

Bria, Ion 1996 — The liturgy after the liturgy, mission and witness from an orthodox perspective

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Where it is true of all Christian churches that all the lines of the church's work and life are concentrated in the worship service, this is even more true in the case of the Eastern Churches. The word 'liturgy' as used by the Orthodox church usually describes the worship service, that is, what goes on inside a church building — prayers, songs and chants, recital of the creed, proclamation of the Word, the Eucharist. The complete spiritual life and labour of the Orthodox church culminates in the Liturgy. It is not surprising, then, that the perception exists that the Orthodox churches are predominantly 'liturgical' churches, concentrating on ritual and hierarchy and neglecting theological research, especially that pertaining to the church's mission. However, the purpose of the author is to show that there is a liturgy after the liturgy because Christians pursue their witness and vocation outside the temple, in the streets, in social halls, in the wider society. Nourished by the Eucharist, the pilgrim's bread, the food for missionaries and evangelists, Christians are sent out — to witness in faithful discipleship in the common round of daily life. Their authority flows from their liturgical sending, which becomes fruitful through personal authenticity.

The author divides his book into seven chapters. In the first chapter he explains the world of the 'liturgy' as understood by the Orthodox church. In the second chapter he deals with the issue of the liturgy after the liturgy. He stresses the fact that the dynamics of the liturgy go beyond the boundaries of the assembly to serve the community at large. He goes on to show that the eucharist liturgy is not an escape into an inner realm of prayer, a pious turning away from social realities: rather, it calls and sends the faithful to celebrate 'the sacrament of the brother' outside the temple in the public marketplace, where the cries of the poor and the marginalized are heard. In chapter three the author deals with the question of ecumenical orientations in liturgy. He shows, *inter alia*, that if participation in the liturgy and in 'the liturgy after the liturgy' is to realise its constructive potential in the life of the churches and ecumenically, the need of liturgical renewal is evident. He stresses the need to empower each member of the church for mission. In the fourth chapter the author explains the relevancy of gospel, culture and liturgy. The link between one gospel and the diverse cultures of our world is a positive reality to be maintained, but not at the expense of breaking the links which unite everyone to each other. In the fifth chapter the author deals with the issue of Liturgy and common Christian witness, while in the sixth chapter he explains the whole spectrum of Orthodoxy and in the seventh chapter the dynamics of liturgy in mission.

The typology of mission as liturgy after the liturgy can, according to the author, help us to understand the connections among the various forms and definitions of mission: as proclamation and invitation emphasising personal salvation, as response to God's merciful will for the whole of humanity, as actions of service aimed at the transformation of society, as witness to God's justice and righteousness against inhuman conditions and unjust social structures, as means for personal discipleship and holiness, as pastoral care responding to God's compassion for lost humanity.

Many people in the West, especially Protestants, do not have a clear understanding of the history and the function of the Orthodox church. For most Westerners the spirit of Orthodox worship is marked by an awesome sense of the majesty of God. Furthermore, the worship service in the Orthodox church

for the Westerner is nothing more than a symbolic drama with a complicated system of entrances and rites, processions, et cetera and as a corollary to this, the church building itself, where the drama is performed, is seen as overgrown with complicated symbolism. The liturgy has to move the soul of the believer by its sacredness, by its mysteriousness, by its otherworldliness. Worship in the Orthodox church is seen as having become a cultic society, existing in and for the sake of the cult; the membership of the church has become unable to understand that worship — as expression, creation and fulfillment — places the church before the face of the world. Worship has also ceased to be the expression of the church in relation to the world; on the contrary, worship is experienced as departure out of the world for a little while, as a 'vent' or break in earthly existence, opened up for the inlet of grace. The author of 'The Liturgy after the Liturgy' shows comprehensively that this is not true. He also succeed in helping those who do not possess a clear understanding of the Orthodox church's history and functioning in forming a view on the functioning, practical problems, solutions et cetera of the church. This book provides an interesting perspective on solving an age-old problem of the church, namely that of passivity — whether it be Orthodox or Protestant.

Although one gets the impression that the book was presumably written by a Romanian Orthodox theologian for Orthodox readers, we can recommend this book to all interested on the grounds that it is well written, well reasoned and worthwhile reading, if only for its stimulating and challenging approach.
