himself to God, the One Who can grant him redemption. Secondly, he must *take his cross* and, finally, he has to start following Jesus Christ. Here, “following” the Teacher means trusting Him, following His footsteps and listening to the commandments, out of gratitude for the redemption that was given to the world through (*Eph.* 4, 32-5,2).

The assuming of the cross means martyrdom, means drinking the cup He drank, and being baptized with the baptism He was baptized (*Mark* 10, 39) so that the Gospel is taught to all the nations. ”You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.” (*Mark* 13, 9-10).

In the writings of Saint Luke some elements with an interesting missionary content can be identified. Besides some of the topics that we encountered in the other evangelists’ writings – the former demonized man from Gerasenes being sent to teach the others (*Luke* 8, 39); the sending of the twelve apostles to preach the word of God (*Luke* 9, 1-2); the sending of the 40 disciples in mission (*Luke* 10, 1-10); the carrying of the cross in the missionary work (*Luke* 14, 27) – Saint Luke the Evangelist emphasizes certain personal aspects that give consistence to the missionary paradigm in his writings. The subchapter dealing with this is, therefore, is entitled *Mission in the Spirit of Christ in the writings of Saint Luke the Evangelist*, as it discusses the pneumatology of Luke, the community of disciples that became known to the people as the “Church” (ἐκκλησία) and which, through the holy life they led, produced a powerful attraction to the rest of the world (*Acts* 2, 42-44) and to the disciples quality of being *witnesses of these things* (*Luke* 24, 48). The approach is justified, on one hand, by the fact that the personal mission of all Christians cannot be

divided from the society, which actually is kept together through the work of the Holy Spirit and, on the other hand, by the fact that, in mission, both the Apostles and the mere believers who confess the life in Christ, are led by the Holy Spirit.

The chapter dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist is called *Mission in Christ's way in the writings of Saint John the Evangelist*. The missionary theology of Saint John the Evangelist is unique and valuable. Although, at a first sight, his writings seem addressed to those inclined to contemplation, his missionary message contains a high Christology that reveals the purpose and the cosmic dimensions of the Christian mission<sup>3</sup>.

In the larger context of the missionary theology of Saint John, the identification of the coordinates of the apostolic vocation of all the disciples is tightly connected to Jesus Christ and to His work of redemption.<sup>4</sup> John the Evangelist provides Christological grounding for the quality which is granted to all Christians and he does it in a more obvious way than the synoptic evangelists. Instead of being "called" (as presented in the Synoptic Gospels), the disciples are attracted to Jesus Christ and they progressively perfect their knowledge about Him (cf. *John* 1, 15-19). The fundamental criterion that brings together the apostles and those attracted by the message of the Gospels is that of believing in Jesus Christ as the only One Who can reveal the Father to them. For this reason, the paper means to show the connection between Christ's message and that of His disciples. (*John* 20, 21-22).

*The anointing from the Holy One as a power against heresies* (*1 John* 2, 20; *1 John* 2, 19; 4, 1; *2 John* 7), is the missionary theme analyzed in Saint John's epistles and in the sub-chapter *The witnesses of God – paradigmatic witnesses for the witness of all Christians* referring to *Apocalypse* 11, 3 the quality of being a witness is associated with that of being a martyr. The *Apocalypse* indicates a transformation of the word μαρτυρ used to name those that willingly choose to become witnesses although they know it could lead them to death. It is the reason why all Christians are potential martyrs. The author of the *Apocalypse* describes the Church as being made up of martyrs (11, 7; 12, 11; 20, 4). For him, a martyr is the ideal Christian. The martyrs are those that best represent the Church, as it is involved in a fight that is carried out under the sign of martyrdom.

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Senior; Carroll Stuhlmueller, *op.cit.*, pp. 282-283; Gheorghe Petraru, *Teologie fundamentală și misionară. Ecumenism*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>4</sup> See a chronological analysis of Saint John's theology at a series of contemporary researchers between 1964 and 1994: Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The missions of Jesus and the disciples according to the Fourth Gospel: with implications for the Fourth Gospel's purpose and the mission of the contemporary church*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998, pp. 6-16.

The first chapter of the second part ends with the sub-chapter *The missionary vocation of all Christians in Saint Paul's epistles*. Saint Paul connects mission to the function of the apostolate. The term ἀπόστολος, used by Saint Paul 34 times names, on one hand, the messengers sent in mission as representatives of the local Churches, just like in *2 Cor* 8, 23, where Saint Paul talks about those sent by the Churches (ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν), or in *Philippians* 2, 25 where Epafroditus is assigned as ἀπόστολος of the Church from Philippi. On the other hand, the term ἀπόστολος refers to the function of the apostolate received by Paul from Christ<sup>5</sup>, Saint Paul connecting his activity as an apostle to the universal mission of the Christians, seen in the terms of the apostleship. According to the epistles the mission involves the following coordinates: a) preaching Christ the One who was Crucified and Reborn as the main structure of the apostolate; b) building the Church as “the body of Christ”; c) serving a variety of offices in the Church.

The second chapter deals with *The patristic references of the sending and the responsibility of the Christians*.

Didache, the writings of Saint Clement the Roman, the epistles of Saint Ignatius the Teophorus, The Epistle for Diognet and the Apostolical Constitutions, they all emphasize the roles and the responsibilities of the Christians in Church, according to the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. They describe the life of the primary Church in the communities to which Saint Paul the Apostle had sent epistles (Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians) In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, where Paul's ecclesiology is reflected in its dynamics, the various offices or manners of serving in Church are mentioned and the role and place of the laity and the clergy in Church mission are differentiated. In Didache, the election of the bishops and the deacons by the Christian community becomes the first prerogative shared by *all* the members of the Christian community or the first responsibility that they have to undertake in order to receive the redemptive divine spirit.

Saint Clement the Roman uses the expression *anthropos laikos* for the first time and the relation between the laity and the clergy is presented by analogy with the army, where each member fulfills the orders received from the emperor or the superiors. However, those on a higher rank cannot exist with those on a lower rank, they are all connected and all useful to each other. The mission of the laity is therefore limited and dependent on the clergy but, at the same time, necessary to the strategic functioning of the ecclesial body.

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<sup>5</sup> On this topic see: S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982; O. Haas, *Pautus der Missionar*, Miinsterschwarzach: Vier Turme-Verlag, 1971, pp. 5-26, M. Hengel, *The Origins of the Christian Mission*, pp. 52-53, D. Senior C. Stuhlmueller, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-171, David J. Bosch, *op.cit.*, pp. 125-129. Peter Thomas O'Brien, *Gospel and mission in the writings of Paul: an exegetical and theological analysis*, Editor Baker Books, 1995, p. 2-3.



For Saint Ignatius the Teophorus, the relations among the members of the Church represent the natural expression of a community body, in which the gifts are divided and the becoming of each Christian depends on the increasing of the gift by relating to the other. In this relation, the personal mission of the believers is that of trying to turn the individual qualities into community virtues, through which the one that has them becomes perfect only through the others and the community, as a whole, builds itself from the inside, as an icon of the Kingdom of God. The “dependence” of the believers on the bishop, in all of their enterprises, is, in fact, by the image of the union between the Father and the Son. That is why we cannot talk about the existence of subordination between the laity and the clergy.

So, although they don't provide an actual division of functions and dignities but of *offices* and *ways of serving the others*, the Apostolic Fathers mention the role and the place of the laity and the clergy in the ecclesial body. There are specific duties that each of them has for the rest of the community, rather like in a symphony. The bishop is the representative of the unity of the Church, a special duty that the rest of the members don't have. He becomes a bishop through a special Sacrament, and the priesthood of Christ is actualized in and for the community. The purpose of the sacramental priesthood is to allow the people to receive communion with Christ and His redemptive work. In the Church, through the bishop, Our Savior Jesus Christ fulfills the promise He had made before he rose to heaven: „I am with you always, to the very end o age” (*Mt 28, 20*). The laity receives the spirit given by Christ in Church through the priests, the ministers of the Sacraments of the One Priest, Jesus Christ. This is how we should understand the role of bishop by the “image of the Father”, as described by Saint Ignatius. Therefore, the laity receive the Holy Sacraments, they work together with the priests in the sacramental servings, but the do not coserve. For our research, emphasizing the role and the general responsibilities of the believers is fundamental. On one hand, it marks the zone that is reserved to the mission of the laity and, on the other hand, it shows that laity is ontologically part of the Church.

The second subchapter dedicated to patristic references is called *Man and his mission in the theology of Saint Basil the Great or of Saint Gregory of Nyssa*. According to the two saints' theology, man is not autonomous and he is not the measure of all things. Disconnected from the divine origin, a purely biological being, the last link of the evolution chain, man starts acting chaotically, disoriented and without a clear perspective. This has become quite obvious in the society we live in, society that is grounded on an anthropocentric doctrine.

The divine law is now used only with a utilitarian, social purpose. It is quite familiar to most of us the attitude of superiority of those who accept the religious phenomena and recommend it as an instrument in establishing a social order in a secularized world. They place themselves above everybody else and the condescendingly look down to the “superstitious masses”, they turn God Himself into an instrument. An active theocentric missionary anthropology, as suggested in the writings of Saint Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa can offer an answer to the identity crisis of the contemporary man and to that of the human society, in general.

The section *The missionary vocation of man in Saint John's theology* shows that man is sent to the world as its *master*. His mastering is not an autarkical one. He receives it as a gift and it is rather an act of praising and contemplating God in the creation. The relation between the *master* and the living being is a dialogical one; he becomes wiser, mastering the creation that receives a name by subjecting to him. “The master” serves the world and the fellow beings. Out of love for them, the Christian becomes a teacher, a witness of the Gospel through his life, generous and hardworking, serving God in all of his actions.

In a theological discourse that generates from the Caledonian Christology of the unmixed and unchanged natures, Saint Maximus the Confessor talks about the mission of man in the world, as a mediator of the five divisions specific to the creation. They are presented in the subchapter *The fulfillment of the mission of man as a mediator in the world in Saint Maximus the Confessor's theology*. The five types of mediation (a. the mediation of the unity between man and woman; b. mediation of the unity between paradise and the world of people; c. mediation of the unity between the earth and the heavens; d. mediation of the unity between the intelligible and the sensible; e. mediation of the unity between God and His creation) all point, in fact, to one unity – unity in grace between God and the creation. This reality represents the content of the deification of man and the cosmos in man and through man. This is the mission of all Christians, the only people who normally live in the Kingdom of Grace. Due to the manner in which it is achieved, it is a mission of all God's people and, therefore, of the laity, too. From the fifth mediation, which contains in itself the other four, a few observations can be derived, with important consequences for the present context: man's relation with the fellow beings and with the entire creation is based on the pattern of the hypostatic union, according to the Caledonian Christology; The fulfillment of this duty reveals man's dignity and his sublime destiny; the natural relations among people are developed so that they become a unity; the relations among the members of the Christian family must be consumed in the

perspective of eternity; the true life of the Christian is his spiritual life; the natural relation of man with the cosmos provides the theological groundings of ecomission.

The third part of the paper deals with *The missionary vocation of the Christians in Father Dumitru Staniloae and Ion Bria's theology*. Based on Saint Maximus' theology, man's most important responsibility in the world would be, in Dumitru Staniloae's view, to deify the cosmos through himself and, as a part of this work, he is called to deify himself as well.<sup>6</sup>

Next, remaining within the borders of the Romanian theological discourse, we analyze the role and place occupied by the laity in the mission of Church, according to Father Ion Bria's theology. He speaks about the necessity of a Christian missionary typology to answer to some of the questions of the contemporaneity. He notices that the new realities require the return of the laity to the missionary field. That is why the most important trend today in the Romanian Orthodox Church would be to wake the missionary conscience of the laity. As an alternative to a national program, the priest has, in our opinion, the responsibility to involve the laity in the missionary activity.

The fourth part of the research deals with the *Actualization of the missionary vocation of man in the contemporary world*. Based on the previous theological considerations, we try to find the differences between the missionary vocation of the laity and that of the sacramental priesthood by identifying the ecclesiological groundings of the apostolate of the laity, the conditions of its undertaking and the domains where they manifest concretely. Thus, we refer to the universal priesthood as a base for the missionary vocation of the laity, to the responsibility of all Christians to assume the cross of Christ in the Mission of the Church, to the sacramental incorporation of all the creation in the *body of Christ* - the Church – through the participation of all Christians, to the preaching of the Gospel as a duty for all the Christians, to perseverance in believing and passing on the true faith and, finally, to the Christian's responsibility towards the creation.

[All these show that life in the contemporary society involve a firm engagement of the lay members of the Church. The progress registered by science an technology, the complex relationships among people, all these not only extended the sphere of the apostolate of the laity, but it also rose several new issues, that require effort in ordered to be solved in the Christian spirit.](#)

Faith as a personal act of receiving God's truth, resulted from the preaching of the Gospels, which are the result of the divine revelation that culminates in Jesus Christ, must generate in the Christian's heart the desire to share with the others the joy of living in Christ's Spirit. The happiness of discovering the Truth and the true meaning of life must

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<sup>6</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul lui Dumnezeu și responsabilitatea Lui în lume*, în *op.cit.*, p. 359.

be shared with the others. Thus, the witness of the orthodox Christian becomes, in an era characterized by a religious and confessional relativism, a road to the source of eternity.

By accepting these responsibilities, man discovers the fact that life is a gift from God. The world he lives in as a master is also a gift from God. Man is created and sent into the world with the purpose of deifying and transfiguring creation. From this point of view, his relation with the world and with his fellow beings is eternal, and his mastering over the world is consummated in eternity by the image of the divine one.

In the light of those said above, we emphasize the necessity of constituting a missionary, witnessing community that takes certain elements from the created world and offers them to God. Acting in this manner, man brings the created being in communion with Him, thus he not only uses it with respect, but also sees it as setting itself free from its natural limits and caring life. So, the assuming of the missionary vocation, as a result of the quality of man as the image of Christ, is essential to all the domains of the human existence.

The *Conclusions* are a synthesis of the argumentation, showing that, based on fundamental theological truths we can state that man's Christological ontology contains a missionary dimension *in nuce* and by becoming a member of the Church through the Holy Sacraments, he becomes a missionary *de facto*, having the responsibility to perform, in and through the ecclesial community in which *he was born again*, actions that are appropriate with *the received gift*. Thus, the dilemma of the contemporary world regarding who or what is the human being can be answered as follows: the mystery and destiny of man is discovered in God. He is *Hommo Religiosus*, sent into the world as *Misionarius Christi*.

