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A Negligible Rock, or the Chief Cornerstone? On Mission: A Dialogue with John Zizioulas

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Abstract:
In several places of his magnificent work John Zizioulas argued that mission does not belong to the very self of the Church. For him mission is historically conditioned, which means that it is only a transient activity, in sharp juxtaposition to the eschatological identity of the Church event. The following paper questions this approach on the basis that, since the Church is not the Kingdom of God, but the sign—the foretaste and the manifestation—of the Kingdom, she not only *has* a mission, but she *is* mission. Zizioulas's brilliant emphasis on the Church's task to transfigure the world and history is in reality an affirmation of the missionary nature of the Church; however, he remained impressively negative towards missionary engagement, in the sense that he conceived it as a Protestant emphasis on preaching which undervalues the sacraments and has an antagonistic attitude toward the Eucharist. This dichotomy does not do justice to a holistic understanding of mission as the symbiosis of action and sacrament. This paper articulates certain objections to Zizioulas' approach, claims that ontology has to take

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seriously into account the activity of God in history (activity which is the foundation of mission, i.e., the establishment of the Church as co-worker with God), shows that the Eucharist includes the missionary impulse, and asserts that not only the Eucharist but also praxis (the loving move of the faithful toward the other, and solidarity with the broken) are in history icons of, and witness to, the eschatological Kingdom.
Keywords: mission, eschatology, ontology, praxis, Eucharist, Kingdom

Introduction

Allow me to begin by making an introductory clarification with a personal note. This clarification involves a series of hermeneutical steps I took in a long personal research "program" on the place of mission in the ecclesiastical event. I inquired: does mission belong to the very core of the ecclesiastical "being," or conversely, is it placed on its margins? In many ways, my "program" received its impetus when our teacher, John Zizioulas, boldly claimed that mission does *not* belong to the core of the ecclesiastical event. I first encountered this claim in his classic *Being as Communion*, which I first read at the beginning of the 1990s. At the same time, I realized that the broader problem has been that it is not at all clear what someone means when they use the contested word "mission"—one gives it either a positive or a negative connotation.[1]

[1] The Greek word for "mission" in general is "ἀποστολή" (*apostoli*), from the verb "ἀποστέλλειν" (*apostellein* – Latin "mittere"). But since the beginning of the 19th century, when referring to so-called "external mission" (the evangelization of non-Christians) the term is "ἱερ-αποστολή" (*ier-apostoli*, i.e., holy mission) and its agents are called "ἱερ-απόστολοι» (*ier-apostoloi*, i.e., holy missionaries). Both the words are coined as neologisms. Until the 19th century, the Church spoke of *apostles, equals-to-the-apostles* and *enlighteners*. See my book *Η Εκκλησία γίνεται όταν ανοίγεται: Η Ιεραποστολή ως Ελπίδα και ως Εφιάλτης* (Athens: En Plo, 2008), 35–37. Sadly enough, among the Greek-speaking Orthodox the neologism helped create confusion between the term "holy mission" and the mission per se of the Church, as if the so called "holy mission" is some-

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Step by step (the rhythm established by the struggle between study and livelihood) I tried to clarify my questions and articulate my disagreements. In the beginning, I studied the broader issues with which Zizioulas' work dealt, and then proceeded to concentrate on that work itself. Every step I took was accompanied by the sense that I still had a long way to go, inasmuch as I labored with full knowledge of his greatness and so feared lest some aspect of his dense work escape me. I note, therefore, a few characteristic milestones in the following.

On July 3, 1995, I served for the first-time as a co-panelist with him, and I was awestruck. Distinguishing myself distinctly from his published views, I maintained that when magnificence in worship comes off as luxury, it no longer refers to the glory of the eschaton, but rather to an authoritarian presentism.[2] I also noted that the necessary emphasis on Pneumatology and Trinitarian theology must not detract from the Christocentricity of the Church.[3]

On February 24, 2001, I again found myself presenting with Zizioulas at the same conference—this time dedicated to the theme of eschatology. My contribution explored the relationship between mission and the eschaton, and indeed the concept of mission as a "sign" of the eschaton.[4]

From as early as 2000, my steps grew.[5] In 2009, in my study on the theology of Fr. Alexander Schmemann, the horizon of my

thing secondary, additional and hence not essential. Nevertheless, the term continues to be used out of necessity, as no suitable term (such as "witness") has yet replaced it.

[2] I later developed this into a study entitled "Η ομορφιά θα καταστρέψει την Εκκλησία;", *Theologia* 83.2 (2012), 199–219. Zizioulas was not receptive to this type of criticism, and he rejected any objection to luxury as pietistic. Cf. John D. Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology* (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2023), 290.

[3] Thanasis N. Papathanasiou, *Ανεστιότητα και Παραπεμπτικότητα: Κριτικές Προσεγγίσεις στα Θεολογικά Δρώμενα* (Athens: Armos, 1998), 68–72.

[4] "Ιεραποστολή και Εσχατολογία," in *Εκκλησία και Εσχατολογία*, ed. Pantelis Kalaïtzides (Volos: Volos Academy of Theological Studies and Kastaniotis), 171–190.

[5] See my "Ιεραποστολή: Συνέπεια ή προϋπόθεση της καθολικότητας της Εκκλησίας," *Synaxis* 76 (2000), 70–79. "Ιεραποστολή και φύση της Εκκλησίας. Επισημάνσεις εισαγωγικές," *Synaxis* 78 (2001), 5–12 (both published later as: "Mission: A Consequence or, perhaps, a presupposition of Catholicity?" and "Mission, the self of the Church" in my book *Future, the Background of History: Essays on Church Mission in an Age of Global-*

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missionary reflection broadened.[6] Indirectly, yet to a large degree, my study referred to positions held by Zizioulas. In 2010, I formulated my disagreement with his conviction that the Eucharist alone images the kingdom.[7]

I did not engage our great theologian in detailed conversations on these matters, despite the fact that I collaborated with him often—both on issues of the Greek-language journal *Synaxis* (of which editor-in-chief I have been), as well as at conferences. As the years passed, I noticed that he viewed some aspects of my thought with interest, a view which he expressed in informal conversation.[8] I will limit myself to the last conversation we had in this life.

In September 2019, the Ecumenical Patriarchate organized an international conference at the Phanar on the legacy of Fr. Georges Florovsky. My paper pertained to his "sacred Hellenism" and the need (in my opinion) to reformulate the faith in the terms of other cultures, beyond (and in parallel with) the established onto-

ization (Montreal, Quebec: Alexander Press, 2005), 39–54 and 13–22. "Il sacramento dell'invito. Le specie eucharistiche e la missione della Chiesa nell'ottica liturgica di Cabasilas," in: *Nicolas Cabasilas e la divina liturgia* (Magnano, Italia: Qiqajon, Comunità di Bose, 2007), 165–191. "Μόνο με ψωμί; Μόνο με κρασί; Η δυνατότητα χρήσης άλλων υλικών στη θεία Ευχαριστία," *Synaxis*) 105 (2008), 55–73. See also my book review of the volume *Πρόσωπο, Ευχαριστία και Βασιλεία του Θεού σε Ορθόδοξη και Οικουμενική Προοπτική. Σύναξις Ευχαριστίας προς τιμήν του Μητροπολίτη Περγάμου Ιωάννη Ζηζιούλα* (Volos: Volos Academy for Theological Studies, 2016), *Synaxis* 149 (2018), 104–106. Specifically, I want to note that on April 12, 2008 I presented a paper at the Volos Academy for Theological Studies entitled "Eucharist and Mission." There my reference to Zizioulas was more direct, but unfortunately the paper remains unpublished. I reworked it in 2018, but again it went unpublished. The present paper represents its final correction and completion. I hope, however, that I will be able to carefully develop my thought further.

[6] "The Church as Mission: Fr. Alexander Schmemann's liturgical theology revisited," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 60 (2010), 6–41.

[7] "Οι εικόνες της Βασιλείας. Κάποια αθέατα του Καβάσιλα και κάποιοι πειρασμοί της Ευχαριστιακής μας θεολογίας" *Synaxis*) 114 (2010), 13–21. "Icons of the Kingdom: Overlooked topics in St. Nicholas Cabasilas, some dangers of Eucharistic theology, and the mission of the Church," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 15:2 (2024), pp. 9–25. See also my "Social Engagement as Part of the Call to Deification in Orthodox Theologies," *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 57.1–4 (2016), 75–84.

[8] Discussions with his student and friend, Fr. Stamatis Skliris, with whose permission I include this.

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logical categories of Hellenistic thought.[9] One late afternoon, after the end of the day's conference proceedings, the two of us spoke on this issue, and he told me that he believed it necessary to reformulate the faith for other cultural contexts, such as the African context, the basic semantic tool of which he considered the traditional African view of the ancestors. With joy, I told him that I had written on just this theme, and I asked him if he would like me to give him an offprint, which I happened to have with me.[10] He accepted it, and not only did he simply accept it, but he surprised me by reading the study that very night (something rare among the greats). He declared the next day his complete agreement with me and his conviction that the Orthodox world did not understand that it must move in this direction. I remember this conversation in particular as an example of amazing openness, considering that Zizioulas was one of the defenders *par excellence* of ontology!

Mission, the Issue at Stake

In Zizioulas' works I believe there are two difficulties with regard to mission. The first is that he does not leave room theologically for mission in the "being" of the Church—i.e., he does not consider mission *constitutive* of ecclesiastical identity. The second difficulty is what he means by "mission," and therefore what he actually opposes. I will comment here on the second difficulty, since I will dedicate the rest of my paper to the first.

In Zizioulas' writing lurks the ghost that has been haunting our theology for years: the vagary and inexactitude in our use of the term "mission." He understands and condemns "mission" as a Protestant emphasis on preaching which degrades dogma, undervalues the sacraments and has an antagonistic attitude toward the

[9] Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, "Fr. Georges Florovsky and mission: Witness 'to,' 'with,' or 'beyond' 'sacred Hellenism'?" in: *The Living Christ: The Theological Legacy of Georges Florovsky*, eds. John Chryssavgis and Brandon Gallaher (London: T & T Clark, 2021), 357–377.

[10] "Χριστός, ο Πρόγονος και Αδελφός: Μια Αφρικανική Χριστολογία," *Bulletin of Biblical Studies* 25.1 (2007), 59–82.

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Eucharist.[11] The big problem here is that he remained entrenched in this definition of mission, as if it had not been made clear—particularly with the monumental reflective work since the middle of the 20th century in the ecumenical Christian environment—that "mission" is identical with the existence of the Church. "*The apostolic work* and the proclamation of the Gospel, also known as *mission*, belong at the core of the Church's identity," as the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church (Crete, 2016) stated.[12] Mission is the Church itself when it crosses every kind of border, when it witnesses God's invitation directed at his creation, and when it ministers to this invitation with its very being, prayer, word, and action. Mission, in other words, obviously pertains to the combination of dogma, preaching, praxis, and sacraments.[13] I therefore believe that in Zizioulas' perspective, the notion of mission was trapped from the start, and I think that it would have been extremely beneficial if Zizioulas had made some critical distinctions regarding mission, as he did for other topics. (For example, regarding ontology—which some reject as totalitarianism over human existence—Zizioulas clarified that the term does not mean only one thing, inasmuch as eschatological ontology (which Zizioulas was presenting) is different from protological ontology, in which the past is constraining.)[14] Similarly, the pages he dedicated to the Church's task of transfiguring the world and history[15] are missiological in essence and essential for the study of mission. Furthermore, his conviction (though very rarely expressed in his

[11] See characteristically *Ευχαριστίας Εξεμπλάριον. Ήτοι Κείμενα Εκκλησιολογικά και Ευχαριστιακά* (Mazi, Megara: Monastery of St. Paraskevi 2006), 26–31 (also 136–137, 147, 169).

[12] "Encyclical of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church" 2, 6, https://www.holycouncil.org/encyclical-holy-council. The contribution of Anastasios, Archbishop of Albania to the deliberations of the Synod was a catalyst for this approach.

[13] Cf. Rommen's argumentation that mission theology lies in organic unity with the entire doctrine. Edward Rommen, *Into All the World: An Orthdox Theology of Mission* (Yonkers, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press 2017, Kindle edition 2018), 78–79.

[14] John D. Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 36, 70.

[15] See characteristically *Ευχαριστίας Εξεμπλάριον*, 37, 124, 144, 169–172, 218–222; John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 181.

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writings) that in the Orthodox East complacency in the eschatological vision of worship tends to paralyze missionary activity to an unsettling degree is extremely significant.[16] And, of course, his immeasurable contribution to the reception of otherness (perhaps his crowning achievement) pertains directly to the mission of the Church: the rift in the world's conviction that the other is first and foremost a threat.

The Problem of the Starting Point

I now come to his theological perspective—that he does not consider mission constitutive of ecclesiastical identity. This issue is extremely critical, since it forms the basis of Zizioulas' individual views.

In the Christian faith, God reveals himself to human beings by acting in history. For Christians, this self-revelation—as it is recorded in (and comes to us through) the Holy Scriptures and the community's experience—is the starting point, the basis of Christians' ability to theologize (Gal. 4:9). Zizioulas, however, does not consider God's self-revelation—in other words, his unique and decisive actions in history (culminating in the Incarnation of the Son through the Holy Spirit, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension)—to be the starting point for theologizing.[17] Due to his deep suspicion that history subjugates whatever happens in it, Zizioulas posits that the true starting point for theologizing is the very existence of God, that is, Trinitarian theology.[18]

I consider his position here problematic. Trinitarian theology itself is only possible through the self-revelation of God; other-

[16] Ibid., 181–182.

[17] See characteristically John Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, ed. Fr. Gregory Edwards (Alhambra: Sebastian Press 2010), 9–10 and 233. Cf. Nikolaos Asproulis, *Το Μυστήριο του Χριστού και το Μυστήριο της Εκκλησίας: Γεώργιος Φλωρόφσκυ και Ιωάννης Ζηζιούλας σε διάλογο γύρω από τη θεολογική μεθοδολογία* and *The Mystery of the Church: Georges Florovsky and John Zizioulas in Dialogue on Theological Methodology* (Alhambra and Volos: Sebastian Press and Ekdotiki Dimitriados, 2023), 293, 321, and 379.

[18] Cf. Nikolaos Asproulis, *Το Μυστήριο του Χριστού και το Μυστήριο της Εκκλησίας*, 432, 484–485, and 543.

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wise, it is simply philosophical speculation. The Christian God is constantly working (John 5:17) and calls the faithful to cooperate (1 Cor. 3:9) in the renewing of the universe, which God is working toward. Even the eschaton breaking into history only comes about through acts of God; it does not simply "happen" or "come."[19] I would go so far as to say that Zizioulas slights even the New Testament when he expresses contempt for the Hebrew concept of "being" as "acting" or "happening," accusing the Hebrew mind of being fixated on history.[20] His position here undermines the significance of action within history, and consequently mission.

Also related to this issue is Zizioulas' emphasis on the inverted direction of time. By this, he means that the Kingdom is not the end of history, but that which comes from the future.[21] Here I have no objection to the claim that the eschaton is breaking into history. My reservation lies in the fact that the direction of time from *the future to today* must never be conceived as replacing (or annulling) the movement of time from *today to the future*. Human beings (and creation as a whole) move experientially from the past to the future. That which comes from the future should contribute to the move toward the future—not invalidate it. Zizioulas is incorrect when he views *the movement from the present to the future* as clearly deterministic, as if it means that the Kingdom is a product of the world's entelechy. Theologically, it is settled that the Kingdom is God's initiative and work. Moreover, a host of theologians and philosophers (from Georges Florovsky to Savvas Agourides, to Nikos Nissiotis and Cornelius Kastoriades, Ilia Prigozhin, Ernst Bloch, and Hannah Arendt)[22] have demonstrat-

[19] Cf. my observations in "The Church as Mission," 85, and "Οι εικόνες της Βασιλείας," 15–16. Similarly, Fr. Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Ο μόχθος της μετοχής* (Athens: Armos, 2010), 185–188.

[20] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 68–75. I consider the crowning moment in this dialogue to be the article by Savvas Agourides, "Μπορούν τα πρόσωπα της Τριάδας να δώσουν τη βάση για περσοναλιστικές απόψεις περί του Ανθρώπου;", *Synaxis* 33 (1990), 67–78, and Zizioulas' "Το είναι του Θεού και το είναι του ανθρώπου," *Synaxis* 37 (1991), 11–36.

[21] John D. Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 16–26.

[22] Characteristically cf. Thanasis (Athanasios) N. Papathanasiou, "Μια θεολογία έξω από 'δω, ή Μια θεολογία του εξαποδώ; Δοκιμές για τη συνδιάλεξη Φυσικών και Θεολό-

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ed in a myriad of ways that the practical march toward the future involves the dawning of something completely new—even surprising. For Christians, of course, this takes place in the framework of the created; yet, it is neither something produced mechanically nor a narcissistic drive to subjugate the future and construct the Kingdom via anthropocentric toil. If, however, the significance and uniqueness of the historical activity of both God and human is dismissed—if, in other words, the future is simply "coming"—then how much does it differ from a platonizing reflection of the eternal into the temporary, or an inverted determinism, with the inevitable located in the future rather than the past? It is no coincidence that Zizioulas himself confronted this head on, when he encountered the teaching of St. Maximos the Confessor on the capital importance of the historical movement of creation (a movement which is not a Fall, as in Origen, but creation's God-given ability to respond to the call it has received), intertwined of course with the saint's decisively eschatological vision.[23]

The Problem of the March Through History

My position is that mission pertains to the "being" of the Church, quite simply because the Church is a *sign*, an *icon*, and a *foretaste* of the Kingdom—not the Kingdom itself. The Church exists *because* of the Kingdom and *thanks* to the Kingdom: it manifests, witnesses, and serves the Kingdom and the invitation into the Kingdom. This invitation comes from God and is directed by God to all people. In this perspective, the Church does not simply *have* mission, but rather it *is* mission,[24] being the diachronic presence of the eschaton within history. This phrase of mine ("the diachronic presence of the eschaton within history") combines with my earlier phrase ("the Church exists *because* of the kingdom and

γων" in: *Φιόρα Τιμής για τον μητροπολίτη Ζακύνθου Χρυσόστομο Β΄ Συνετό* [in Greek; Festschrift In Honor of Metropolitan Chrysostom II of Zakynthos] (Zante 2009), 769–788.

[23] John D. Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 93, 95.

[24] Cf. my "The Church as Mission."

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thanks to the kingdom") and affirms the eschatological nature of the Church in conjunction with (not in opposition to) its historical mission.

Not even Zizioulas would consider the historical Church identical with the Kingdom, but whenever he notes this juxtaposition (between the historical Church and the Kingdom), he does so in a way that eventually overlooks the centrality of mission. He was focused on the counterpoint that the authentic "being" of the Church is eschatological, which is made manifest in history with (and during) the Divine Eucharist.[25] In the spirit of this counterpoint, nothing besides the Eucharist is considered a decisive element of ecclesiastical identity.

All of this is related to the following as well: Zizioulas connects the Church's *apostolicity* with acceptance of the Apostles' teaching and with that which the Church experiences eschatologically in the eucharistic gathering of the Apostles with the Risen One.[26] Nevertheless, given that the Greek verb *apostellein* means *to send*, the Church is apostolic because it is *sent* (by its Lord) and *sending* (its members to witness to the world), a fact that is testified to by Jesus himself in his prayer to the Father regarding the establishment of the Eucharist (John 17:26). Such an approach to apostolicity recognizes mission as an element of the Church itself (as an element of its very being, according to the Nicene Creed, in addition to its *uniqueness*, *holiness*, and *catholicity*). However, Zizioulas has devalued this apostolicity from the outset and proceeded to sharply divide two different eschatological concepts: on the one hand, the mission of the apostles, in which the eschaton becomes present as a result of the march through history; on the other hand, the liturgical manifestation of the eschaton, which appears as a projection from the future and presupposes the end of mission. Zizioulas, of course, considers only this latter option foundational.[27]

[25] John Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 136–146. Cf. also Asproulis, 277.

[26] John D. Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 13–14.

[27] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 174–175. *Έργα, Α΄. Εκκλησιολογικά Μελετήματα* (Athens: Domos 2016), 616–18.

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My humble view is that the march through history on the one hand and the liturgical synaxis on the other are not in counterpoint. The eucharistic community is a marching community at the same time! It celebrates the Eucharist on the way. In other words, missionary activity is simultaneously a *march toward* the eschaton and a *reception of* the eschaton. Matthew's penultimate verse contains not only Christ's call to missionary activity ("go therefore and make disciples of all nations," 28:19), but also the assurance that the risen, eschatological Christ would remain with his disciples ("and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age," 28:20)—in other words, he would be marching with them through history! Thus, the points where Zizioulas acknowledges an interest in a synthesis of the historical and eschatological approaches[28] could be among his most fruitful contributions and must be elaborated in future work.

The Problem of the Signs of the Kingdom

In support of his position that the Church is realized only in the Divine Eucharist, Zizioulas often resorted[29] to St. Nicholas Cabasilas' view that "the Church is represented in the mysteries" (meaning the Eucharist) and that if one could see the Church, one would see nothing but the very body of Christ."[30]

On one occasion (in 2011) in which Zizioulas made this reference, he added a sarcastic footnote that marveled how no one had yet accused Cabasilas of "eucharistic monism."[31] Let me add here that I had broached the issue of eucharistic monism, not in Cabasilas but in Zizioulas, inasmuch as Zizioulas failed to recognize Cabasilas' truly non-eucharistic-monistic vision! I propounded this issue on November 20, 2008, during a presentation of Fr.

[28] Ibid., 181–88.

[29] Characteristically: J. Zizioulas, *Ἔργα*, 277. *Ευχαριστίας Εξεμπλάριον*, 43–44, 200; J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 79; J. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 68; *Remembering the Future*, 301.

[30] Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, trans F. M. Hussey and P. A. McNulty (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 91–92.

[31] John Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion*, 69.

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George Basioudes' book, *The Power of Worship: Fr. Alexander Schmemann's Contribution to Liturgical Theology*.[32] My paper, entitled "Are we in danger of eucharistic monism?", was the rough draft of a study I then published in 2010.[33] Allow me to summarize in the following.

I find it strange that everyone seems to pass over another identification that Cabasilas makes, indeed even in the very same work. It comes at the point where he is commenting on the people's plea, "Lord, have mercy" during the Divine Liturgy. "To beg God's mercy, says Cabasilas, "is to ask for his kingdom," because "the kingdom of God is signified by his mercy." "If," Cabasilas continues, "among the actions of merciful men, one wishes to contemplate the aim of the divine mercy, he will find that it corresponds exactly to the Kingdom itself." [34] Here, then, solidarity—an act of love toward our fellow human being—constitutes an *icon* of the Kingdom within history. This quotation of course is impressively similar to his classic quotation regarding the Eucharist. Cabasilas in fact uses the exact same words "represents"/ "would see." In support of his position, he brings forward Gospel passages which feature solidarity as well as eucharistic and eschatological elements: Christ's words about the final judgment, "I hungered and you gave me to eat" (Matt. 25:35–36), and the banquet table in his kingdom, where the householder himself will serve his guests eternally: "Truly, I say to you, [the Lord] will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them" (Luke 12:37).[35]

Cabasilas, therefore, neither ignores solidarity nor embraces it merely as a secondary and therefore non-determinative element of the Church's self. For him solidarity is certainly a determinative element of the Church's self. Someone here could object that solidarity is a non-determinative element because no one will be hun-

[32] In Greek: *Η Δύναμη της Λατρείας: Η συμβολή του π. Αλεξάνδρου Σμέμαν στη Λειτουργική Θεολογία* (Athens: En Plo, 2008). The presentation took place in the "Gallery (Stoa) of the Books," Athens, Greece.

[33] "Οι Εικόνες της Βασιλείας." Its English translation, "Icons of the Kingdom," was published in 2024.

[34] Cabasilas, 47.

[35] Cabasilas, 48.

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gry in the Kingdom. I think this objection should be overruled. A movement of love toward the other will continue to be an element of the Kingdom. The only thing that is certain to remain in the Kingdom is love (1 Cor. 13:13). For this reason, practical acts of love within history are essential elements of the "being" of the Church! It is revealing moreover that in the narrative of the Last Supper, the Gospel of John does not cite Christ's "words of institution" ("take, eat"), but rather puts in their place Christ's washing of the disciples' feet (cf. Cabasilas' eschatological image of Christ ministering in His Kingdom). In this way, John declares that service is inherent in the ecclesiastical event, an essential dimension of the eucharistic sacrament, and a witness to the Kingdom.[36]

Cabasilas (along with innumerable other Fathers) especially emphasizes human action. Action on behalf of social justice, inspired by the Kingdom, changes the world—i.e., it serves to bring the light of the eschaton into history. Here we find another imbalance in Zizioulas: He quite rightly posits an "eschatological ethics"—i.e., the believer's decisions and actions in everyday life in light of the eschaton. He also notes emphatically that, in this perspective, when love is not the center of the Church, a tremendous degradation takes place, and the social exclusion that results is sin, inasmuch as it denies love.[37] The areas of everyday life where Zizioulas sees the application of eschatological ethics include ecology, art, sexuality, and the positive sciences.[38] Political and social justice do not appear on his horizon. Zizioulas continually views these with suspicion and a negative predisposition. While he notes beautifully that love means the destruction of death and that love has no meaning if it is not interwoven with immortality, the example of deficient love (i.e., not interwoven with immortal-

[36] Petros Vasileiadis, *Eucharist and Witness: Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Mission of the Church* (Geneva & Brookline, MA: WCC Publications and Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1996), 3–4.

[37] John Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 195.

[38] John Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion*, 79–82, 128–175; *Remembering the Future*, 141–159.

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ity) that he cites is the feeding of the hungry![39] Here I'm afraid his position starts to crumble. First of all, the feeding of the hungry in the Gospel is a criterion for eternity—for the last judgment—and secondly, any human activity (ecology included) can easily become disconnected from the perspective of eternity (which we observe constantly and brutally nowadays).

The Problem of the Source

In contrast to views that juxtapose the Eucharist and mission (the best case scenario of which sees mission as a non-determinative element of ecclesiastical identity, which however is nourished by the Eucharist), I believe that the missionary dimension is *inherent* to the celebration of the Eucharist.[40]

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes," wrote Paul (1 Cor. 11:26). This saying concerns the proclamation we experience in the Divine Liturgy—not in its first part, in the so-called Liturgy of the Word, which concludes after the reading of the Gospel, but in the second part, in the Liturgy of the Faithful, the sacrament. Most of the eucharistic Anaphoras have included a phrase to the effect that the celebration of the Eucharist represents the proclamation of Christ's Resurrection, and some others have further added the proclamation of His Ascension (which does not simply represent Christ's historical epilogue, but also the glorification of his historicity and the manifestation of his coming return).

For Zizioulas, the Eucharist is clearly the source of all the structure and ministries of the Church.[41] I believe, however, that it is important to hold the Eucharist before us not only as the source, but also as an offspring. Its source is the Covenant, the agreement between God and human beings, human beings' acceptance of the invitation issued by God. The Covenant together with the implied human being's personal conversion is the foundational missionary event and the terms of the eucharistic synaxis (the faithful

[39] John Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 43–62, 307–313.
[40] For what follows, see my "The Church as Mission."
[41] John Zizioulas, *Έργα*, 280.

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have to renew their fidelity to the Covenant in each moment and for this reason the reciting of the Creed precedes the celebration of the Eucharist). In God's unfenced spaciousness and his unyielding love, there *is* salvation without the Eucharist, but there is *no* salvation without the Covenant. St. Mary of Egypt may have concluded her monastic seclusion by communing (receiving the holy Eucharist), but the thief at Golgotha and St. Ardalion the Mime[42] became citizens of the Kingdom without communing and, to be exact, without even being members of a congregation—a eucharistic community. God himself mystically baptizes and communes anyone he wishes, acting voluntarily and freely expanding the boundaries of his Church, being himself the missionary and liturgist par excellence.

Zizioulas, naturally, recognizes that the Eucharist operates with presuppositions and that, in this sense, it also has its source in a way. For example, he repeatedly notes the obvious, that the Eucharist is inconceivable without baptism, which also forms the border of the eucharistic community.[43] Nevertheless, the force of his entire theological framework highlights the Eucharist as the ultimate source, a move which, as I said earlier, connects it with the devaluing of mission, among other things.

We find this same asymmetry in Zizioulas' notes on the *Didache*, a valuable text from perhaps the end of the first century AD, which was nearly included in the canon of the New Testament. Zizioulas frequently invokes its excellent eucharistic prayer (9:4), in which the community entreats God to gather his Church from the ends of the earth into his coming kingdom. Zizioulas connects this prayer with the emphasis on the Eucharist as a manifestation of the Kingdom and as the only determinative element of the ecclesiastical identity. This, however, in my view, begs the question of whether the *Didache*'s eucharistic vision pertains to the eschatological gathering of the now-existing communities or, more likely, the eschatological gathering of the *whole* world. I say

[42] Cf. Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, "If I cross the boundaries, you are there! An affirmation of God's action outside the canonical boundaries of the Church," *Communio Viatorum* 53.3 (2011), 40–55.

[43] John Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion*, 33. *Έργα*, 455 ff.

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unreservedly the latter, which is moreover highlighted in the Holy Scriptures.[44] But in this perspective, an essential dynamic of the eucharistic vision is the missionary tension: the concern for and ministry to the whole world, the invitation (to the Kingdom) of all creation, which does not at this moment participate in the ecclesiastical community.

At a certain point, Zizioulas affirms this concern. With amazing clarity, he emphasizes that the recapitulation of the whole world (not only the now-members of the Church) in the eucharistic worship contributes a new understanding of the Body of Christ, inasmuch as Christ is not only firstborn among the brethren (Rom. 8:29), but also firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15), with his Body being "the fulness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23).[45] I personally had the opportunity to present (in 2000) the powerful dynamic of the "completion" of Christ's body on the basis of John Chrysostom, Bishop Theophan the Recluse, and Fr. Georges Florovsky, exactly in organic relationship to mission, meaning serving the "filling up" of the Body of Christ.[46] Zizioulas, however, is surprisingly inconsistent, for while he speaks about an eschatological gathering of all the nations, he does not make room for mission. It is like someone believing that the eschatological gathering of the world will "happen," and that the Church need only "be"—without *acting* as its *constructive* element (one more manifestation of ontology's dominance). Thus, when Zizioulas proceeds to connect the *Didache* with the march through history, he makes intra-ecclesiastical observations (e.g., regarding the current problem of not gathering in one place due to the reduction of bishoprics in favor of parishes, chapels, and monasteries),[47] but he has no place for witness to the world.

An absence of this kind constitutes a void in Zizioulas' work, as well as an inconsistency in relation to elements in his own work that do correlate with the aforementioned missionary dynamic.

[44] Matt. 25:32; John 11:52; 1 Cor. 15:24–28, and elsewhere.
[45] John Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion*, 32; see also 36–37 and 52–53.
[46] "Mission: A Consequence or, perhaps, a presupposition of Catholicity?", op.cit.
[47] John Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion*, 46–47.

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Zizioulas himself explicitly maintained that work on ontology is necessary since it is the normative way of thinking of the Western world, which is especially bound up with Christianity.[48] As we mentioned, he also recognized (with rare vision among the Orthodox) that in other cultures it was necessary to reformulate the faith in non-ontological ways. However, this perspective, this sensitivity, and these theological ventures (both Zizioulas' own toward westerners, as well as the needed reformulation of the faith in other cultures) are precisely manifestations of the Church's missionary self, which continually translate the Gospel message into the languages (verbal, symbolic, cultural) of the contexts in which they enter—just as the Lord translated his very self into the human condition. Hence my belief that mission is the cornerstone of the Church's construction and not simply an overlookable, negligible rock (cf. Matt. 21:42).

Epilogue

One of the images that Christ gave us of the Kingdom is, as is well known, the parable about the yeast (Matt. 13:33, Luke 13:20–21). At first glance, there appears to be two different realities: the flour and the yeast. Flour is the world and yeast is the Kingdom, still at work in history. What is required is the working of the yeast all through the dough. Nevertheless, there is a third constituent: There is also the woman who mixes the yeast with the flour. The working of the yeast, in other words, does not simply "happen." It is activated through action. And all of this has to do with the very nature of the yeast. Its capacity to work all through the dough is determinative and not just an attendant element. Without this, whatever manifests as yeast is simply … stucco.

[48] John Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 63–64; Nikolaos Asproulis, *Το Μυστήριο του Χριστού και το Μυστήριο της Εκκλησίας*, 305.

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