

## True Mission

Mission belongs to the very nature of the Church, and the Creed itself calls the Church “apostolic”. This implies not only a continuity in the apostolic faith, but also the duty to propagate the Christian truth for the salvation of all men.

However, mission is not only “preaching”, not only talking about God, or promoting ‘our thing’. Mission is not a Christian commercial. It is a witness and an act of love. It implies love for those to whom it directed, and love means *self-giving*, not simply giving something.

The Orthodox mission in Alaska had been successful in the past not so much because it was financially supported from Russia, but mainly because a few real missionaries, like St. Innocent Veniaminov, gave their whole life to the people they wanted to evangelize.

Now, love also means that one accepts people as they are, wishing only that they accept Christ. It does not require any national or cultural alienation. St. Paul became “Jew with the Jews, and Greek with the Greeks” in order to gain both for Christ. This was also true with all real apostles, and this is why – for the Aleutians and Indians of Alaska – the Church has become truly “their own”.

The Church in America must follow this same pattern.

It certainly can not be “the Church” unless it shines with love for all men, wishing nothing else than their salvation, their eternal life. This missionary dimension of the Church’s nature is the only key to a solution of the “ethnic” problem in American Orthodoxy. The Church has not right to force upon its members any ideology or culture except the Truth of the Gospel: this Truth makes men “free”, as St. Paul explains at length in his epistle to the Galatians. St. Herman had fought those who, in his time, tried to exploit and “Russify” the people of Alaska. His spirit must remain with us today. As we have repeatedly said, no one has a right to forbid Americans, who want to be Orthodox, to remain Americans. **However, it must be maintained, with equal strength, that neither is “Americanization” a requirement of Church membership! Families, as well as larger groups and organizations, have the perfect right to maintain their identity in the One Church, provided they remain aware of the missionary nature of the Church and remember the miracle of Pentecost, when all nations heard the Word of God in their own language.** Provided also they realistically recognize that the Church must build its presents and future *for America*. For our Church, there are indeed Americans. But there are still also Albanians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Serbians, Romanians, and Russians. There are blacks and whites. The Church has no right to suppress any of them, but must continue the miracle of the Pentecost when the confusion of Babel was abolished, when all nations “were called to unity” and began “in symphony to glorify the Holy Spirit” (Kontakion of Pentecost).

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*Fr. John Meyendorff. “Witness to the World”, S. Vladimir Seminary Press. Crestwood, N.Y. 1987. Pages 188-189.*

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