

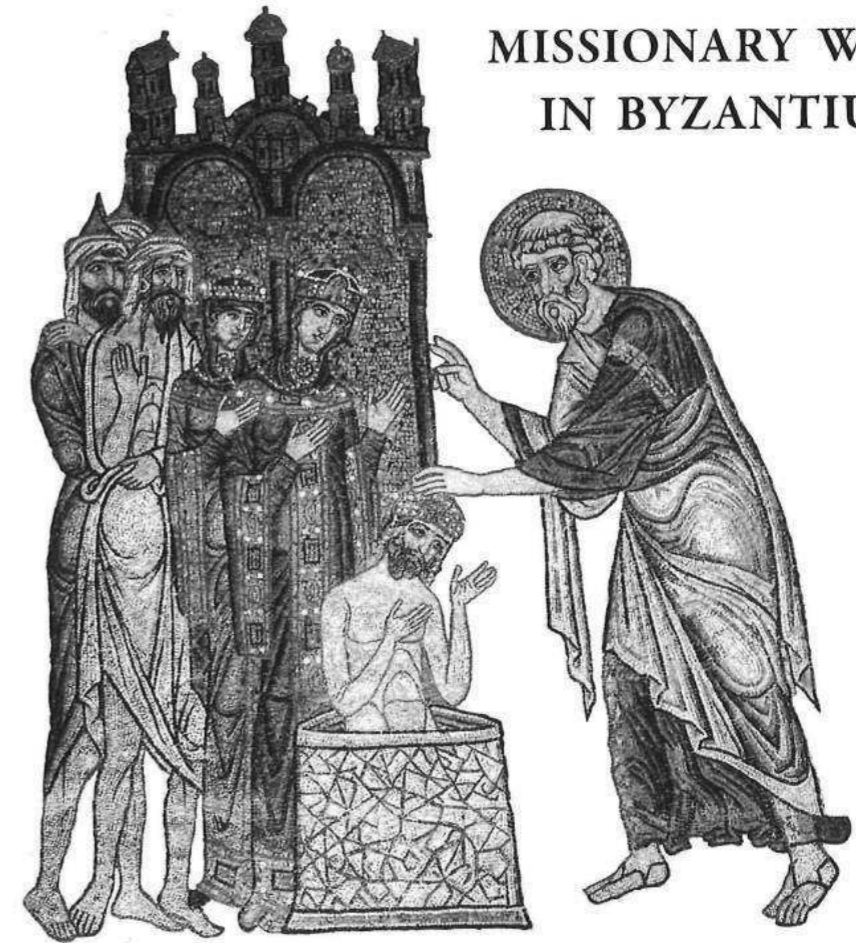
COLLÈGE DE FRANCE – CNRS
CENTRE DE RECHERCHE D'HISTOIRE
ET CIVILISATION DE BYZANCE

MONOGRAPHIES 47

Sergey A. IVANOV

“PEARLS BEFORE SWINE”

MISSIONARY WORK
IN BYZANTIUM



ACHCByz

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adapted from a translation from Russian by

DEBORAH HOFFMAN

ACHCByz

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 Artyom TER-MARKOSYAN VARDANYAN 

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FOREWORD

During the Middle Ages orthodoxy spread from the Greeks to other peoples. The present work examines how this process developed and, most importantly, how the Greeks themselves viewed it. Why did they strive to baptize "barbarians," and what, in their opinion, occurred to the "barbarians" as a result of that baptism? Henceforth for economy's sake the word "barbarian," which will be repeated many hundreds of times, will not appear in quotation marks; its evaluative and relative nature will be assumed.

The author has not set out to write a history of Christianity in barbarian lands: The present study focuses on mission. This is a work of cultural history, and not of theology or church history, the first monograph in international scholarship specifically dedicated to the phenomenon of Byzantine missionizing as a whole.

The monograph was completed over an extended period of time. Research trips to libraries overseas, made possible thanks to support from IREX (1995), the British Academy (1997), the Onassis Foundation (1998), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (1999, 2003), and the Fulbright Program (2000–2001), were of great benefit to the author. A Research Support Scheme grant from the Soros Foundation permitted the writing of the text. The author likewise expresses deep appreciation to those colleagues who agreed to review the manuscript or portions of it and provide their opinions.

The publication of the English version of this book has been made possible by Constantine Zuckerman who saved me from numerous errors and to whom I owe more than I can express. I am also indebted to Vincent Deroche who kindly agreed to read the manuscript and made many astute suggestions, and to Artyom Ter-Markosyan Vardanyan who invested so much creativity into the the book's layout.

I am grateful to the members of the Medieval Studies Department at the Institute of Slavic Studies (Russian Academy of Sciences) who were my close colleagues for thirty-four happy years. Parts of this book were written during that time. The Greek Studies Institute at St. Petersburg State University has been my second home for many years.

My new employer, the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow, has provided me with the opportunity to complete the manuscript and prepare it for publication.

INTRODUCTION

The word "mission" (Latin *missio*, "sending") has several meanings, but it will be used in this work with one alone. Mission will be defined as the activity of a religious organization in recruiting non-believers into its ranks. Christianity is a missionary religion. The church that professes this religion describes itself as "catholic and apostolic," that is universal and established by Apostles ("messengers"), the first missionaries sent to proclaim the new faith. Thus it announces its goal of embracing the entire "universe" or all humanity, and the mission to be the means of attaining this goal. "And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?" (Romans 10.14-15). Mission rooted as it is in Christianity's very essence, its missionary zeal might seem to have always remained a constant. Yet, a specialist in medieval missionizing moderates this view. While admitting that "the contemporary observer is inclined to view the universality of mission as a requirement which inevitably arises from the primary teaching of Christianity,"¹ he points out that missionary consciousness was different in different eras, that each missionary was prompted to his activity by various motives, and that each generation of missionaries read the evangelical missionary precepts in a new way.

Referring to Christianity as a missionary religion is somewhat anachronistic to the extent that the linguistic term "mission" was not fully developed until the early modern period. The Greek term, which denoted the mission of the Apostles, ἀποστολή, was reserved for them alone, and was never applied to anyone else. The Latin term *missio* was only officially introduced in 1622. Most obviously, just as the hero of Molière's "The Bourgeois Gentleman" spoke in prose without realizing it, medieval churches in the East and in the West could practice mission without using the term. All the same, superimposing the grid of contemporary concepts upon an ancient culture involves the risk of misrepresenting one's own terms of reference. I have kept this danger in mind throughout this entire work.

To state again the task at hand, it is desirable to clarify what the orthodox Greeks thought about their obligation to sow the true faith among the barbarians, what steps they took in this direction, how they evaluated their successes and failures, and how they interacted with the baptized barbarians up to the point when the latter created their own churches. Constantinople's interactions with the newly created orthodox churches will only be discussed to the extent that the Greeks themselves continued to consider their activity there as 'missionary' in nature. Our other task consists of understanding how the barbarians, once Christianized, changed the way the Greeks perceived them. Could a barbarian, once baptized, cease being a barbarian in Byzantine eyes? This, in turn, raises a new question: how did the goal of religious enlightenment correlate with Roman imperialism and Greek cultural snobbery?

1. FRITZE 1969: 123.

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Not a single contemporary Byzantine source mentions the Christianization of Ethiopia in the fifth century, the Byzantine attempts to convert Persia at the end of the sixth, the creation of the Slavic alphabet in the ninth, or the baptism of Rus' in the tenth. These great achievements of Eastern Christianity left the Byzantines themselves perfectly indifferent. Byzantium produced a number of ardent and committed missionaries, but much more visible were the Greek intellectuals who believed that it was easier "to whitewash an Ethiopian" than to Christianize a barbarian. When Leo V acquainted the pagan Bulgars with the Christian sacraments, Theophanes Continuatus castigated him for "casting the pearls of faith before the swine." In the end, the missionary zeal of a few enthusiasts lost out to the haughty isolationism of Empire. *"Pearls before Swine"* focuses on the complex relationship between the Christian pledge to "teach all nations" and Greek cultural snobbery.

Cover illustration:

Apostle Matthew baptizes the Ethiopian king Egippus and his family
(Venice, San Marco, south isle, thirteenth-century mosaic).

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